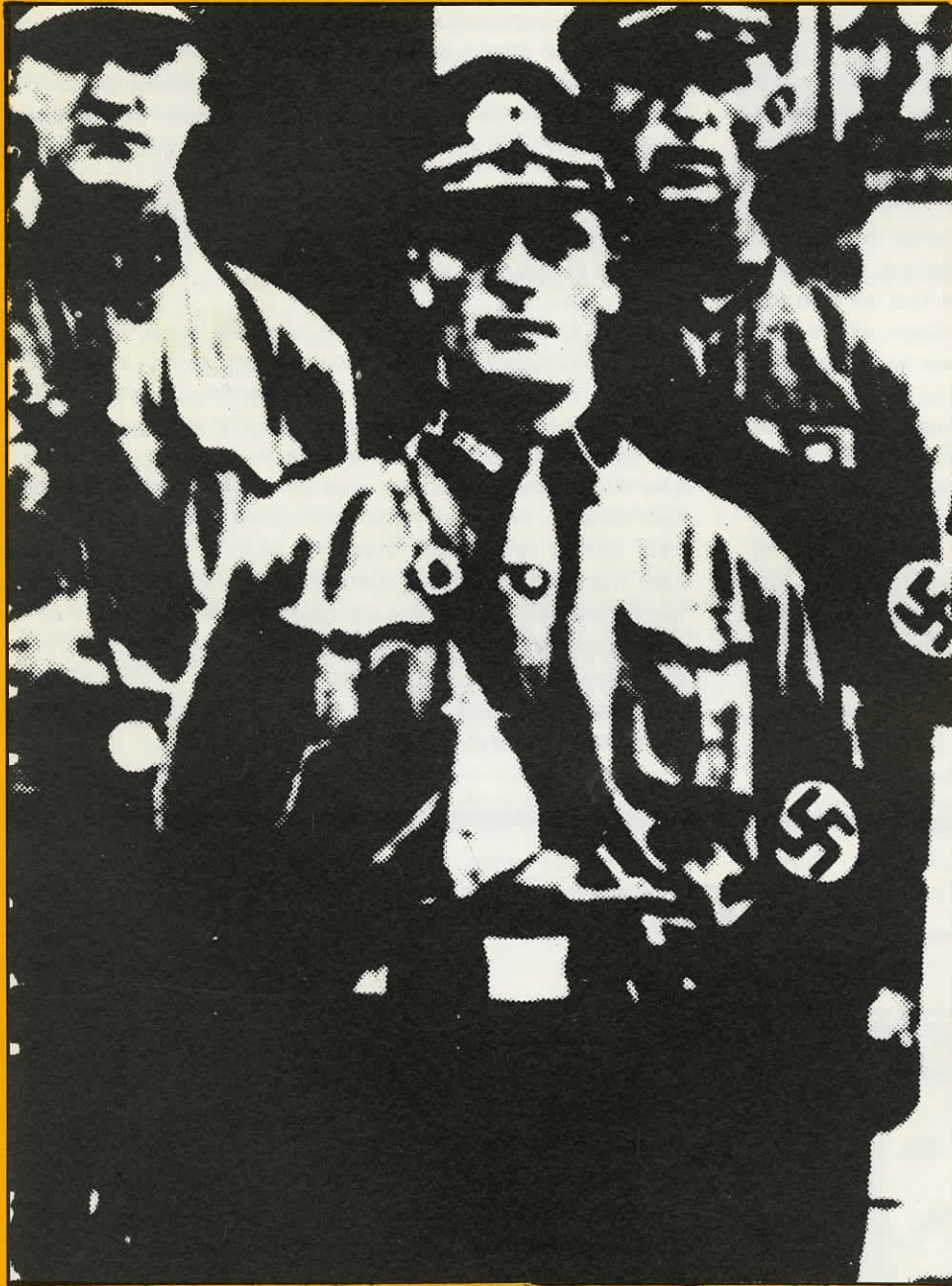


JEWISH SOCIALIST

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Clause 28...
the road to
Auschwitz?
The politics
of
Holocaust
analogies

A new Jewish agenda

Farrakhan's friends

Israelis support the intifada

Chief Rabbi interview

Sanctuary

EDITORIAL

For some Jews, antisemitism is easy to understand: they believe that it is all-pervading throughout history and across classes, communities and nationalities; that although it may take different forms, these are, in fact, manifestations of the same phenomenon. For the Jewish establishment, this position serves to keep Jews in line behind a barricade of fear which divides them from the rest of the world and prevents them from making effective alliances with groups struggling against all forms of oppression.

Several recent events have proved a challenge to Jews who are active socialists and anti-racists, who believe that hearts and minds can and must be changed and that an identical reflex response to every whiff of antisemitism, wherever it occurs and whatever its motivation, is at best inadequate and at worst reactionary.

Louis Farrakhan, the Black American renowned for his compelling speeches which mix apparent calls for Black liberation with classic theories about Jewish conspiracy, has had a clear influence on a vicious campaign directed against Jews in Hackney over the last few months (page 9). Any kind of politically effective response has been overshadowed on the one hand by visions of a right wing Jewish establishment gleeful at this "proof" that Black people "hate Jews just like everyone else", and on the other hand by the paralysis of anti-racists faced by an apparent conundrum that Black people can be antisemitic.

In Sheffield, too, Jewish anti-racists have had to find ways of dealing with an antisemitic incident which materialised out of an apparently well-motivated anti-imperialist venture (page 3). Some of their comrades in the Labour Movement didn't even perceive the pernicious and damaging antisemitism which also threatened to generate a politically inspired and destructive reaction from some members of the Jewish community.

In Chicago there have been equally disturbing incidents, posing a similar challenge to Jews committed to making alliances in order to fight racism (page 7).

However deep our commitment, when we face antisemitism, whether it's barely conscious and unthought out, or whether it comes ominously close to traditional fascism, it's tempting to draw on the received wisdom in the Jewish community: that it's impossible to challenge it and that if you don't run from it you will eventually be destroyed by it. But those who have confronted it in Hackney and Brent, in Sheffield and Chicago, have started to discover their own political potential. They have not tried to convert diehard antisemites, but they have demanded, and, at least in some cases, got, support from councillors and trade unionists who claim to be socialists. They have raised consciousness and changed perceptions on the left and as a result have made it harder for those diehards to carry out their destructive and divisive campaign.

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A wall to wail about

An antisemitic image in an anti-imperialist mural presented to the Sheffield Labour Movement has provoked strong and effective protests from local left-wing Jews. The artist — a Chilean refugee from Pinochet's fascism — presented the mural to the Labour Movement and council-supported Sheffield Centre for Unemployed Workers. It was unveiled at a ceremony there on May Day this year. The theme of the mural is the historic struggles against imperialism and oppression. It combines images of suffering and struggle with a vista of a "new Jerusalem". In the far right-hand corner it shows a panel of oppressors including Thatcher, Botha, Reagan and finally Hitler — who is being embraced by a figure of an orthodox Jew. The person most responsible for the genocide of six million Jews is depicted being embraced by one. While the other oppressors are individuals — representatives of governments — the Jewish figure alone is a representative of a whole people. Among the

images of struggle there are none of the fight by Jews against European fascism and the only Jew who is visible is the one embracing Hitler.

The centre is a popular meeting place for left activists, with meetings held on various issues day and night. Many of them would therefore have seen the offending image, even though it is not the central image in the mural, and there have been many opportunities for comment. The general response from the activists who use the centre has been silence. Meanwhile, however, a group of left wing Jews wrote to the management of the centre explaining why the depiction was objectionable. The image was initially amended by having the word "Zionism" painted across the Jewish figure! The objectors met with the centre's coordinator and its management committee, some of whom were sympathetic to the protest while others stressed an ideological link between Zionism and fascism, shifting debate away from antisemitism towards the separate issue



The offending section of the mural with the stereotyped Jewish figure next to Hitler

of Israel. The centre treated the matter as a dispute between the artist and the group of left wing Jews. The latter felt it was an issue for the centre and the Labour Movement who should take responsibility for dealing with it.

The Jewish group met with the artist during which it became clear that he was not consciously presenting an antisemitic image but genuinely subscribed to a narrow and misconceived analysis that collapsed Jews and Zionism together and collapsed that further into a simplistic iden-

tification with capitalism, imperialism and fascism. The unintended result was rightly condemned as deeply offensive to Jews and all opposed to antisemitism. A few weeks later the image was further modified with the bulk of the Jewish figure painted out, leaving only the hands still embracing Hitler and the word "Zionism". Later these were taken out too, and now that whole section of the mural is awaiting a major revision. The dialogue between the artist and the Jewish group is continuing.

Stamp of solidarity

In our last issue, Peretz Zylberberg reported from Warsaw on the unofficial ceremony that took place during the 45th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when a memorial stone commemorating the Bundist leaders Alter and Erlich was unveiled



at the town's Jewish cemetery. This was principally the initiative of Dr Marek Edelman, Second in Command during the Uprising and currently prominent in the Solidarnosc trade union movement. In conjunction with this ceremony, Solidarnosc issued a symbolic postage stamp (opposite). It reads: "Poland '88. Victor Alter born 1890, Henryk Erlich born 1882. Leaders of the Bund. Members of the Second Socialist International. Shot dead in December 1941 in the Soviet Union. Solidarnosc Post 170 Zlotys."

Chronicle of bigotry

The pervasiveness of the unpleasant climate which created Clause 28 was amply demonstrated this spring when the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group (JGLG) was abruptly notified of a partial ban on its advertisements in the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC). It was not the first such unpleasant encounter with the JC: last year the Group was refused permission to place a *Rosh Hashanah* greeting. This was not entirely a surprise, as the erratic conduct of the advertising department in accepting and rejecting special notices such as this was already fairly well-known. However, apart from this, the other advertisements submitted by the JGLG publicising its various monthly events had been regularly printed by the JC since the early 1980s and the Group felt that at least a basic level of tolerance generally obtained in the JC's dealings with lesbian and gay Jews.

In March of this year (during which month, among other things, Clause 28 received royal assent...), the Group received an entirely unexpected letter from the editor, Geoffrey Paul, announcing that the JC would henceforth refuse any advertisement for the Group which publicised events in "non-synagogal premises". He indicated particular aversion to meetings

which occurred in "public houses" as these might pose a threat to the welfare of "innocent and curious youngsters". Although Mr Paul indicated that he was influenced by "representations" made to him by others in the Jewish community, he neither identified these objectors nor made clear whether his offensive choice of words was his own vocabulary or theirs.

The JGLG decided against making the matter public and approached the editor with a view to arranging some sort of mediation. He eventually agreed to a meeting on 5 May with an intermediary (in fact, a founder-member of Jews Against The Clause) chosen by the Group, who today recalls the encounter as "useful and polite". Although Mr Paul offered no apology for his charge that the Group endangered "innocent and curious youngsters", he appeared at pains to emphasise the very considerable pressures from weighty figures in the Jewish establishment to which he was being subjected. A total prohibition on any reference to the JGLG was being demanded, he said, and he therefore presented his decision to ban advertisements for "non-synagogal" events as a compromise. The mediator chosen by the Group, mean-

while, pointed out that there had never been any suggestion of wrong-doing or impropriety on the part of the JGLG (a point acknowledged by Mr Paul) and suggested that those who allegedly had "representations" to make should have the decency to communicate these directly to the Group. He also took the opportunity to argue that the distinction between "synagogal" and other advertisements was not otherwise applied by the JC and therefore seemed arbitrary and bigoted.

Although the editor showed no willingness to withdraw the ban there and then, he did undertake to "open the columns" of the letters page to correspondents wishing to take issue with his decision — such as the Group itself — and to review his decision subsequently. This was clearly the best that the JGLG's mediator could hope for, though he found himself recalling with a sense of unease some of the vituperative and wounding examples of homophobia which had materialised in the JC's letters columns on previous occasions when homosexuality was under discussion.

He need not have worried for, in the event, no correspondence at all appeared. The Group had duly despatched a mild, courteous letter which took issue with the discriminatory and ill-founded introduction of the ban and expressed dismay at the efforts of those who would erase the existence of gay and

lesbian Jews from the pages of the JC. The letter was not published. Eventually a reply from the editor was received. He was only interested in contributions from "representative rabbis", Mr Paul now declared, and would not be printing the Group's letter. Thus the Group's final attempt to press its case was silenced.

And so, dear reader, maybe you would like to try your own luck — even if you do not have the intriguing good fortune to be a representative rabbi. As those who would silence the JGLG have thus far been confirmed in their conviction that their bigotry represents the sum of all Jewish thinking in this area, it seems a good time for Jews to come forward as Jews to resist this pernicious assumption. "If not now, when?" Those adequately emboldened should write to: Mr Geoffrey Paul, The *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 Furnival Street, London EC4A 1JT.

RAPHAEL GRUENFELD
 • *Jewish Socialist* wishes the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group and all their well-wishers a happy new year!

New number

The Jewish Gay and Lesbian Helpline, launched last February, has moved to a new location. Its new number is 01-706 3123 and it will be open for confidential calls from 7pm–10pm on Mondays and Thursdays.

JERUSALEM 91068 ISRAEL — a movement of army reservists refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories. More than 500 refuseniks signed the following public statement in June:

The Palestinian people is in revolt against Israeli occupation. Over 20 years of occupation and repression have not checked the Palestinian struggle for national liberation. The uprising in the occupied territories, and its brutal suppression by IDF forces, graphically illustrate the terrible price of occupation and the absence of a political solution. As IDF reservists, we declare that we can no longer bear the burden of shared responsibility for this moral and political depravation. We hereby proclaim that we shall refuse to take part in suppressing the uprising and insurrection in the occupied territories.

So far, 31 have been imprisoned for their refusal. While in prison they forfeit their family allowances. Donations will boost the support fund for them and their campaign fund.



DAI L'KIBUSH (DOWN WITH THE OCCUPATION) PO BOX 3472 JERUSALEM ISRAEL — is a coalition of Jewish and Arab political groups and individuals campaigning for

- An immediate end to the occupation.
- The creation of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel.
- Negotiations with the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, within the framework of an international peace conference.

Their activities include arranging informal dialogue meetings between Israelis and Palestinians in the Occupied Terri-

tories, weekly solidarity visits to West Bank villages, hospitals and refugee camps, sending speakers into schools, and organising protest actions.

COMMITTEE TO SAVE THE PEACE DIALOGUE PO BOX 17489 TEL AVIV 61171 ISRAEL — is campaigning against the law passed in Israel in 1986 which forbids contact between Israelis and the PLO. On 30 June four prominent Israeli peace activists were the first to be convicted for violating this law. They received 18-month sentences (12 months suspended) and very heavy fines. They are appealing against the sentences. The Committee is supporting their legal battle and waging a broad campaign against this draconian law.

THE FUND FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS PO BOX 4362 TEL AVIV 61043 ISRAEL — is supporting the legal defence of the four journalists facing trial from the left wing, Jerusalem based *Derekh Hanitzotz / Sharara* newspaper, which was closed down in February this year. The journalists face charges which carry sentences of up to 40 years. The trial is due

to start on 8 September. While in detention, the four have endured a sickening catalogue of physical, sexual and mental harassment and abuse. They went on hunger strike in July in protest against the conditions they were forced to endure while awaiting trial.

THE FELLOWSHIP FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THEATRICAL CULTURE PO BOX 36379 TEL AVIV 61363 ISRAEL — is trying to raise funds to produce the play "Ephraim returns to the Army" by Israeli playwright Itzhak Laor. The play, which focuses on a military governor in the West Bank was due to play at the Haifa Theatre in 1986 but fell foul of the censors on the grounds that it "offended the good name of the Israeli Defence Forces". Backed by the Playwrights Union, Laor won his case in the High Court for the play to be produced. But the Haifa Theatre has not rescheduled it and other theatres have refused to play it, even though the text is freely available in book form. The only option now is to produce it privately and all funds they receive will go towards this project.

Benefiting the resistance

A night of secular Jewish socialist culture in north London provided direct material aid to Israelis and Palestinians resisting the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The "Benefit Against the Occupation", held at the Red Rose Club, Finsbury Park, in July, raised £320 —

half of which went to *Yesh Gvul* (Israel's army refuseniks) while the other half went to projects organised by Palestinian women's committees in the occupied territories.

The evening was organised jointly by the Jewish Socialists' Group, Jewish Women Support Palestinians and *Khamsin*

journal. Frances Rifkin, who compered the event, read out a letter from *Yesh Gvul* thanking the organisers for this show of solidarity, and then introduced Royte Klezmoyres — a women's *klezmer* (Yiddish instrumental) band making their first public appearance. A very apprecia-

tive audience, nearly 200 strong, then welcomed poet Mike Rosen, singer Lucy Siefert, Marxist magician Ian Saville and singer Leon Rosselson — who played a very moving song about Israel, based on a diary he kept on a visit in 1959. The event was rounded off with a disco from the Esther Kahn Jewish Dance Palace.

Appealing Israelis—not the JIA!

As *Rosh Hashana* (New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) come round again so the representatives of the Joint Israel Appeal (JIA) will be standing in synagogues throughout the land pleading for a healthy annual donation to Israel. But this year, it is clearer than ever before that there are two Israels a world apart. The pleasant Israel of the JIA dream is the nightmare

which is enacting ever more brutal and authoritarian measures to maintain the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, measures which have claimed the lives of more than 300 Palestinian civilians since the *Intifada* began nine months ago, and which carries out a range of discriminatory practices against Palestinian Arabs within its own borders. On

the other hand there is the Israel of those fighting back, refusing to be corrupted by the tide of national chauvinism, and seeking a secure and creative future for Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs based on justice.

From this Israel we have recently received a number of urgent appeals for political and material support. Unlike the JIA they do not ask us to

send money to Israel in order to fulfil Zionism, but as an act of international solidarity with those in struggle for a better Middle East and a better world. On this *Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur* we urge our readers to show in a practical way your support for the campaigns described below:

YESH GVUL (THERE IS A LIMIT) PO BOX 6953

...and a happy new year

Diana and Chaim Neslen wish health and progress in 5749 to all those working for a better world.

Ralph Levinson wishes all JSG friends and comrades a radical but prosperous new year.

Anne Krisman wishes a happy new year to family, friends and all Ilford cabbies.

Julia Bard and David Rosenberg with Jacob and Reuben wish family and friends a happy, healthy and socialist new year. *Arbeter in ale lender fareynikt aykhl!*

To all JSG members: a happy new year and a peaceful solution, **Laurence Garber**.

Jews Against the Clause wish all their wellwishers a happy new year. Coming soon: Harvey Milk commemorative event. Watch for details.

The Jewish Socialists' Group wish a happy and healthy new year to Jewish socialist and radical organisations internationally, especially to the Jewish Labour Bund, the Union des Progressistes Juifs Belgique, Blaanes (Holland) and all branches of the International Jewish Peace Union.

Karl Marx (left!) performs for Palestine with Ian Saville (right)



Photo: Marian Shapiro

DYBBUK'S DIARY

BRIGHTON SHMOCK

While a bracing wind of change might have blown up north in Leeds, down south in Sussex-by-the-sea a particularly balmy breeze wafted over the prom, bringing a letter to the *Jewish Chron* from Messrs Jack Garnel and Harry Rochlin. Having been delegates to Poale Zion's annual conference from Brighton branch, they wish to complain that the JC report was "too charitable to Poale Zion".

Apparently, PZ delegates rejected a Brighton resolution demanding expulsion of anyone who provided "an unchallenged platform for anti-Zionist speakers". The aggrieved writers add in parentheses: "Such a PZ anti-Zionist fringe meeting was in fact held during a Labour Party conference." "Really?! Come on!

I regret I missed it. Unless, of course, they are expressing their shock and indignation that Poale Zion — still a constituent part of the Labour Party — invited Gerald Kaufman, who happens to be Labour's shadow Foreign Secretary; and that he had the temerity to tell them a little home truth, ie that it was talking nonsense to say you want a Middle East peace, and yet deny a place at the peace conference for the PLO.

It seems worse was to come at PZ's gathering. Only a minority of hands went up for Brighton's other resolution, adding a commitment to defend Israel in the labour movement and campuses, to PZ's constitution. As though PZ ever did anything else. Chair Henry Smith pointed out the motion was a little superfluous.

Jack Garnel has been around, mind you. Some years ago he was unmasking

such dangerous Bolshie subversives as JONAH (Jews Organised for a Nuclear Arms Halt), and he has also gone to some lengths to defend the shady past of Yitzhak Shamir. Such a committed Zionist as he is has frowned angrily on those milksops of Young Poale Zion suspected of flirting with dangerous ideas. Maybe democracy is one of them, especially when conference delegates have the cheek to vote against your pet resolution.

Messrs Garnel and Rochlin's concluding two pars deserve quoting in full, both for the glimpse of paranoia (the notion that the JSG would be interested in infiltrating such a tumbledown relic as PZ is pure Hammer-film horror) and for the picture of how these characters proceed politically:

"A month before conference, there were many lapsed and no paid-up members of PZ in the Brighton area. Several were persuaded to rejoin conditionally, subject to an amendment of the PZ rules to eliminate Jewish Socialists' Group type anti-Zionist infiltration.

"At a report-back meeting, all five paid-up members of the Brighton PZ branch confirmed their resignation and decided to return their membership cards."

So there! We're not playing, see, so yah boo sucks to you! (Or will they be back a few weeks before the next conference, I wonder?)

NATIONAL SHORT BACK 'N' SIDES?

Lifestyle politics is making a comeback in all sorts of places, I'm pleased to note. Naturally, it takes various forms.

One shabbos afternoon at

the end of July, having stepped into a Leeds pub for some refreshment, I saw a bunch of fellows going into the back room. "Must be an one? m'lava malka? siyum?" I thought, picking up my pint to follow. As it turned out, there were no raisons (as the French say), just a load of nuts.

This fellow giving the *drosheh* says we should all try to live our lives, as far as possible, in accordance with the ideological beliefs of the movement. "Right on!" I assented. "The personal is political." But then I caught the speaker and some of the audience giving me funny looks, so I decided to keep *shtum* and give him a chance.

Next he's on about listening to "white" and European music, which I don't quite understand, though I did once see a fight in Glasgow over "orange" v "green" music, but anyway the rest of it was straight-forward enough, as he spoke about physical fitness, healthy living, being tidy, and "dignified conduct at all times". Apart from the odd taste in music, sounds almost like my Mum, I thought, but he's probably some sort of scoutmaster. I don't mind chanting "Dyb, Dyb, Dyb," with a lot of grown men, but I hope we're not going to finish off with a game of "British Bulldog".

I suddenly start to realise I've met the speaker before somewhere (what a pity I didn't catch his name) as he goes on: "Nothing harms the cause of nationalism more than for human dross to be recruited...and thereafter... allowed to project an image of nationalism associated with punks, rockers, football hooligans and pansies." (Obviously not an extremist — a tabloid leader writer perhaps, except for that "thereafter"?) "The upbringing of children should aim at producing real men and real women, not unisex creatures of the kind in present fashion..."

As we assembled real men applaud, and make for the bar to replenish our real beer

guts, it dawns on me where I've met the speaker before I turn to find him touting his new book, *The Eleventh Hour*, and sure enough, recognise his name on the cover...

"Mr Tyndall!" I venture. "Remember me from the old days back in Notting Hill? You were always in my chemists shop buying up tins of weedkiller, and I used to always ask how's the garden. And that friend of yours, what was his name, Colin something, Jawgone or Jargon, used to go about in funny uniforms. Whatever happened to him?"

But while one of his stalwarts tries to interest me in some British National Party literature, my old neighbour hurries off saying he has a train to catch. Such a nice man, really.

Vanunu news

On 30 September 1986 Mordechai Vanunu was abducted in Rome having been lured from London by an Israeli secret agent. It took the Israeli Government five weeks to admit they were holding him. His crime was to have revealed details of Israel's nuclear capacity to the *Sunday Times*. As a result he was found guilty of treason and espionage and sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment on 27 March 1988. He is being held in solitary confinement and is allowed only one visit a month from his family. An appeal against the sentence is due to be heard in early 1989.

On 30 September 1988, to mark the second anniversary of Mordechai Vanunu's abduction and to focus public attention on his case, an all-day vigil will take place in central London with the participation of CND and other groups. Further details can be obtained from the International Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu and for a Nuclear-Free Middle-East, PO Box 1328, London NW6 (01-328 4255).

Farrakhan of worms

Brian Klug draws a worrying picture of increasing black-Jewish tension in Chicago

May was not a merry month in Chicago this year. A crisis materialised out of the blue, like a prairie tornado, exposing the fragility of black-Jewish relations. These are the main events as they occurred.

1 May The *Chicago Tribune* published a front page story reprinting antisemitic statements made by Steve Cokely, political aide to Mayor Eugene Sawyer. The statements are taken from tape-recordings of lectures that Cokely gave to audiences at the Chicago headquarters of Louis Farrakhan's Black Muslim splinter group, Nation of Islam. The tapes have been on sale at a bookstore run by the group on the south side — in the so-called "black ghetto". Cokely suggests, amongst other things, that Jewish doctors are injecting blacks with AIDS. This is, on his account, part of a larger scheme of things. He is quoted as saying: "The Jew hopes to one day reign forever."

According to the *Tribune*, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith had brought these tapes to the attention of Mayor Sawyer three weeks earlier. The mayor had been surprised, but was reluctant to dismiss Cokely who has been his link to the black nationalist faction in Chicago. Now the cat is out of the bag: he can no longer avoid the issue.

2-5 May The whirlwind gathers force as the days pass and the mayor still keeps his silence. Jewish community bodies are not alone in wondering at his slowness to act. One black civil rights activist, Robert Lucas, remarks: "Why the mayor continues to tolerate Mr Cokely is beyond me." (*Tribune*, 5 May) But vocal black opinion tends to be defensive, construing the pressure from Jews (and others) for Cokely's dismissal as outside interference in the internal affairs of a black administration. "The black community does not have to make apologies to other ethnic groups," says the Rev Al Sampson. "I trust Sawyer will remember his roots and maintain Cokely within the administration

and not sacrifice him for 30 pieces of silver." (*In These Times*, 25 May)

Tempers are starting to fray and a second storm develops over a senior black political figure who is widely reported as saying that Cokely's antisemitic statements have "the ring of truth" about them.

6 May The morning headline announces: "Sawyer fires Cokely as aide." (*Tribune*, 6 May) But the crisis in the city is still building. The mayor is under attack from all sides; and as the gulf widens between blacks and Jews he makes a public appeal for "healing".

7-10 May Despite the mayor's plea, over the next few days the wounds continue to fester — not least within the black community itself. At one rally, Farrakhan turns on the handful of black leaders who had openly called for Cokely's dismissal and brands them as traitors. (*Tribune*, 10 May) However, a brand new controversy is about to break, one which allows black leaders to close ranks and present a united front...

11 May A local art student named David Nelson has executed a satirical painting which depicts the late Harold Washington — mayor of Chicago until his sudden death last November and the man who led a united black movement into civic power for the first time in the city's history — dressed in women's underwear. The portrait has been hung, this very morning, in a corridor of the School of the Art Institute as one of Nelson's entries in the annual contest for final year students. The exhibition is not open to the public. But word of the painting's existence has reached the ears of the City Council sitting in session a few blocks away, and the tinder of indignation has been ignited. Eight black aldermen promptly leave the chamber and proceed on foot straight to the school, where they remove the painting from the wall.

12-17 May In the heated public debate that ensues, no one seems to have a kind word for the offending canvas. But equally, outside of the south side, there is a broad consensus that the aldermen acted in a high-handed manner. In contrast, the overwhelming reaction of black leaders — political, religious and communal — is to stand by the group of eight aldermen, whom they see as having defended the dignity of the late mayor and the honour of the black community as a whole. Mayor Sawyer joins 100 black ministers in criticising the Art Institute and demanding a written apology from the student. Speaking on their joint behalf, the Rev Willie Barrow, Executive Director of Operation PUSH, describes Nelson's painting as "the latest in a series of escalating attacks and insults against the black community". (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 14 May)

There is a clear allusion to the Cokely affair in the reverend's statement. When the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) takes up Nelson's case, the allusion is spelt out. Alderman Robert Shaw says the organisation is being one-sided since they did not come to Cokely's defence and he sees this as symptomatic of systematic racial bias on their part. Appearing on television with Harvey Grossman, Legal Director of the ACLU, he turns to him and says accusingly: "When there's a question of whites and blacks, you fellows at the ACLU take the side of whites all the time." (*Newsmakers*, WBBM, 15 May) Since the ACLU's active commitment to civil rights is long-established and a matter of public record, this particular accusation is hard to swallow. One begins to sense that events are moving on a plane that transcends mere facts.

Alderman Allan Streeter, one of the "group of eight", does not dispel this impression when he states categorically: "The fellow who drew that picture is Jewish." Reporters interviewing him say they do not know if this is so. But the alderman is convinced: "It's all related. I

don't feel it's a coincidence. I feel the fellow is a Jewish person who is defaming the mayor that I love." (*Tribune*, 15 May) As it happens, I have a friend who teaches at the School of the Art Institute. A couple of phone calls establishes that Nelson is no more Jewish than Streeter himself. Perhaps I am missing the point?

18-19 May Mayor Sawyer uses the annual lunch of the National Conference of Christians and Jews as a forum for addressing the city at large. He speaks of the need to "reassert the city's position unalterably opposing intolerance and bigotry, regardless of its source...". And in a pointed allusion to Farrakhan he says: "I disavow any person who teaches that Judaism is a gutter religion." (*Tribune*, 19 May).

Within the hour, aides to Alderman Streeter are distributing copies of his free ward newspaper at City Hall. The lead story on the front page appears under the headline, "Alderman Streeter on Jewish 'Hit List' ". This is the opening paragraph:

"Alderman Allan Streeter recently revealed that he and several other prominent African American leaders are among those listed on a Jewish 'Hit List' of people to be removed from public office or silenced, according to recent news media reports. Controversial researcher Steve Cokely was also on this list, which surfaced prior to his firing."

The article goes on to report a meeting with representatives of CBS in which Streeter had referred to "intense attempts of certain Jewish groups to remove him from office by providing extensive financial backing to his opponents...". The alderman also touched on "the issue of continued Jewish dominance of the news media and the ongoing portrayal of anyone who speaks out as 'Antisemitic' ". But it is the idea of a Jewish "hit list", in particular, that lights a fuse in the city's media. Which brings us to Day 20...

20 May It is a little after 11pm. I am speeding south on Lake Shore Drive, punching the buttons on the car radio, searching for something to keep me awake at the wheel. A genial voice comes floating in over the airwaves. "Okay, thanks for calling. This is WVON. 591 5990 is our number. We want to hear from you, Chicago. Well, what do you think about that hit list? Is there such a thing and what does it mean? Well, they're using the term 'hit list' but of course we're not



Louis Farrakhan addressing a rally

talking — hopefully — about bloodshed. What they're talking about is targeting certain people that, well, don't have their interests at heart — or at least that's what they think. . . 591 5990 is my number. Give us a call, Chicago." I am cured of my drowsiness and for the next two hours my ears burn.

WVON is a black radio station and I feel like an eavesdropper. But in a manner of speaking, I am the topic they are discussing. My reputation precedes me; and on the whole I could prefer it to be different. A woman tells me that I have "all the money and all the power", and that I am "determined to keep black people in subjugation around the world", something I and my kind have been doing for at least 500 years. She suggests a counter-offensive: "While the Jews are compiling hit lists, I think we had better be compiling some hit lists against them." "Well there's an interesting proposal," chimes in our host. "Fight fire with fire." Another caller casually mentions "the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion", which, he points out, "a lot of people have read". For the benefit of those who have not, he explains that this much-read document is "a blueprint of the Jewish people to control things by controlling that dollar. . .". His information goes unchallenged.

Only one person ever questions the assumptions that seem to underlie the entire programme. "This Jewish-black thing is getting out of hand," says the caller derisively. "I've been black as long as Alderman Streeter . . . I don't have a problem with Jews."

Just before midnight Cokely comes on the air. Taking up the gauntlet thrown

down by this sceptic, he says the question can be resolved through what he calls "research". "I think if we go back to the beginning of time, the origin of life on earth and the beginning of the races...and trace the relationship between blacks and Jews, we can resolve the question once and for all as to what is the source of the conflict." But on one condition only: "They've got to come clean and put those pathologies on the table about this Chosen People stuff and get back to what [is] *really* the source of life and who *really* they are and who we might be." And what are "they" — what am I — really like? The nearest Cokely comes to giving a straight answer is this metaphor: "Just imagine a beast hidden in the cave and part of his strength was his hidden nature and that no one could ever see the attack coming because the beast was hidden or submerged."

Postscript It has been like a merry-go-round in Chicago this May. It will take time for thoughts to settle. In the meantime, as an antidote to the noxious innuendoes of Steve Cokely, I choose to close with this reminder from a man in the thick of the action: "Blacks and Jews marched together and died together for civil rights in this country. In the early '70s, we stopped talking to one another. History has brought us to the point we don't know one another. Those discussions never should have stopped. We stopped talking because we thought everything was okay. Everything is not okay. We can never take that for granted." The Rev B Herbert Martin, Harold Washington's Minister in the Progressive Community Church (*Sun-Times*, 14 May).

Conspiracy THEORISTS

The tensions in Chicago are being echoed closer to home. Michael Heiser reports on recent events in Hackney.

Antisemitism appears in many guises, some of them on the surface progressive. Not for nothing did August Bebel, a nineteenth century German socialist leader, once refer to antisemitism as the "Socialism of Fools".

In America, Louis Farrakhan has pioneered a particularly noxious blend of seemingly progressive Black liberation rhetoric imbued with antisemitism. Unfortunately, Farrakhan has his imitators in this country. One area where they have been active is the London borough of Hackney. It was a former Hackney Labour Councillor, Lester Lewis, who in 1986 issued the invitation to Farrakhan to come to this country, which resulted in the Home Office ban (see *Jewish Socialist* 5). Hackney is an area with one of the highest Black populations in London. It also has the second highest Jewish population of any London borough. It is famed as "Britain's poorest borough" — an epithet due to the high level which the borough scores on various indices of deprivation; deprivation which does not escape either the Black or Jewish communities. To add to its numerous other problems, many arising from government controls on expenditure by the borough council, it is about to have control of education in the borough thrust upon it, following the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority. So Hackney needs antisemitism like, so to speak, it needs a *lokh in kop* (hole in the head).

From early June this year a series of leaflets began to circulate around Hackney Town Hall, other council offices and other buildings in the borough. They were unsigned but claimed to be issued by a group calling itself "Hackney against White Supremacy", allegedly based at the Town Hall. They contained a number of obnoxious features including a series of vicious personal attacks on councillors and council officers, most of them Black.

Running right the way through them was a strain of conspiracy-school antisemitism.

Another leaflet, distributed at the same time and signed by Lester Lewis, was written as an open letter to the Labour Group and, though more muted in tone than the unsigned leaflets, contained some similar themes. In addition, two handbills — distributed in the borough as well as in the Council — advertising meetings by a group called African Solidarity Campaign, contained some identical phrases to the unsigned leaflets. At both these meetings a member of the current Hackney Labour Group, Lloyd King, was billed to speak, in one case accompanied by Lester Lewis and a Brent pro-Farrakhan activist Kuba Assegai.

The following, taken from the first of the series, will give the flavour: "...this Zionist; Freemason; Racist and Black slaves club who masquerade as Socialist have impoverished the Black community even more than their predecessors. Hackney Council syphoned off...monies to the Khazars — Europeans who converted to and thus polluted the Hebrew faith (African religion) in 740AD — community."

The political goal of the leaflets apparently related to who would control Hackney's Education Committee, and its school governing bodies. The proposed Hackney Education Committee would be, it was alleged, "95% white. Not to mention over 50% of the Committee will be comprised of Zionists."

The terms "Zionist/Racist/Freemason" were used as part of conspiracy theory rhetoric, whereby it was alleged Jews get "Black Slaves" to do their work in oppressing other black people. In one leaflet, similar in style but this time relating to Brent, a Brent Jewish councillor was (ludicrously) alleged to have said, "As Black people you can be showcases in important positions but do not believe

that we (Zionist/Racist/Freemasons) will allow you to exercise any real power in Brent."

The juxtaposition of "Zionist" (in contexts which have nothing to do with Zionism or the Middle East) with "Freemason" is of course a well known feature of neo-Nazi conspiracy literature.

Another feature apparently borrowed from the Far Right is the use of the word "Khazar" to mean Jew, or specifically Ashkenazi Jew.

Historically, the king of the Central Asian Khazar tribe and a good portion of the nobility (but never a majority of the tribe itself) did convert to Judaism in the eighth century. The tribe enjoyed power from the eighth to the tenth century, but was finally broken by the Tartars in the thirteenth century. Following this the tribe dispersed. However, some scholars (for instance, Arthur Koestler in *The Thirteenth Tribe*) have concluded that Eastern European Jewry is descended from the Khazars. The main argument on which this contention rests seems to be that it is an explanation for the large increase in Eastern European Jewry from the late middle ages onward. Most opinion, however, holds that the Khazars are not a significant factor in the ethnic origin of most Eastern European Jews.

Be that as it may, the purpose of using the term "Khazar" here is to allege that Ashkenazi Jews are not the "real" Jews (who are seen as the Ethiopians). Therefore, the vast majority of Hackney's Jewish population are decreed not to be "real" Jews, but instead the ubiquitous "Zionists, Racists and Freemasons". In one leaflet it is stated that a list of Black Councillors and officers will be treated like "Vladimir Jabotinski (a Khazar used by Mussolini to carry out genocide against the original Jews in Ethiopia. . .)" Now, it is well known that Jabotinsky's attitude towards fascism was, to say the least, ambivalent,

and, of course, Mussolini invaded Abyssinia. So put the two together and... Truly, in this case at least, a little learning is a dangerous thing.

People in Hackney who have talked to *Jewish Socialist* say that the leaflets were condemned almost universally. However, a number of Jewish members were conscious of a tendency to condemn the personal attacks on Black councillors without mentioning the antisemitism. When the antisemitic nature of the leaflets was raised by some Jewish members in conversation and in at least one Labour Party ward, the issue was generally ignored by the rest of those present. And even among Labour activists who were concerned to confront the antisemitism of the politics being promoted in the leaflets there was some chariness about condemning the references to Zionism. The confidence to attack anti-Jewish racism when it is dressed up as anti-Zionism appeared to be somewhat lacking, despite the fact that the same leaflets used Zionist and Jew almost interchangeably. At least initially, the main opposition expressed was about the tone, general level of nastiness and

personal abuse in the leaflets. Some of our members felt at that stage that the level of outrage to such openly anti-Jewish literature that socialist Jews might have expected from their comrades, for the most part, simply was not there.

However, when Hackney Council Labour Group eventually came to consider the matter at the end of July, the Group Officers, at the initiation of the Leader of the Council, issued a strongly-worded statement. The leaflets, they acknowledged, "must not be used to divert our attention from the underlying issue that in particular black children have been let down by our school system... the fact that they begin with a most serious issue and build racism and abuse on top makes them important, and dangerous documents". And further, "the political objective appears to be that by attacking certain black members and officers as agents of 'White Supremacy' they will be tarnished or isolated as activists within their own community". The statement then went on to make a clear and unequivocal denunciation of "anti-Jewish racism", recognising that the leaflets "use

the myth of the Jewish conspiracy".

The Group passed a motion reaffirming its commitment to combat racism in all its forms and condemned the leaflets and specifically the "anti-Jewish racism". All Labour members were asked to sign this statement, refusal to sign being regarded as incompatible with membership of the Labour Group. Unfortunately, two days later yet another unsigned leaflet appeared headed "The Truth! 'Chosen Peoples' Philosophy and The Crises in Hackney".

There are those in the Jewish community, hostile to the Black fight against racism and to the concept of anti-racist alliances, who will look at this tale and breathe a knowing "I told you so". Having experienced a similar situation in Brent over the "Lift the Ban on Farrah Khan" campaign (see *Jewish Socialist* 8), I feel conscious of how such attacks, and an inadequate response to them by both Black and white people you regard as allies, can be dispiriting and disillusioning. But incidents like this cannot be allowed to put us off the hard but necessary task of forming alliances between Blacks and Jews against racism and antisemitism. □

RED RABBI

On 20 May 1988 the newspaper *Evening Moscow* published an interview with the Chief Rabbi of the Moscow Choral Synagogue, Adolf Solomonovich Shayeich, as the first in a series of "dialogues about religion". Here is an edited version of the interview. Translations and notes are by Stephen Shenfield.

I arrived at the synagogue a little before the time set for my meeting with the Chief Rabbi. In the small prayer hall the morning service was still proceeding... 15-20 worshippers, mainly of pensionable age, some with medals on their jackets, heads bent as the words of the prayer sang out...

"Are you looking for me?"

Rabbi Shayeich was not as I expected him. I had envisaged an aged bearded man in a black suit, but before me stood a youngish man in a bright excellently-fitting three-piece suit, a dark-blue shirt with a white collar and matching tie.

Through fashionably-framed spectacles looked lively, clever eyes. If it had not been for the black yarmulka, the rabbi could have been taken for a successful scientist.

Please tell us about yourself Adolf Solomonovich. I think that our readers will find it interesting to make the acquaintance of the Chief Rabbi of the Moscow Choral Synagogue.

I am 51. I spent my childhood and school years in Birobidzhan.¹ I graduated from polytechnical institute in Khabarovsk and for eight years worked as an engineer.

Then as now, I was attracted to artistic and historical literature. I wanted to know more about the culture of the Jewish people, to learn the language. All that brought me, already 35, to Moscow. I began studies in the yeshiva, the religious school attached to the synagogue. After a year I was sent to study in the rabbinical seminary in Budapest. I was there for six years, together with the man who is now my colleague in Leningrad. On my return I became rabbi of the Moscow synagogue, and in 1983 the Chief Rabbi.

That, so to say, is your work biography. Would you talk about yourself in more detail?

Married, two sons aged 5 and 2. My wife is a pharmacist. I like the theatre, books, sport — football, ice-hockey. I'm a Spartak fan; I go to a match when I can. I play tennis, but badly. I'm better at table-tennis. Alas, a rabbi has little free time. If any turns up, I read. Or rush to the Chaika pool to swim.

Excuse me, it interests our readers to know how much you earn.

500 rubles a month.² My sole wealth is

my library — several thousand volumes including the Russian classics and Soviet literature. I keep up with new books.

Adolf Solomonovich, how many people attend the synagogue?

I cannot answer precisely; we do not record it. I think 80-90 people come to pray every day. On sabbaths up to 500. On holidays many more.

Could you briefly describe Judaism?

It is a monotheistic religion, worshipping the God Yahwe. It arose in the first millenium before our era in Palestine. It is widespread among Jews.³ The majority of those professing Judaism live in Israel and the USA. The basic propositions of Judaism are collected in the Talmud.

On what does the Moscow Choral Synagogue subsist?

On the contributions of believers, income from the sale of religious literature, ritual objects and matzo. We produce up to 130 tonnes of matzo each year for Moscow alone. The money is spent on necessary upkeep of the synagogue itself — after all, it is over a hundred years old, on employees' wages and on the synagogue's religious school. I must say that there is enough money for all this. From what remains we make donations to the Peace Fund,⁴ the Culture Fund, and we also transfer certain sums for charitable purposes, in particular to help children.

Let us shift to secular matters, Adolf Solomonovich. Has perestroika affected the position of the synagogue, believers, your own work? Or should the question be put in some other way?

No, why? The progressive, creative force and energy of Perestroika cannot pass us by either. The emerging and growing democratisation of the whole of society has greatly changed attitudes to the religious person. Let us not beat around the bush — for long years the religious person has, as it were, stood outside society. No, the believer has not been expelled from society, but he has been seen somewhere on the sidelines.⁵ We feel positive changes in the attitude of the state towards religion and in inter-religious contacts. This, as I understand it, is only the beginning, and it makes for optimism.

You have returned from the USA. Did you take part in debates there, meet believers, talk with them?

Of course. I must unfortunately note that, in my view more often than necessary, Jewish believers in America turn to the problem of refuseniks, to the so-called Jewish question in the USSR. Most of the

interests of those I talked with came down to these themes. I had to explain to them that a Jewish question as such does not exist in our country, and that the synagogue has no connection with the emigration procedure: we cannot influence the decisions of state agencies. As far as various kinds of problems are concerned, I told them, isn't it better for you to solve yours and us to solve ours, at home, without interfering in other people's business?

Do congregants considering emigration turn to you, as their rabbi, for advice?

There have been a few such cases. It is a pity that there have only been a few. The reason is that not many people emigrate for purely religious motives. As a rabbi, I could understand believers wishing to reside in holy places, but in the USA I realised that 85% of emigrants were thinking of holiness least of all. The majority are moved by other motives.

I deeply regret every case of emigration. I am sure that now any emigrant would have had the chance here, in his own country, to be of more use both to society and to himself. More than that, I am in no doubt that there, taking part in the renewal of life in their Homeland, they would have found the happiness which they hope to find in foreign parts. As for genuine believers, I think as a rabbi that here they can count on a free religious life: the changes taking place in the country are the guarantee for that.

What disturbs me is the fuss around the question of emigration, which some people try to give almost a political resonance, when the wish of one group of Jews is represented as the aspiration of an entire people who, in their absolute majority, are tied by their thoughts and feelings to their Soviet Homeland.

In the foreign press one may find claims that there is state antisemitism in our country. And not only in the foreign press. Sometimes we have heard this from our fellow citizens. What is your opinion? Our society is large, in it about 300 million people of various kinds live together, cultured and uncultured, free of prejudices and stuffed with them. Are there within this ocean of human diversity antisemites? Yes, there are. They can be met with in a shop queue and in a communal flat,⁶ on the street and in superficially cultured company, in the personnel department of an agency and the administration of a higher educational establishment. However, must we, on meeting these everyday antisemites, draw global conclusions about the existence of state antisemitism? No, of course not!⁷

Sometimes you hear: "That is a forbidden theme." Nothing of the kind! We are now living in a time when at last things are called by their names. Are there in our society people with venereal diseases? Is there prostitution, drug addiction? Are there people corrupted by license, high-level protection, or their own high position? Are there hooligans, rapists, murderers? There are. And there are antisemites as well of various kinds — rabid antisemites and wavering ones. Is it an illness, philistine prejudices, dissipation or dense ignorance? Or all of them together? Society and time will judge, everyone will be rewarded according to their deserts. And we shall overcome this. I believe that our society has sufficient will for that.

However, social dumbness does not cure and does not educate. Only openness heals. I think that in exerting influence on antisemites we should not limit ourselves to condemning or shaming them. In my view, we need literature, accessible to all, about the history of the Jewish people and the sources of antisemitism, in particular in Russia. We need to have published more widely what great people have said on this subject — Lenin, Lev Tolstoy, Gorky... It seems to me essential that, when the racist essence of Zionism is exposed, a clear and definite dividing line be drawn between Zionist and Jew, between nationalist ideology and national belongingness.

But when I hear claims of the existence in our country of state antisemitism, then certainly this is a matter of obvious substitution of concepts. In some cases as a result of sincere delusion, in others in deliberate pursuit of far-going and (to put it mildly) improper goals. □

- 1 The (theoretically) Jewish "Autonomous Region" in Siberia.
- 2 Two to three times the average wage.
- 3 The Russian language distinguishes between "Jews", members of the Jewish people or nationality, and "Judaists", believers in the Jewish (Judaic) faith. Many Jews are not Judaists, and some Judaists are not Jews. So to say that "Judaism is widespread among Jews" is not tautologous.
- 4 Linked to the Soviet Peace Committee; collects money supposedly for the promotion of peace.
- 5 The rabbi here avoids the crucial point that the (openly) religious person cannot take the most active roles in society because he/she cannot join the Party.
- 6 The older type of flat, shared by two or more families. Many still exist.
- 7 An analyst less concerned than the rabbi to demonstrate his loyalty might wonder whether such a sharp distinction between "everyday" and "state" antisemitism can viably be drawn in such a "statified" society as the USSR. After all, he has just hinted at antisemitic discrimination in state agencies and educational establishments.

NUREMBERG REVISITED

Tara Kaufmann explores the use and misuse of analogies with Nazi Germany in the campaign against Clause 28

In June 1988 a new law came into force which was widely greeted as proof that Thatcher's Britain is nothing less than a fascist police state. "The road to Auschwitz is clearly signposted" warned *Capital Gay*, while *City Limits* claimed that this law "has no precedent since the Nazis seized control in Germany". The new law was, in fact, not a measure to enforce racial hygiene, or to legitimise the incarceration of millions of political prisoners. It was designed primarily to undermine local authorities and capitalise on the Labour Party's problems with its "loony left" image. Hardly Nuremberg revisited.

This is not to deny that Clause 28 (now Section 2A) of the Local Government Act is a particularly vicious and bigoted piece of legislation, one which will undermine the human rights of a minority of the population and feed the popular consciousness in a similar way to legislation passed by the Nazis in the early thirties. Nor is it to deny that there are comparisons between Thatcher's Britain and Hitler's Germany which can be drawn with some validity. My concern is that the use of the spectre of Nazism in the Stop the Clause Campaign has been so obsessive and so ahistoric that it has obscured our understanding of the issues involved and diverted our attention from more contemporary issues and alliances which need to be forged.

ECHOES OF ANTISEMITISM

Clause 28 exploits the "otherness" of lesbians and gays and lends institutional affirmation to further discrimination and persecution against a group which is already marginalised and vulnerable under the law. In addition, recent homophobic rhetoric has been uncannily evocative of classic antisemitism. Lesbians and gays are perceived as a corrupting influence, reservoirs of disease and degradation, as a conspiratorial clique intent on undermining Christian values. We are also seeing

...the singles out... for punitive and prejudiced treatment. If the Bill suggested that Jewish help organisations should be outcasts, that Jewish community groups should be denied funding and the threat that Jewish teachers should be banned from classrooms were made, and the quality press would be in little doubt that the foundations for a new from were being laid. Opposition must be leading a strong campaign against it and the liberal establishment would be girding for a tough but honourable battle.

The amendment has no logic behind and has no precedent in Western Europe since the Nazis seized control in Germany based on the... of hate, and

City Limits

the growth of a new paranoia about homosexual "power". In the same month that Clause 28 became law, the *Sunday Telegraph* ran a centre-spread article asking "Is There a Homosexual Conspiracy?" and concluded that indeed there is.

These analogies have been sullied by inappropriate use, accompanied and reinforced by new myths about Nazism. One important example of this has been the myth that lesbians suffered in the same way as gay men under Hitler and were forced to wear black triangles as a badge of their sexuality as some kind of equivalent to the pink triangles that branded gay men in concentration camps. There isn't sufficient space here to explore the position of lesbians in Nazi Germany; suffice it to say that the black triangle did not signify lesbians and that lesbians as a group were never targeted for persecution in the same way as gay men. The reality is much more complex, and to assume that lesbians suffered equivalent oppression to gay men is to ignore the very different meanings and threats of male and female homosexuality. Those who perpetuate this myth are, usually unwittingly, buying into a history which obscures and distorts the specific experiences of women.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Why do myths like this gain credence? What is so attractive, so powerful, about evoking images of Nazism in our political activism? I see this tendency as arising primarily from the fusion of two cultural trends. First, the current crisis in identity politics; secondly, the meaning of Nazism in modern consciousness and its use in political rhetoric. Traditionally, identity politics has been attacked and ridiculed by Left activists, who have caricatured its proponents, particularly feminists, as being too busy knitting muesli to make revolution. Much of the time this criticism was based not in a desire to advance the cause of women's liberation, but in a wish to discredit feminism and devalue its achievements. Recently, however, growing discontent has been evident among those who previously embraced identity politics, but are far from happy with its current meaning.

We have developed a political discourse which has mutated the concept of personal identity as being intrinsic to our politics to the extent that our personal identity has become our politics. Far from educating us about diversity of experience, this has restricted — even fossilised — our perception of human reality. Individual negotiation with present reality is allowed little room; we have become merely the sum total of our gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and ability. These "identities" are presented as credentials; not in order to inform, educate or invite discussion, but to assert moral and political authority and the right to define "the truth" — in short, to stifle debate.

Identity politics has become a cult of victim-worship, in which oppression has been glamourised and equated with both virtue and access to some kind of higher truth. "Oppression points" have become so linked with status and even with validity as a human being, that as individuals we are put under enormous pressure to present our credentials as victims of

...what the Nazis did to homosexuals... they did the same thing as they did to gypsies. They did the same thing as they did to Communists. They herded them into concentration camps and liquidated them. I am not suggesting that majority of Conservative Members could actually want to open up concentration camps, but I suspect the clause is so dangerous... like to ask the... He did... Hansard

oppression. One way of doing this is to bracket our identities and destinies with those of other victims, both in the past and in the present. Co-opting the Holocaust in order to boost victim-status is a particular temptation for lesbians and gay men, as our claims for political solidarity are often met with ridicule. Our oppression status does not stand on its own merits, but must be proved by association with others who have public validation for their suffering.

Nazi Germany is especially popular as a source of analogies. It has become one of the most potent cultural landmarks of our time. It is presented to us as the ultimate scenario of inhumanity and repression; this has, unfortunately, obscured understanding of both its specificity and its context in history. The Holocaust has become mythologised in the popular consciousness into little more than a combination of war story and grisly atrocity tale along the lines of Dr Crippen or Jack the Ripper. For many, the events of the Holocaust bear as much relation to a reality undergone by real people as cowboys and Indians films bear to the experience of Native American communities. I feel that the Holocaust is a particularly inappropriate subject for sloppy comparisons — not because it is a sacred cow, but because its horrors, and the lessons it holds for us, are unique and specific. This is important because analogies are useful tools only insofar as they are meaningful and accurate.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

Scare-mongering as a political tactic can be useful in the short term. In the long term, it undermines credibility and increases confusion and fear. There is sometimes a fine line to be drawn between getting people worried enough to get mobilised, and spreading misunderstanding and panic (rarely a useful strategy in political activism). On reflection, I believe most of us in the Stop the Clause campaign did not give this issue sufficient consideration. It is, of course, vital that we learn the lessons of the past. But memory is useless without understanding,

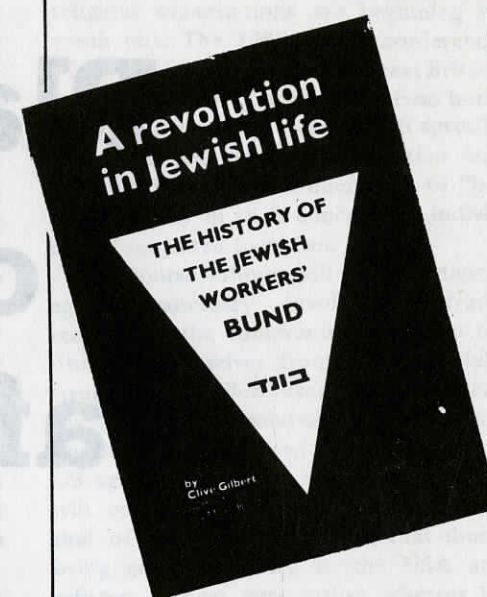
and understanding is obscured by misuse of history. What I am criticising is the usage of simplistic references to the neglect of important social and cultural links. And what I am advocating is active understanding and use of history, challenging conventional perceptions of the past in order to write our own history with new awareness. The Stop the Clause campaign is not a charity but a political struggle. We have a right to solidarity and support.

We can also use a better understanding of history to construct and assert identity in a more thoughtful, positive way than we do at present. We do have both choice and responsibility in our negotiation with the past. This issue of identity management holds particular difficulties for lesbians and gays who have been isolated from the normal networks of community and support. The questions we face as Jews in a modern, secular society are very different but just as complicated. Those of us who are both Jewish and lesbian or gay can interweave our history, our present and our choices into an exciting and creative challenge to the status quo, or we can fall back on the tired and restrictive "doubly oppressed" model.

...ably follow. Once upon a time in another land, artists amongst others were discouraged from portraying Jews as anything other than purveyors of disease and moral decay. It did not take many years for the poison of censorship, silence and official "truth" to seep through a whole society and rise to the surface... Belsen. Noel Greig London NW6 Guardian letters

I believe that history can and should be used to improve our understanding of the present and enable us to progress. It should never be used to fossilise our imagination, our understanding, our activism. If we learn to do this, there need be no sacred cows, no untouchables. We need not be diverted from analysis of our links with contemporary, more relevant issues such as ratecapping, education, employment rights and motherhood. A thoughtful examination of these links could provide us with analogies infinitely more useful and enlightening than those we are currently struggling with.

With thanks to Nicola Field, Sigrid Rausing and James Baaden



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LETTERS

Because of the volume of material we have received for this issue we have had to hold over "Letters" until next time. We promise a full letters page in issue 15!

Place of safety

Jewish communities in Britain can take a lead from their USA counterparts in support of sanctuary, argues Steve Cohen

"Freedom is freedom from violence. In El Salvador an estimated 20% of the entire population... have been displaced from their homes by the war. Tens of thousands have suffered violence, torture and death at the hands of those who are supposed to be upholding law and public order."

"There are many people dying in Latin America — dying of hunger, killed because they disagree with the repressive policies of their governments. Some of these people escape; some get to the US. But less than 3% of Salvadoran refugees who apply for asylum are granted it. Of those Salvadorans and Guatemalans who are caught by the Immigration & Naturalisation Service and sent back to Central America, most disappear and many are killed."

Either of these two quotations could have come from typical political activists, Jewish or non-Jewish, here or in the USA, protesting against repressive regimes in Central America which are economically and militarily supported by the USA. The quotes are actually from two United States rabbis — the first, by Rabbi Yoel Kahn of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco, the second, by Rabbi Burt Jacobson of Kehilla Community Synagogue in Berkeley. These rabbis are supported by their congregations. The congregations are themselves not acting in isolation. Many other *shuls* (synagogues) and Jewish institutions are making similar declarations —

and they are putting their words into practice by providing actual political and material help to Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees.

For Jews in Britain, where the eleventh commandment is: "Never speak out about politics," all this is remarkable and positive. So what is it all about?

THE JEWISH SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

It is about defiance of US immigration laws through the use of sanctuary. In this country the sanctuary of Viraj Mendis, who is fighting for asylum rights and against deportation to Sri Lanka where, as an open supporter of the Tamils, he fears persecution and even death, is well-known. Since December 1986 he has been in sanctuary in the Church of the Ascension, Hulme, Manchester.

In the USA religious sanctuary is a mass movement. It was born on 24 March 1982, the second anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, when the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson and five East Bay California churches declared themselves sanctuaries for Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees. Since then hundreds of churches of many denominations have made a similar political commitment. Today about 100 Jewish institutions are also working within the sanctuary movement. In December 1982 the Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, with its Rabbi Francis Silberg, became the first Jewish congregation to shelter refugees. In 1984 the

Conservative, and then in 1985, the Reform rabbinical organisations passed positive resolutions on the sanctuary issue. The Conservative Rabbinical Assembly resolved that it endorse the "concept of sanctuary as provided by synagogues, churches and other communities of faith in the United States". The Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis stated, "This CCAR urges the use of our synagogues as sanctuaries for refugees and commends those of our colleagues who have been actively involved in promoting freedom and democracy in Central America." The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the National Council of Jewish Women have likewise endorsed sanctuary.

By any standards Jewish involvement at the grassroots in sanctuary is impressive. As well as individual *shuls* offering sanctuary, Jewish organisations in several cities have combined to produce regular newsletters explaining and supporting sanctuary. A regular National Jewish Sanctuary Newsletter is published. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations has produced a 130-page pamphlet *Providing Sanctuary, The Jewish Role — A practical guide for congregations and individuals*. 'Sanctuary' itself encompasses many different activities from the commitment to house refugees in synagogue buildings to legal, financial, welfare and other forms of political aid to threatened refugees. Many sanctuary covenants made by *shuls* undertake to campaign against US immigration policy or aspects of it.

RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATION

The decision by individual *shuls*, local communities, national organisations religious and secular to support and offer sanctuary was positive and bold. However, it also required a lot of argument and convincing, based largely on the interpretation of Jewish religious texts. These provide many justifications of sanctuary. In Exodus: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress them for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." In Deuteronomy: "Love you therefore the stranger." Leviticus: "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour" — a *mitzvah* (good deed) that takes precedence even over the observance of the Sabbath. Judaism stresses the concept of help for the stranger (in Hebrew, *gere*). The *gere* was someone who had left their land or tribe to come and live with the Israelites. Religious supporters of sanctuary point out how Jewish tradition holds that for all of Sodom's supposed transgressions the city of Sodom was actually destroyed because of cruelty to strangers.

COMMUNAL CHALLENGE

For secular, atheist Jews, religious argumentation does not come easy. However, these texts deal with fundamental questions of Jewish philosophical learning — which is the heritage of us all. Moreover, the supporters of the Jewish sanctuary movement in the USA do not rely dogmatically on religious texts. Rather they have taken up serious political questions within the Jewish community — and have challenged communal reluctance to engage in radical politics. The same questions will necessarily emerge in the Jewish community here once the issue of sanctuary is raised. Whenever Jews in a congregation take on a cause not directed at other Jews we are asked "But is this a Jewish matter?" or "Why don't you do something for the Jews?". This world view has a spurious plausibility given the historic isolation of Jews, but it is misconceived. The most powerful answer to it is Hillel's famous epigram, "If I am not for myself who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" This is quoted in the declaration of sanctuary by Congregation of Beth El of Sudbury River Valley which adds: "What would it mean about Judaism or its importance in our lives to say that the fate of Central American refugees and our nation's policies in Central America are not a 'Jewish issue'?"

Community "leaders" often tell us to "keep out of politics" and not challenge the government or law. But challenging bad law is fundamental to Jewish belief and experience. US sanctuaries frequently quote Maimonides: "And it goes without saying that if a king ordered a violation of God's commandments, he is not to be obeyed." The Union of American Hebrew Congregation's 1985 endorsement of sanctuary stated that "Nathan, the prophet, offers an exemplary biblical model for confronting a state authority wielding its power unjustly and abusively. To a show of might, Nathan responds with right, with truth."

HOLOCAUST ANALOGY

A third and powerful political issue has had to be confronted in persuading Jewish communities of the righteousness of sanctuary. This is the significance of the Holocaust. Rabbi Charles Feinberg of the Harvard Divinity School has written that "As a Jew I cannot help but identify with Central Americans in our midst. I cannot help but identify with people who are fleeing persecution and violence... we know what it means to be a stranger. We knew it in antiquity in Egypt and Babylonia... in the Middle Ages as we were hounded, oppressed, expelled from every

Western European country. And... as no other people in this century, when the Jewish people had no place to flee."

Jewish critics of the sanctuary movement have argued that any analogy with the Holocaust is wrong because the Holocaust was a unique attempt to wipe out an entire people throughout the world, the Jews. Supporters of sanctuary have not denied the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Rather they have emphasised that politically what allowed the Nazis' genocide was the fact that no one came to the aid of the Jews and countries such as the USA and Britain refused refuge to all but a small minority. Rabbi Feinberg has written, "The only common element between the death of six million Jews and the oppression of the Central Americans is the indifference of the bystanders. Indifference led to monstrous evils in Europe. Indifference to the suffering of Central Americans just perpetuates that suffering." Rabbi Robert Marx of Congregation Habafa, Glencoe, Illinois, asks: "Are we, as the people who have drunk most deeply from the bitter cup of persecution, in the process of developing a spectrum of savables? Will our spectrum range from 'most savable' at the top to 'least savable' at the bottom? Will it place Soviet Jews at the top and Salvadoran Catholics at the bottom?"

JEWISH SANCTUARY IN BRITAIN?

Many Jews in Britain are active in anti-deportation campaigns. However, there is no organised Jewish presence and no community involvement. Meanwhile, a sanctuary movement has begun in this country, a movement which has spread beyond the churches. In the last year there have been three sanctuaries other than that of Viraj Mendis, all of which have been successful — Salema Begum in a church, Rajwinder Singh in a Sikh Gurdwara, and Renouka Lakhani in a Hindu Temple. *Shul* involvement has been conspicuously lacking. So could there be a Jewish sanctuary movement here even on a small scale?

The Jewish community in the UK is far less politically and socially secure than in the US. It is therefore more timid. It is also moving towards the right. But there are also positive, progressive developments. In the last decade there has arisen an "alternative", radical Jewish network, many of whose members retain traditional communal links. Secondly, some community institutions are starting to allow their premises to be used for discussion of this issue. Recently the Manchester Jewish Museum hosted a joint public meeting of Jewish refugees of the 1930s and Tamil refugees of today. Thirdly, significant

religious organisations are beginning to speak out. The 1988 annual conference of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain passed a motion condemning racism both in South Africa and in the UK. It specifically criticised the new Immigration Act and called upon its member *shuls* to "be active locally in their concern for individuals" subjected to racism.

Of course, there will be resistance against sanctuary involvement from sections of the community who want to distance themselves from black people's struggles and indeed from any struggles. Even people of goodwill will echo the doubts that have been expressed in the US against sanctuary. Another objection will counterpose the US experience to that of this country, arguing that those being given sanctuary in the USA are refugees fleeing persecution whereas in this country most people threatened with deportation have come to the UK "merely" for economic or family reasons. This objection flies in the face of the history of the reaction to Jewish immigration into Britain. Before the Second World War immigration restrictions were used almost exclusively against Jews. In the 1930s Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism were generally excluded on the grounds that they were just "economic refugees". The first comprehensive immigration legislation in this country, the Aliens Act of 1905, was designed specifically to keep out Jews fleeing Russia and Eastern Europe, escaping both physical persecution and economic impoverishment. Are we to withhold support on the grounds that they will not be shot to, for example, Tinu Olowokanga and her six children who are being threatened with deportation to Nigeria, or from Syed Rahman who would be separated from his wife and family if he were deported to Bangladesh, or from Paul Ho whom the Home Office want to remove to Hong Kong or to Francis and Moji Oklanami and their baby who are under threat of expulsion to Nigeria? Are we to draw up our own list of "savables" — where divided families and deportees come at the bottom of the list and where in practice we don't even offer support to political refugees? As Hillel said, "And if I am only for myself, what am I?" □

Much of the material in this article is drawn from:

Providing Sanctuary, the Jewish Role. Obtainable from Religious Action Centre of Reform Judaism, 2027 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20036, USA. Price 7.50 dollars.
National Jewish Sanctuary Newsletter, PO Box 411391, San Francisco 04141-1391, USA
BASTA — the magazine of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, 59 E Van Buren, Suite 1400, Chicago, Illinois 60605, USA.

Judith with assistant Susan. Motto of her shop:
"High fashion without being too extreme;
elegance at the right price."

Exclusive Designs

"Some women make
themselves neurotic
for their simcha."



Anne Krisman 1988

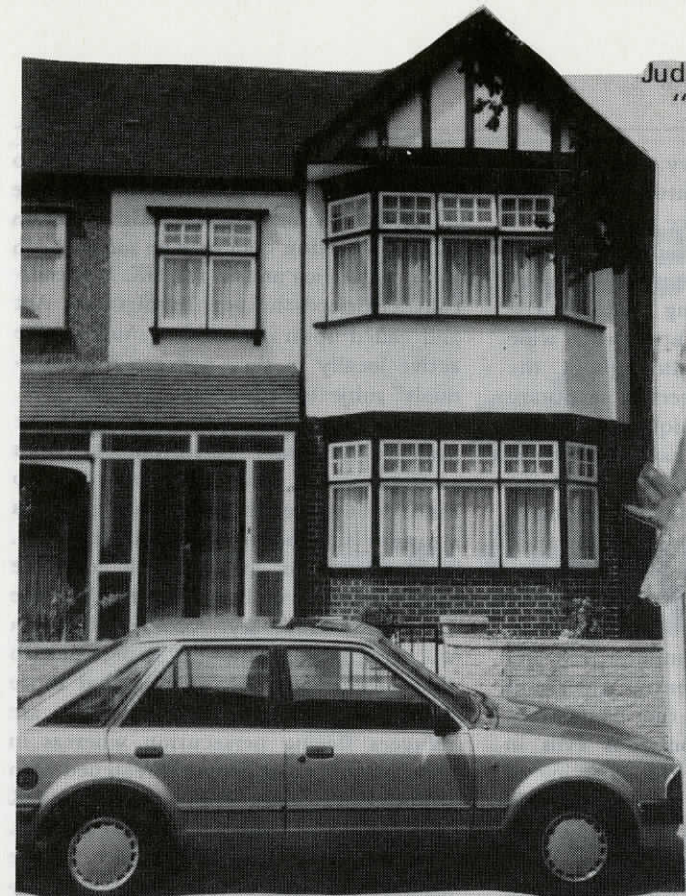
Gerald from Gants Hill has delivered
ice cream locally for 24 years.
Jewish customers care about
quality. Twelve years ago
business was so bad I had
a half-price sale. No one
bought anything — they
thought it was stale. Do you
know my daughter Sharon's got a baby now?"

Alan, Gants Hill estate agent: "Our clients drive you mad, but I love them all.
We see so many Jewish properties we ought to put 'Mezuza to stay' on the
adverts. Our clients don't want our boards outside their house in case the
neighbours get to know their business. We see lots of *hey mishe bubele*

properties — through lounge over 30 foot:

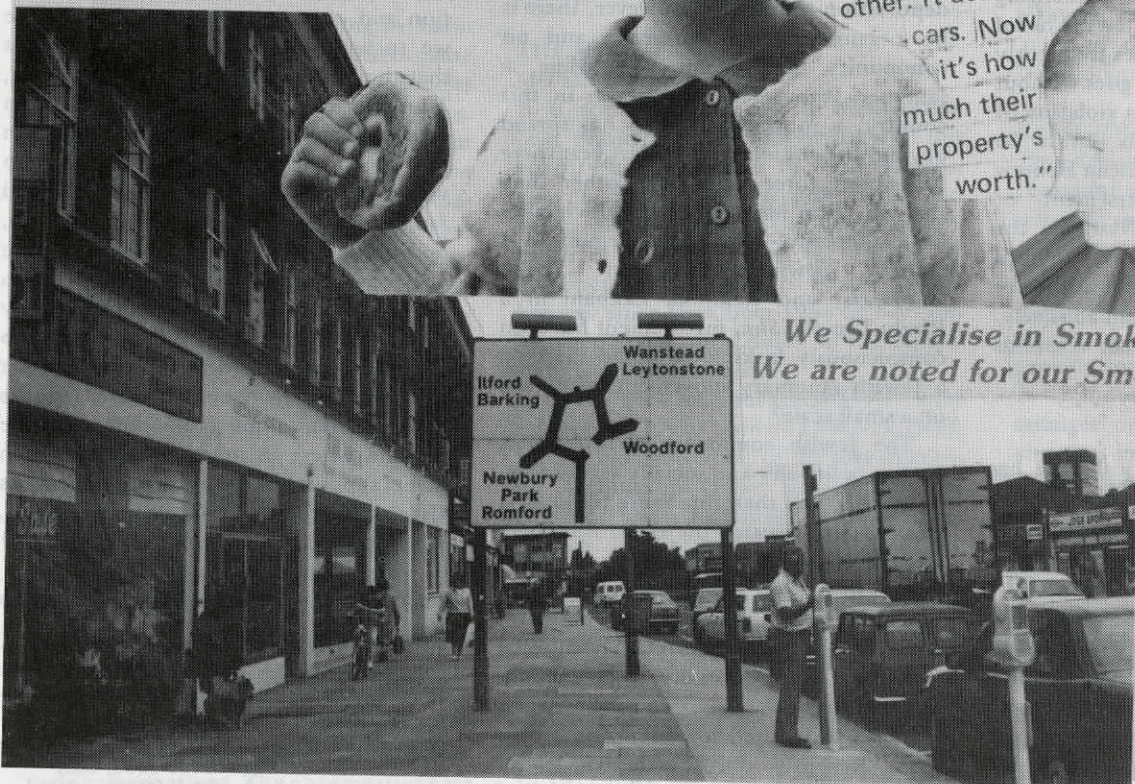
crystal lamps; fitted kitchen; new toilet
in the downstairs broom
cupboard; fitted wardrobes;
extensions; patterned
carpet, wallpaper to match.
someone

When you go in you know
from the pictures."



Melissa's mother has lived in
Redbridge for seven years. She
was originally from Victoria Park.
"That was a closer knit, friendlier
community. Here it's a rat race;
everybody for themselves, outdoing
each other with material possessions.
Being a single parent, I've learnt
to stand up for what I want."

Susan, hairdresser: "I cut lots of taxi drivers'
hair. The bald ones are fussier than the ones
with hair. I'm not a nice Jewish girl any more;
I'm English. I'm into non-kosher
men. The Jewish boys want you
to take over their mother's role
when you marry.
They're all insecure;
they compete with each
other. It used to be
cars. Now
it's how
much their
property's
worth."



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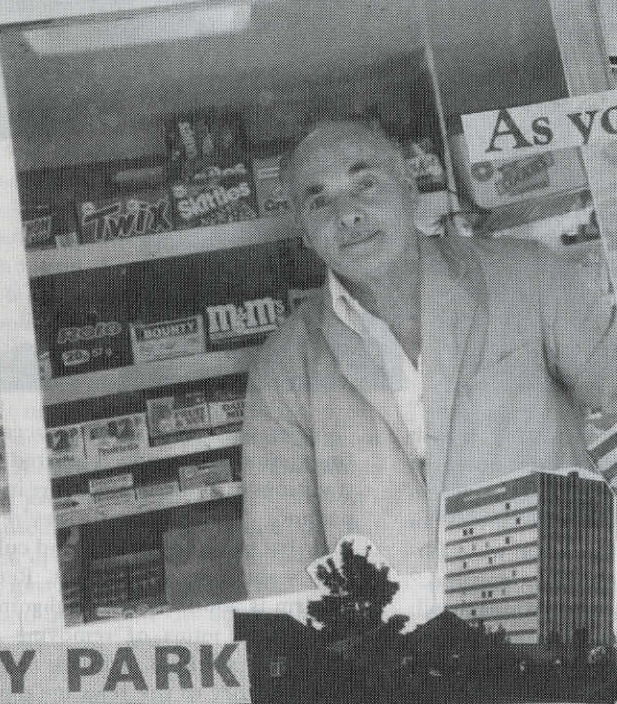
NEWBURY PARK

Ilford exposed

There's been a lot of talk recently about Jewish communities: developing
new ones; returning after initially rejecting your own; coming to terms with
your feelings about your roots. I have been in the Redbridge Jewish
community all my life and this is a glimpse of the culture and values of the
area. For me, being a Gants Hill Jew means both participation in the life of
the community as well as distance and observation. I've somehow managed
to do both: making a through lounge out of two separate rooms...

the
REDBRIDGE JEWISH COMMUNITY

As your home value soars...



Michelle, a hairdresser, 18.
"I don't go out
of my way to wear fashionable
clothes. I dress for me and
no one else. The girls I know are
hairdressers; the blokes are into
stocks and shares or estate
agents. Outside the Bagel
Bakery is the place
to beck."



On May bank holiday weekend, 150 Jews who, for a variety of reasons, felt themselves alienated from the "mainstream" Jewish community, gathered in Leeds. This bald statement disguises a whole range of hopes, expectations, angers, disappointments, friendships, that went into and came out of the gathering. These are reflected in the personal views which follow.

The weekend was arranged by six people living in Leeds, most of whom have been active in JONAH (Jews Organised for a Nuclear Arms Halt) and other issues. Whose idea it was originally appears to be a matter of dispute.

The weekend consisted of a series of workshops broadly divided into issues around Zionism, sexuality, religion and spirituality, culture, community, racism and antisemitism, literature, history, education, identity; community building groups, randomly chosen, met on three occasions with the supposed intention of planning a strategy for the future; and there were support groups of all kinds. Interspersed with all this were singing, dancing, praying, eating, walking and talking.

The final session attempted to formulate a "way forward" in the form of a newsletter, follow-up events, and a database. Since *Ruach* a couple of follow-up events have taken place and a newsletter is soon to appear.

Ruach itself means spirit or wind. Whether it will lead to a new spirit or wind of change in the "alternative" Jewish community still remains to be seen.

Ongoing groups include:

- *Teachers and youth workers* — contact 26 Hazelwood Avenue, Newcastle NE2 3HX
- *Red Ruach (Jews active on the Left)* — contact 29 Brook Road, Sheffield S8 9FH
- *Ruach Newsletter* — contact 108 The Vale, London NW11 8SL
- *Chavurah (New Age Jewish Spirituality)* — contact 18a Brownlow Road, London N3 1NA
- *Database (Directory of Skills, Resources)* — contact 27 Tylney Road, London E7 0LS

If you want to receive the newsletter please send £4 to *Ruach Newsletter*, BM Box 8063, London WC1N 3XX. Send information for listings — about groups, events or projects — to the same address.

Ruach—the

After *Ruach* five participants talked about their reactions. Though they came from different backgrounds, they had in common an identification as Jews and as socialists and a hope that *Ruach* would gather together the disparate groups and individuals which make up the "alternative" Jewish community.



Photo: Marian Shapiro

"I was looking for the existing Jewish groups to form links and create some sort of alignment which could find a voice in the Jewish community," said Clive, "an opportunity to look at political ways forward to be 'not the Board of Deputies'." James had "really no expectations at all. My own involvement with other Jewish people had been in the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Helpline project. We've never had any links with any other Jewish groups. We've never been included in any Jewish endeavour; never invited to any Jewish gatherings. I wrote to the organisers and got very nice letters back; warm, welcoming and encouraging."

The programme was both full and varied, making it difficult to choose what to go to. This problem was made harder still by the fact that most of us led workshops as well as going to other people's. One which made a strong impression was led by Michael Feinberg on Reconstructionism and other Jewish Alternatives in America. "A lot of people from socialist backgrounds were there," said James.

"Maybe they were excited because they found something which related to those traditions of Judaism which are in ordinary parlance 'religious' and they're part of their background, history and culture and they want some access to it. Reconstructionism is about as thoroughgoing as you can get in terms of removing anything that's very spiritual. It focuses on the idea of the history of the Jews and the community of the Jewish people and dismisses the idea of God." Marian disagreed: "What people found attractive was not so much the theory about Reconstructionism but the picture Michael drew of an alternative Jewish community in Philadelphia. People there were desperate for a sense of community because they felt isolated from the established Jewish community; they felt alienated from the dominant Christian culture. People in that room were mentally buying their plane tickets."

Anne gave a workshop on the way Jews are represented in the media. "It was about images of the Jewish community and other ethnic groups," she said. "To

wind of change?

most of the people there it felt quite new to feel angry about something you saw in the media. We moved on to looking at images of Jews in textbooks and talked about how you can represent Jews if you aren't going to portray them in a religious way. What images you get of Jews in the *Jewish Chronicle*; what images you can use if you're not using the symbol of laying *tefillin* (phylacteries), not using the symbol of the *huppah* (wedding canopy); what you get in religious textbooks: *shabbos* (sabbath) candles, *shabbos* tables with the woman missing because they've cropped her out of the picture!"

James went to Gail Chester's workshop on Sexual Politics and Jewish Identity. "She was quite clear about trying to stress political analyses in relation to marriage or the way in which relationships are used within society," he said, "but people were much keener to talk about their own personal experiences." He, himself, led a workshop on Looking at Homophobia. "The topic was deliberately constructed so people wouldn't say 'Oh that's just for the gays and the lesbians'. So it was disappointing that no heterosexual people turned up. However, we didn't really discuss any of the political issues. I wanted to talk about Clause 28; how homophobia is being used by this government; how it's been used in the past; none of that cropped up. But we had a group of people who'd never met any other lesbian or gay Jews and it became an opportunity for people who are isolated, who feel their official community only expresses hostility towards them, to meet other people and talk. That was very constructive but the political points never really surfaced."

The workshops varied a great deal in size. Julia led one on Zionism in the Diaspora, and said: "Although it was very small, it was an interesting mixture of people. We had a fascinating discussion about ideology, culture and hegemony, and looked at the way Zionism has acted to detach diaspora Jews from diaspora Jewish history. I came away feeling that I'd been challenged and stimulated in a way that I hadn't in some of the other events."

As well as workshops there were informal support groups. We all felt that the

initial list drawn up by the organisers was extraordinary and eclectic and that, at first sight, there was little we could relate to. However, some were surprisingly constructive and, because the structure was less formal, it gave people a space to set things up there and then such as an alternative Jewish teachers' group and

up by the organisers. People were allocated to groups at random to discuss their hopes for an alternative Jewish community and then report back. Said James: "Some groups were quite political: one reported on very concrete issues in Britain today; other groups were totally different. I was curious about the organisers' intention in



Photo: Marian Shapiro

Red *Ruach*. Julia found the parents' support group particularly useful: "We discussed everything from mealtimes at *Ruach* to education and what we were going to do about Jewish culture; we also thought about arranging weekends together. Those parents came from all sorts of different places but they knew they had to organise to get something done."

James went to a support group for the children of refugees and survivors. "We've met twice since *Ruach* to talk about our parents, our families and the environment in which we grew up," he said, "and I think it's an excellent group which has been very useful. At the moment it's just about the personal, but I think it's going somewhere. I would hope that we could move on to look at issues of refugees today, for instance."

The other main forum for discussion was the community building groups set

mixing people in this random way. You don't build a community with a random selection of people with whom you have very little in common." Marian felt that "the groups were based on the assumption that everybody at *Ruach* would have quite a lot in common. I don't think this was the case. A lot of people had feelings of alienation and a desire for an alternative community in common but there were also really deep differences which were glossed over."

Ruach was polarised around issues of identity, spirituality and methods of political organisation. Said Julia: "There was a great deal of feeling about Jewish identity, but for a lot of people it wasn't based on any kind of understanding of the Jewish community or Jewish history. I don't know if it's to do with post-war Jewish education but there are vast gaps in people's knowledge about their own

New age old tune

Celebrating our history or denying it?
asks Bryan Cheyette

Being someone who spends a lot of time playing around with words, I have a confession to make. My first reaction to the *Ruach* gathering was before the actual weekend in May 1988 and was to the title *Ruach* chosen by the six organisers and, I fear, a permanent feature of the New Jewish Network. *Ruach* is a highly ambiguous Hebrew word. Yes, it means "spirit". Anyone who was ever involved in a Zionist or Jewish Youth Group will remember, with some trepidation, the dominating call for "more *ruach*" by their group leader (meaning more group atmosphere). Personally, I couldn't shake off that association after I was told the name of the gathering. But, I also knew that *ruach* meant "wind" and, in modern Hebrew today, bodily wind. So, I thought, was *Ruach* a new spirit "healing the wounds of our people", as one of the organisers put it? Or, alternatively, was it just a lot of hot air; excess wind? The ambiguity of *ruach* (the word), as it turned out, was a perfect expression of my ambiguous reaction to *Ruach* (the gathering).

On the positive side, it felt really good to meet and talk with like-minded individuals both inside and outside the workshops. Whilst I am sure that I didn't feel as isolated as many of the other *Ruach* participants, it was good to put faces to names of people I admire and learn from people with whom I have different power relations and, even, different politics. What I knew in theory became a reality; there really is another Jewish community out there and this has arisen in the 1980s. The six organisers made this sense of a community possible and I realise, writing this now, that what I have to say is predicated on their hard work over the last year.

Yet, I would like to think that the *Ruach* organisers would be the first to agree that one weekend is just a gentle breeze (as opposed to a transforming wind) and that there is still a long, long way to go. So, on the less positive side, why, after experiencing the gathering, do I find it so difficult to be enthusiastic about the direction of *Ruach*?

A clue to my worries about the gathering stems from the introduction to the Information Pack which was sent to the participants, where the organisers write that "*Ruach* began a year ago as a mixture of dreams and questions". *Ruach* might have begun a year ago for the six organisers, but the idea of an "alternative" Jewish conference began three years before that at the one and only National Conference of JONAH (the Jewish anti-nuclear group) in Leeds which attracted over 80 people. I sadly couldn't attend that JONAH event but the one thing that emerged from it — when I spoke afterwards to the participants that I knew — was the idea of a bigger event along similar lines to bring together the myriad of "alternative" Jewish groups that had sprung up in Britain in the 1980s. It was this denial of history — and of the specific context of the radical Leeds Jewish community — by the *Ruach* organisers (some of whom, surprisingly, are active members of Leeds JONAH) that, I feel, contains a much larger and more significant denial. *Ruach* (the word), according to some of the organisers, signifies something new and different; something that will transform and heal the sick; something that will lead to a "new community"; and, in their more visionary moments, something that might even be a part of the New Age.

But, surely, as I have said, there are already a myriad of radical, new, alternative Jewish groups — and cultural and ethnic formations — that have existed in Britain for, at least, the last decade and have given renewed expression to a centuries-old Jewish radical tradition. Wasn't May 1988 meant to be an event which would celebrate and facilitate what we already have? Did not *Ruach* build on groups or events (to name the most prominent) such as the national Jewish Feminist conferences; or the *Jewish Quarterly* symposia; or the Jewish Women's Oral History Project; or the South Bank Yiddish Day; or the Jewish East End Festival; or the Jewish Film Foundation — not to mention the activities of JONAH or the Jewish Socialists' Group? Perhaps even more disturbing, why were existing radical Jewish communities — in London, Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester (to name but four) — voiceless and invisible at *Ruach*?

Are these communities all "sick" and in need of healing by the *Ruach* physicians?

With the emphasis at the gathering on personal transformation and spiritual awareness — and the creation of a new sense of self and community — I felt fortunate during the weekend to come across individuals who were not suffering from this existential angst. I strongly suspect that, for many of these individuals, *Ruach* did not offer them a great deal (we were not in the business of being Born Again). For those, on the other hand, who had an insecure sense of Jewish identity — perhaps a majority — then *Ruach* might well have been more fulfilling. These, presumably, were the sick who needed to feel "safe", in the words of one organiser.

Actually, when I come to think about it, the vocabulary of a "sick" Jewry has long been part of Jewish nationalist thought which goes back to the middle of the 19th century. Even if some of the *Ruach* participants and organisers did feel uneasy at the thought of more than 150 Jews in one place, I realise now that it was, in fact, a less pronounced form of this self-denial that influenced the agenda of the *Ruach* gathering. That is why there was a refusal to acknowledge much of what has already been achieved and why we were urged at *Ruach* to create a new community and a new spiritual ideology.

In the age of Thatcherism, when the left as a whole is powerless and insecure, it is really very tempting for us all to create an ideal (*Ruach*-ised) sense of self and then pretend that what we have is a form of oppositional politics. (In fact, in this situation, all we oppose is those who are similar to us but who don't quite share the same identity-politics.) *Ruach*, as it is constructed at the moment, is unable to oppose or transform anything.

In Sheffield, on 16 May, *Red Ruach* had a day forum to try and redress this particular form of unpolitics. And, on 19 November, in Leeds, this debate will be continued. There is a danger, however, that all we will end up doing is examining our own (*Ruach*-inspired) navels. I hope that the next gathering of the New Jewish Network will more forcefully give a voice to our achievements and, crucially, address the question of the considerable power-structures that we will have to overcome if the other Jewish community is to be anything more than a handful of "personal visions" and something that comes and goes at gatherings — like the wind. □

Brian Cheyette teaches English and Jewish Literature at Leeds University. He is also the literary editor of the *Jewish Quarterly*.

Gathering storms

David Cesarani looks back
in anger

To my mind, "alternative" connotes openness, inclusivity and spontaneity. I harboured a 1960s-ish fantasy that *Ruach* would be an open house where people came to share and explore their Jewishness, a combination of the Spiro Institute and Woodstock. I also had high hopes of a serious conference atmosphere where Jewish alternative groups and individuals could hammer out a common platform or statement of intent, maybe even going on to the founding of a standing conference or committee. I was desperately hoping that at last the disenfranchised, the marginalised and the silenced Jews would find a voice.

Before I even arrived at Leeds, I had a feeling of dread because I'd heard bad news about the behaviour of the controlling group and had been badly upset by the way in which people in London were being refused admission. This had led to a number of heated telephone calls to Leeds in which the reasons for this exclusion changed every five minutes from fire regulations, to space constraints to the problem of food. When I got to Leeds, I learned that another reason lay in the Judaeo-phobia of at least one of the organisers who told me that she found the presence of more than 150 Jews oppressive, hence the more or less random limit to numbers.

This was in total contrast to the sentiments I had once heard from the people in charge and what I thought an "alternative" gathering was all about. I had been afraid that there would be "tyranny of structurelessness". Instead I found myself at an exclusive event that was locked and barred to dozens of people and rigidly, even hierarchically, organised. If you opted out of the prescribed activities the feeling was like playing hookey from school.

The existence of community rests on intimacy and shared values, from which are derived some sort of authority and rules of behaviour, and a subtle interaction of obligations and benefits. Yet, in my community building group there were people constantly questioning whether anything was shared and putting primacy on recognition of their own narrow identification as a person, not even as a

Jew. At times, being Jewish seemed to be the least important factor, some of the participants didn't seem able to feel, and hence to be, Jewish at all.

One person insisted that the only community she'd be prepared to be a member of had to meet certain personal requirements and exclude certain Jews she found threatening or antithetical to what she believed in. And all this had to be done so that she could be part of this "community" while living a hundred miles from the nearest Jewish centre. I was amazed by this *hutzpa*. There are certain obligations that go with being a Jew, like belonging to any voluntaristic association, especially one which depends on a shared way of life. You can't create a Jewish community of any kind if people want to live at the ends of the earth and do their own thing.

I won't say much about the attempts to create some kind of permanent organisation. It could have been achieved if there had been a true spirit of pluralism and toleration; there are democratic structures which can encompass difference and combine diversity with unity and strength. Instead, there was an overwhelming suspicion of politics, a quite irrational aversion to organisation. This blocked any constructive work and was facilitated by the highly planned agenda and structure designed to frustrate such constructive initiatives; a testimony to the experience of people who once practised the tactics of entryism and who now set out to frustrate anything that smacked of coordinated action.

I was pretty busy giving workshops so I only got to a few but I enjoyed tremendously the session on Yiddish folk music and song. I thought it was a pity there weren't more on Jewish culture or Jewish cultural creativity in cinema, drama, Hebrew and Yiddish literature, philosophy, theology or history. This may have resulted from the experiential basis to so many of the workshops. I wasn't sure at what level they were supposed to be pitched or what form they should take. I was very annoyed by the way in which one workshop which I gave was disrupted by rude efforts to impose a particular rhetoric.

It seemed to me that many of those who came to *Ruach* were experiencing

varying degrees of identity crisis; political, religious, personal, gender. For these people being Jewish was itself problematic. The question for them was not "what kind of Jew am I?" or "how can I be a Jew?" but "what are Jews and am I one?" or even "do I want to be a Jew?" This isn't a problem of Jewishness, but a constant interrogation of the self. Is it possible to create a community out of people for whom the bedrock, the shared values, are so dreadfully weak or undermined? The problem here is personal not political, private not communal and it can only be solved at



Photo: Clive Trouberman

the individual not the collective level. This body of individuals dominated *Ruach* and, from my point of view, wrecked it for the rest. There is still a constituency for an organised community and a network of groups and I'm sure that these people will continue to work towards that since the need is so urgent.

There was always a danger that *Ruach* would alienate as many as it attracted. This is what happened to me. I left Leeds exhausted, disappointed and angry. I was overwhelmed and almost crushed by the negativity, the hostility and the intolerance amongst the organisers and participants. It has taken a long time to recover. But I believe that the positive and constructive aims of so many of us who were there will find fulfilment. □

David Cesarani teaches politics at the University of London and writes on Jewish history

Prisoners of Zion

Does Zionism live up to its claim to support and defend Jewish communities the world over or does it undermine their self-confidence and ability to defend themselves? David Rosenberg looks at the appeal of Zionism and analyses why "orthodox" anti-Zionism has failed to make an impact among Jews

Zionism is usually understood as the ideology of a movement which sought to build a Jewish nation state, and then, having established that state, in Israel, as the ideology which justifies its role and practice as a state. The roots of Zionism are generally seen as a nationalist response to European antisemitism. Its founders argued their case by claiming that antisemitism was an inevitable product of societies where Jews were a minority, and that ultimately it was futile to fight it.

But that is only part of the story; to understand Zionism's historical meaning and its attraction we must look at the broader context in which it emerged at the end of the 19th century. As well as being a reaction to antisemitism, it was also a response to growing civil and political emancipation which threw up a range of issues around Jewish identity, status and destiny, and encouraged the growth of a wide range of ideologies in Jewish life, both religious and secular. Among these Zionism was a minority secular movement (albeit a significant minority) and it remained so until the Nazi Holocaust.

Its minority status reflected its class origins: a movement of bourgeois intellectuals among largely working class Jewish communities, although later, in Poland in the 1920s, it developed some working class base. But generally Zionism was neither a practical nor a desirable ideology for working class Jews. It was also rejected by many in the middle classes who preferred acculturation — seeking to become as much like the middle classes of the surrounding society, keeping only the minimal differences of faith — to national separatism.

In Britain the main force in the Jewish establishment has been the Board of

Deputies, founded in 1760. Zionism came into existence in 1897, but it wasn't until 1938 that the Zionists captured the Board, and it took the next decade with all its destruction and upheavals to consolidate that control. Up to 1938 the Board had been actively anti-Zionist, seeking to avoid a dual and possibly conflicting national loyalty.

The failure of the Left to prevent the initial victory of fascism, the Holocaust of European Jewry, and the aftermath — wretched Jewish survivors in displaced persons camps refused entry in country after country — all combined to thrust Zionism to the fore.

Jewish communities in Britain and the USA, which could only watch the unfolding horror, felt a massive sense of betrayal by the people who had the power to withstand and overcome fascism: the international socialist movement; democratic and progressive forces; and ultimately the allied governments, for whom saving Jewish lives was evidently not a war priority. That sense of betrayal is still very keenly felt, especially in the generation that lived through it, and it underpins their post-War attachment to Zionism. It will certainly not be assuaged by those who, in the name of anti-Zionism, turn our attention narrowly and crudely to the role of the relatively powerless Zionist movement of that period, as Jim Allen did with *Perdition*, for example.

The Holocaust and its aftermath threw up the central question of security for Jews. But that wasn't the only question, and the strength of Zionism as an ideology has always rested on it offering much more than just physical security. It offered an identity which broke with the image of a downtrodden, oppressed people,

always at the mercy of others, and promoted instead the image of the new, free, strong, upright Jew. Through state power it offered a voice in, and equality with, the non-Jewish world; it offered constructive and military achievements for its people to take pride in and, in the vacuum left by the destruction not only of European Jewry but also of their Yiddish culture, it offered a new, modern, Israeli Hebrew culture to identify with, whose symbols were independence, freedom and *khalutzit* (pioneering). Zionism also projected itself as a movement of the future, optimistic in common destiny for all Jews. It appropriated the traditional concern and support of one Jewish community for another and turned it into a one way support system for the new Jewish state.

Zionist ideology has been integrated into the power structure of these communities — its press, its education system, its authority structures. It has become so normalised, so naturalised among large sections of our communities, that its different elements are produced and reproduced as unquestioned assumptions, almost as articles of faith. Zionism is promoted now as an essential element in Jewish identity. Once an option, it is now an imperative, and those, like the Jewish Socialists' Group, who question its assumptions are themselves questioned as to their Jewish credentials. Our communal establishment seems to have succeeded in moulding Zionism to our Jewish identity, claiming that to break with Zionism is to shatter your Jewish identity. The current Zionist hegemony is promoted as some kind of eternal truth in Jewish life rather than an ideology and set of power relations that have been constructed and can

be deconstructed. Ironically, many anti-Zionists have been caught in the trap and have argued, as Jenny Bourne does in her *Race and Class* article, that to break with Zionism is to shatter your Jewish identity and that there can be no stable diaspora-based Jewish identity. She attacked Zionism by means of a shallow attack on Jewish identity.

In recognising the systemic nature of Zionism, opponents of Zionism must recognise that to challenge one aspect of it or another without challenging the broad range of assumptions on which it is based, and without offering an attractive alternative, will not succeed. The key assumption in Zionism today is that Israel is central in Jewish life: the belief that only Israel can guarantee the future security, identity, prosperity, cultural creativity and welfare of Jewish people the world over. This has been translated into a colonial power relationship between Israel and diaspora Jewish communities who are drained politically, culturally and economically for the benefit of the Israeli state which then claims to act on behalf of these communities.

So, to what extent *does* Zionism act in the interests of Jewish communities? In various diaspora communities there are bureaucracies which are largely dependent on Zionism and they are functionaries of its colonial role in those communities. Zionism is very much in their interests and to challenge Zionism is to challenge them, but numerically they are very few. Although, in terms of class, many Jews now are a more suitable constituency for Zionism, objectively very few have a direct material interest in Israel, though some have close family there and are concerned for their safety. And although many Jews appear to agree ideologically with the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, their active Zionism consists mainly of an annual financial donation, possibly a holiday there too, and the repetition of political clichés in discussion. In fact, Zionism poses a threat to diaspora communities economically, politically, culturally and socially, and their real interest is in opposing Zionism.

Politically, Jews share an interest with other ethnic minorities in the defence of civil and democratic rights, in the promotion of pluralism and tolerance, and in resistance to racism and the economic system which generates it. In other words, their interests are with the Left. Zionism's political alliances are with right-wing imperialist interests, and in demanding loyalty from Jewish communities they are helping to pull those communities to the right and away from their traditional alliance with the oppressed.

I can give very stark examples of the conflict of interest between diaspora Jews and the Israeli state. In Argentina in the 1970s, thousands of political oppositionists (including a high proportion of Jews) "disappeared", while Israel was stepping up its arms supplies to the junta. Israeli politicians claimed that they were protecting the Jews from the regime. It was more the case that they were protecting the junta from the Jews and other opponents. In the Soviet Union, where some 2½ million Jews live, there is now, under glasnost, a real opportunity to challenge antisemitic discrimination, to raise the demand that Jews be able to live equally as Jews in the USSR, to rehabilitate Jewish culture. Zionism's narrow priorities remain the same: to evacuate as many Soviet Jews as possible to Israel, thus abandoning the struggles of the Soviet Jewish majority, and showing more interest in Israel's welfare than in the Jews it purports to help.

Economically, the flow of money from Jewish communities to Israel has undermined support for Jewish welfare, educational and cultural institutions in the diaspora, either making them much poorer or making them dependent for survival on Israel. Zionists foster an "insurance policy" ideology — that if Jews give now, they can run to Israel if the situation here deteriorates, so give now to earn your moral right to go there later.

Culturally, Zionism has tried to replace the rich, organic, cultural creativity of the diaspora with an inauthentic Israeli culture. Historically Zionism waged a particularly fierce battle against Yiddish, the indigenous language of most Jews before the Holocaust. Since Israel was established it has also rallied against the Sephardi and Mizrahi cultures brought to Israel from the Arab world and the East. Zionism has made many Jewish people ashamed of their cultural roots, undermined their culture and deprived them of access to their own history. Zionism is not interested in culture per se, but only as a means to an end: political support for Israel.

Socially, Zionism promotes the dangerous illusion that there is a separate Jewish solution to the problems facing Jews. It ignores the fact that the majority have lived, do live and will continue to live outside of Jewish statehood and their fates are interdependent with those of the non-Jews they live among. What holds many Jews to Zionism are those forces which deny Jews the role of a self-confident minority, expressing and asserting its national culture alongside others in the countries where they live.

Zionism has not solved antisemitism; if

anything it has weakened Jews' ability to confront it. Israel remains a fortress in a constant state of war, unable to guarantee the security of its own citizens. And the identity, image and culture promoted by Zionism has undermined all these as they existed in diaspora communities, driving them into ever narrower avenues of expression and cynically using them for reactionary political goals. But Zionism survives by obscuring and distorting these realities for many Jewish people. This has important implications for how we oppose Zionism within the Jewish communities because it means that many Jewish people may not consciously share the *real* politics of Zionism; rather they share its unconscious assumptions. They do not know the alternatives and have not been shown them in a very convincing way. Many anti-Zionists do not seem to grasp these complexities. This has led to tactical mistakes which have pushed many Jews closer to the conscious politics of Zionism rather than drawing them away from it.

Much anti-Zionism today suffers from a number of weaknesses. It addresses the central issue of justice for the *Palestinians* but does not address the question of what Zionism offers, or does not offer, the Jewish people as a whole. Zionists ask themselves what will happen to Jews if there are dramatic changes in Israel. If we are to be effective we have to have genuine answers: that there can be a strong and creative Jewish life and culture in the diaspora; that reliance on the centrality of Israel weakens, not strengthens, Jewish existence; that the traditional Jewish concern for social justice can be reconciled for Jews here and in Israel for the benefit of the Jewish people *and* the Palestinians who are being oppressed in our name.

Historically, the most effective opposition to Zionism came from Bundism, the mass Jewish socialist movement which challenged the assumptions underpinning Zionism and combined that with a vision of a creative Jewish future in the liberation of humanity as a whole. Today, mainly thanks to Nazism (and Stalinism), the Bund barely exists, but we can learn from its experience.

Many supporters of Israel are beginning to question its repression in the Occupied Territories; some are asking basic questions of Zionism: We have to find a language which meets them where they are and enables them to take a clear stand for justice for Palestinians and a secure and creative future for Jews. □

This article is adapted from a workshop given at a conference on Zionism and Jewish Identity organised by Return on 12 June 1988.

MAY DAYS IN HABONIM

In 1968, socialism overrode Zionism in Habonim, and you were expected to live according to your ideals, remembers Bernard Misrahi

Can you imagine arriving at summer camp, as a youth, to be taught a ballad about an IRA attack on a British barracks as the camp song? The theme of the camp was "revolution", which we discussed at length. Decisions were made at an assembly of all the campers. All money was pooled.

That was Habonim in 1968! The *madrichim* (youth leaders) of this veteran socialist Zionist youth movement were studying at the LSE or other centres of student revolt. However, what was impressive, and distinctive, about Habonim's politics was not student power or Vietnam, but their insistence that you could change the way you lived your own life now — a type of personal socialism.

It was at my first Habonim summer camp in 1967 that I discovered the benefits of the *Kupah* — pooling the spending money. We all put our money in this central pool and then spent it either individually on chocolate, or collectively on outings, as we wished. To realise how wonderful this system was you had to have experienced previous summer camps where inequality prevailed. To my previous summer camps with Brady Youth club most of the boys brought £5 (saved from Sunday jobs at Petticoat Lane Market I suppose), while I only had thirty shillings (£1.50).

As for the experience of direct democracy, I cannot actually remember any decisions we made. Perhaps the youth leaders really retained all the power. But it certainly seemed a principle worth fighting for.

Just as important as these principles was the atmosphere of the club. You didn't have to feel bad because you couldn't afford the fancy clothes other people wore. You didn't need to risk being rejected when you asked for a dance, and then not be able to hear a word your partner was saying because of the loud music. Instead we all wore blue shirts and dancing was in circles.

Whilst washing up on kibbutz I realised how individual those blue work shirts were. When the workers put their dirty plates through the hatch to be washed up, we, the washer-uppers, could only see their chest and forearms. My fellow washer-upper and I used to try and guess who these shirts and arms belonged to. The game was so easy that we soon stopped it. In fact, pairing off at summer camps was considered bad for *hevrah* — the sense of togetherness. Of course, most of the others did get off with each other, but at least those who didn't weren't made to feel the holiday was an entire wash-out.

We were shown round a communal

house where some of the student *madrichim* lived. With the posters on the wall, the Marx and Lenin on the shelves and the Dylan and Stones on the floor, it seemed very attractive. What clinched it was the pot where the money for household expenses was pooled.

When we returned from that summer camp people at Habonim did not seem quite so interested in the outside world. Few of them shared my enthusiasm when I said I had been that afternoon on the massive anti-Vietnam War demo (in October 1968) — the only demo I have marched on which spanned both sides of Park Lane untrammelled by the police.

Summer camp 1969 was a disappointment. Habonim now seemed more Zionist than socialist. Worse, the others rang home to hear their O-level results. How bourgeois!

The ultimate aim of Habonim was to send a group to a new kibbutz. This group split when nearly half the members refused to live on the Golan Heights because it was occupied territory — though some emigrated to Israel anyway. I still found I was arguing against Zionists in Habonim, and against crude anti-Zionism in the Labour movement. I spent a year on kibbutz after I left school, taking care not to carry any illusions with me. It was a rewarding experience, but I knew the time had come to part company with those planning *aliyah* — emigration.

I didn't leave Habonim because I had stopped being a Zionist, because apart from during the Six Day War I never was a Zionist. At that time opposition to Israeli occupation was simply part of revolutionary politics which I took on with everything else.

When I was in Israel I never hid my view that the Jewish state should be abolished to be replaced by a democratic secular state. I thought Western Galilee, a predominantly Arab area where my kibbutz, Beit Ha'amek, was situated, was just as much "occupied territory" as

Nablus and Gaza. But none of the Zionists I spoke to got at all worked up about these ideas — unlike the hysterical response Jewish Socialists' Group members often receive here.

I didn't join Habonim for the politics anyway. They set up a group in my

children's home in 1967 in south London. My houseparents kicked me out of the house, saying it was time I did something sociable in the evenings. I was attracted, once I had joined, by the personal politics — that how you live your life is more important than going on demonstrations

and passing resolutions. It was this mixture of the genuine collectivist spirit of the kibbutz combined with the revolutionary fervour of 1968 that was such an exciting and formative experience. I suppose all that has long changed. Who can say where Habonim is at now? □

Tears over gas

Israel's misuse of teargas

against Palestinians

has provoked

widespread

condemnation.

Elfi Pallis reports

teargas, and Palestinian doctors speak of a rise in late miscarriages and in the number of almost fully grown foetuses stillborn 24 to 48 hours after their mothers had inhaled teargas.

Witness reports indicate that it is difficult to counteract the effect of the gas once it has entered a person's lungs inside a building. Fresh air helps, but as teargas is often used by the Israeli army during curfews, victims risk being shot if they venture outdoors. Even if a still-breathing victim is taken to hospital, little can be done there, since Palestinian doctors do not know what substance their patients have been exposed to. When a group of them recently asked the Israeli Poison Control Centre in Haifa for information about the composition and toxicity of the substances and the recommended treatment, they were told that such information was either unavailable or classified.

Since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising the army has used two different types of gas, distinguishable by effect. According to a report issued by the American "Physicians for Human Rights" following a recent fact-finding visit to the Occupied Territories, one makes the eyes water intensely and irritates the respiratory tract, producing symptoms similar to an acute asthma attack and aggravating any underlying pulmonary disease. The other one causes intense nausea, retching, stomach cramps and, particularly in children, severe and protracted diarrhoea. Directed against a refugee population amongst whom chest and stomach disorders are endemic because of poor food and poor housing, both are potentially lethal.

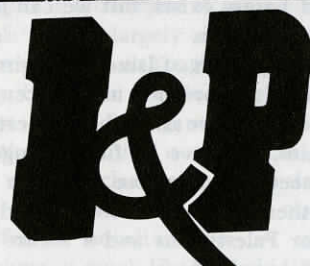
Some of the gas is produced in Israel, but Israel has also imported large quantities. The Herzlia-based ISHPRA company has long supplied local consumers — mainly prison staff using gas to subdue both Jewish and Arab prisoners. However, its output appears to have been too small for Israeli army requirements and, according to US sources, Israel acquired some 120,000 teargas grenades or projectiles from American companies under the US government's military sales credit

programme since the beginning of the *Intifada*. One of them, Federal Laboratories in Saltsburg, Pennsylvania, a subsidiary of TransTechnology, has since suspended shipments, alleging that Israel misused its product, but the army seems to have adequate stockpiles.

Neither the Israeli nor the American manufacturers will reveal the precise composition of the weapons, but Federal Laboratories' handbook warns that "under no circumstances should grenades, cartidges or projectiles designed for use in riots be used in confined areas, as serious injury might result". Even one teargas grenade, thrown into a closed room "can lead to severe illness or even death. . . Before using CN or CS gas, be sure there is an open avenue of escape." A group of senior Israeli physicians, who investigated the issue this June at the request of Citizens' Rights Party Knesset Member Dedi Zucker, are now warning that infants, children and those suffering from heart or respiratory ailments may die if exposed to as little as ten minutes of CS gas. CN gas is not much safer. Physicians for Human Rights concluded this March that teargases should be defined as "poisonous gases" and "banned from further use against human populations everywhere".

Israel's use of teargas, nevertheless, continues. Aware that they are remarkably ineffective in stopping Palestinian riots, an increasing number of soldiers, according to Israeli press reports, have taken to lobbing them into homes, shops and even hospitals to punish a hostile population. The gas thus causes the greatest damage to the least militant and most vulnerable Palestinians.

Their fate serves as a harsh indictment of Israeli chauvinism, and one not attributable to one political party. Those still hoping that things will change should Israel's Labour Party, with its peace-seeking rhetoric, win a decisive victory in the next elections should be aware that it is not a Likud hawk like Ariel Sharon but Labour's second highest-ranking politician, Yitzhak Rabin, who is giving the orders for these actions as Defence Minister. □



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FREE TRIAL ISSUE
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Seeing red

Unbroken
Resistance and survival in the
concentration camps
by Len Crome, Lawrence and Wishart
£12.50

Writing can be a therapy. The attraction is obvious to the Holocaust survivor. Rewarding though the catharsis may be, however, the decision to publish is another matter altogether. Questions of "style and grace" notwithstanding, does it have anything new to say, or at least offer an individual and informed perspective? Is there a contemporary or future relevance? Then, matters of veracity, both with regards events and impressions, especially those cathartic sequences which form a central proscenium to the narrative — must be shown to be worthy of the trust of the reader. In my view, this has not been achieved.

Briefly then, *Unbroken* represents recollections of the experiences of Jonny Huttner, a member of the German Communist Party, beginning in Berlin in 1932 when he joined "Das Rote Sprachrohr" (The Red Megaphone) at the height of the vibrant Agitprop theatrical era of Brecht, Eisler and Weill, through the epoch of the Nazi Reich as witnessed from within a succession of concentration camps (Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and their various support camps) until their relief in 1945.

Of the events described, one can only feel awe at the enormity of the evil which we know to have been true. The literature of the Holocaust is a cumulative testimony to the lapses and human weaknesses which allowed such atrocity to become empowered, and to reign unchecked. Of course, this book will take its place in that literary parade.

However, without in any way wishing to impugn the validity of the events described, it must be said that the narrative is less than satisfying, and ultimately alienating. Told partly in Jonny Huttner's words and partly in third person, the



Jonny Huttner in 1932

development is chained to chronology (... and then I went to Auschwitz...), describing the horrors in a matter-of-fact tone without any apparent emotional reaction. For example, a description of one Frankel, a designer and art expert who helped preserve their sanity: "...they were taken away in groups... a few hours later artificial limbs, hernia trusses, dentures and spectacles were returned and we knew that all the prisoners had been killed. We discovered later that the killing was by suffocation with vehicle exhaust fumes. (para) Another interesting lecturer was..."

The main characters in these recollections are almost invariably "Comrades". Indeed, the presentation of Huttner is as a communist first, a Jew second, and a Berlin German third. The emphasis on communist perspective, repeated almost every page, becomes blatantly propagandist and ultimately self-defeating. Had there been some insight offered into the Party's strategic directives on resistance or an appreciation of Huttner's own derived philosophy, for example, on the Hitler-Stalin pact (which must have had profound effects), this testament might have achieved a more meaningful import.

What we are given instead is the assurance that "red" is a *priori* good. Thus: "All prisoners who behaved decently to each other were comrades as far as he was concerned, and so we gradually built a feeling of real community in our hut without classifying prisoners into party and non-party. I also tended to be sectarian — towards Trotskyists, for example — but began gradually to realise that one could work with anyone so long as the leadership remained in trustworthy hands."

It is perfectly reasonable for a "comrade" when incarcerated to seek out other comrades, and I am certain that given the Nazi antipathy for socialists the camps were well populated with communists, but the impression is left here that much of the resistance and internal organisation of survival was the province of the communists, if not solely, at least prominently. Similarly, that altruist quality in us, "humanity", whereby extra scraps of food ration (or clothing) necessary to survive an episode of illness or (yet more) extreme need — was conferred upon the needy by the benevolent hand of the leaders who, we are reminded, were comrades.

I began by questioning the purpose of this book. If it were better written, or if it presented fresh evidence or old evidence in a new light, then one would overlook most of the niggling doubts prevalent. I suspect that it was never intended that these recollections be published generally.

Jonny Huttner told his story to Len Crome (his brother-in-law), also an idealist, who has cobbled it together in a combination of first and third person narratives. Not having experienced the grave himself, Crome is, naturally, unable to communicate the smells of the camps, with the consequence that there is an undeserved hollow ring. Perhaps Huttner wanted these to be published after his death. Perhaps he just didn't live long enough. This book was published the year following Huttner's death. R.I.P.

CHAIM NESLEN

MOVING MEMORIES

Ralph Levinson reviews three films looking at the Holocaust

Remembering for the Future was the title of a film season run in July under the auspices of the Spiro Institute at the Everyman cinema. The heading of the programme notes for the first session read: "Attempts to describe the indescribable on film". The theme of the "indescribable" was the Holocaust.

The first "attempt" I saw was Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*. Made in 1955, the film is a collage of documentary footage and stills, a voice-over giving the effect of a doom-laden Pathe News. The Holocaust is described as a process that fuels German industry, its economy and war. The commentary is as grindingly relentless as the production line of a factory; every part of a human body can be turned into profit: body fat converted into tallow, oil and soap; hair for wigs and other cosmetic purposes; eyes and reproductive organs for live medical research — the list is sickening. And, of course, human labour can be used until the body is exhausted, racked and useless. Beyond the rectangular blocks of Auschwitz, German industry is firing away in the distance.

Resnais' analysis goes beyond this grim utilitarianism. The images are so constructed that the victims appear to collude in their grotesque slavery: in a silent sequence a man in a homburg hat nods to the SS before closing his door of the cattle truck, the victims pile bodies into a dreadful heap, the faces of the starved



prisoners in the liberated camps seem resigned. The film constructs a description of the nature of fascism: the wielding of power to serve capital, where life is conceived only in terms of productive units. When the nature of that power becomes manifest it dehumanises its agents and, ultimately, its victims.

The problem with this brilliant film is that its viewpoint is purely functional. There is no attempt to reach behind the minds of the individuals involved in the system. We can grasp the essence of power relationships within an authoritarian system but the suffering of the individual is so intensely personal and unique that it evades the realm of political analysis.

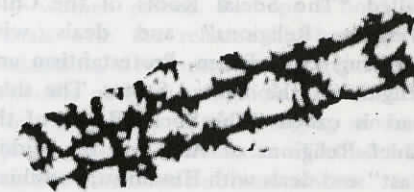
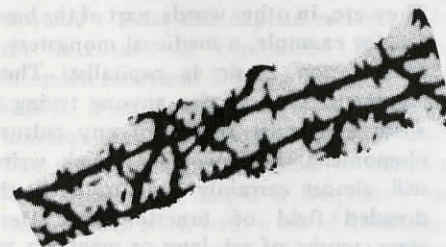
The second film of the programme, *The Gathering*, complements the first film because it concentrates on personal experience. The circumstances under which the film was made are poignant. The gathering was a reunion of Holocaust survivors who came to Jerusalem in 1981. The gathering seems to have turned into a media event, the cameras of the press and TV clicking and whirring as survivors come together for the first time since the camps. A large computer helps survivors look for missing relatives, and the computer operator lets people know whether they have been successful in their search in much the same manner as the person at an information desk might guide you to your platform in a railway station. One man parades a card with the number

of his block at Auschwitz in his search for comrades as if he were meeting someone at an airport, an unbearable moment.

Intercut with the glitz and to-ing and fro-ing of the reunion, a few survivors tell their stories. A woman had her breasts specially bound by Mengele so she could not feed her baby. Evidently, Mengele was carrying out an experiment to see how babies survive without their mother's milk after birth. There are other horrific accounts that do describe the indescribable because they are the distinctive voices of the people.

The theme for day 6 of the film season was "Collaboration and Resistance". One of the films shown was *Chaim Rumkowski and the Jews of Lodz*. Rumkowski has been demonised because of his collaborative role as president of the Lodz ghetto. The film is a reassessment of his position. It takes the form of still photographs with commentary, the last few minutes is a movie film of the ghetto taken by a German soldier.

Before the war Chaim Rumkowski was a small businessman well respected within the Lodz Jewish community: he set up an orphanage and organised other social services. When the Germans marched into Lodz the ghetto was hermetically sealed and Rumkowski was appointed president. At first, starvation set in. To offset this Rumkowski approached the German commandant and offered to organise the ghetto to service the German war machine. This was agreed, the ghetto functioned





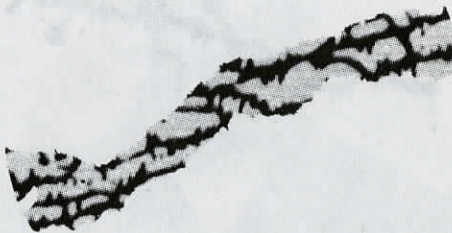
again but practically as a slave labour camp. Again, here was a human group, a productive unit, at the base of the fascist pyramid. They were human only to the extent that they converted raw materials to consumer goods. When they were no longer useful they would be slaughtered.

The ghetto deteriorated as work could not keep famine and disease from the door. Rumkowski maintained his power by means of a police force and the apparent lack of any alternative. He did the Nazi bidding, and arranged transports to the camps assuring everyone it was for the best. By the end of the war Rumkowski's efforts to survive were foiled as mass transports were set up for the death camps where he eventually met his fate.

What is the case against Rumkowski?

He played the German stooge; he suppressed any resistance within the ghetto; he refused to face reality; he became a kind of megalomaniac printing coins and stamps with his portrait; he alienated the people so they became desperate but without the communal and spiritual means to shape their own destiny; he ruled and divided; he operated his own oppressive police state.

And the case for: he believed that by becoming useful to the Nazis the ghetto could have survived the war; he tried to keep the essential services running; he genuinely did not know that the transports would result in the gas chambers: the ghetto was completely cut off from the outside world; the destitution and suffering would have been worse without his efforts.



The film passes no judgement on Rumkowski. It does explore the options that were open to the Jews of the ghetto and it states the contradictions. However, it does fail to analyse some questions that would make the predicament facing the Lodz Jews more universal. Why was there no opposition to Rumkowski? How could the ghetto police exert so much power? How could Rumkowski be taken seriously as a petty dictator?

If the films I saw were representative of the film season then it has certainly raised many issues — the role of the State and Capital in exploiting racial and cultural differences; the nature of evil; the problematics of collaboration and resistance, to name a few — that enable us to assess the present in a new light. □

Beyond belief

The Meek and the Militant
by Paul N Siegel, Zed Press (£0.00)

The Meek and the Militant is an analysis of religion from a Marxist point of view. The first part is called "The Marxist Critique of Religion" and deals with the French Enlightenment Materialists' view, the Marxist view and then compares Marxism with religion. The second part is called "The Social Roots of the Chief Western Religions" and deals with Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism and religion in the United States. The third part is called "The Social Roots of the Chief Religions of Asia and the Middle East" and deals with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The final and fourth part is called "Religion and the Struggle for

Socialism" and deals with Marxist parties and religion.

Anyone who has tried to figure out the relationship between the ideas that people have and the kind of society they occupy might expect this book to help them come to some conclusions. The field is a thorny one. Are there such things as "base" and "superstructure"? Marxist shorthand for the economic system (base) and the world of ideas, laws, religion and art (superstructure). Does the base determine the superstructure as in a contention like "The decline of feudalism and the growth of mercantile capitalism causes Shakespeare". Or is the relationship between base and superstructure dialectical, meaning that the base influences and shapes the superstructure but the superstructure shapes and influences the base, as in "The law legalising homosexuality

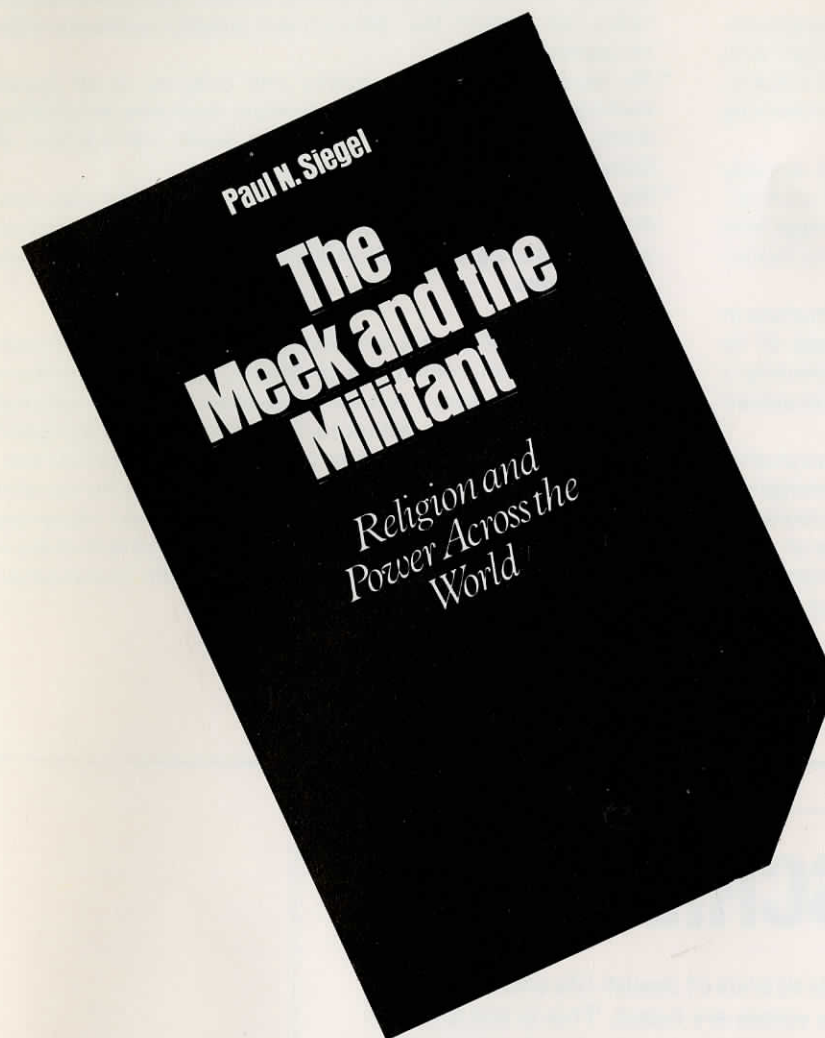
arose out of boom-time capitalism and a consequent relaxation of the need to discipline society in general and workers in particular. But, in turn, the law helped shape consciousness regarding gay rights and culture."

Perhaps the base and superstructure metaphor is misleading, say some, in that superstructural activities like music, law courts or churches have economic lives. They are, in other words, part of the base! So, for example, a medieval monastery is feudal, pop music is capitalist. These arguments crop up for anyone trying to write a Marxist review of any cultural phenomena. Moreover, any such writer will almost certainly have to enter the dreaded field of functionalism. Here, ideas, works of art, laws or whatever are described as having the function of, eg,

"maintaining the status quo" or "reinforcing a warrior ethos". This then leads to questions of whether this was an intentional function, an inevitable function or a sole function. In case these three sound too abstract, an example would be "racism today". Marxists frequently describe the function of racism as being "to help capitalists rule by dividing workers". Does this explain racism? Is it the intention of capitalists? Is it an intended function? Does racism inevitably follow from capitalism? Is it the sole function of racism to assist divide and rule? The problem with this kind of Marxist functionalism is that it is frequently an oversimplification with a bit of determinism lurking in the background. (The problem with determinism, by the way, is

that if conditions determine us how can we ever change anything?)

I opened this book hoping to have some of these problems clarified in concrete case examples of specific religions. The author would, I think, claim it does just this and, on a first reading, I would perhaps agree. The major world religions are laid out before us in their historical contexts. But there are problems. Again and again, Siegel presents us with formulae like "the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary heyday gave up religion". "Commerce and later usury was a selective process through which Judaism was preserved." "Under the shock of monarchic despotism after the freedom of tribal society, numbers of individuals renounced society seeking salvation in ascetic practices and



being wandering mendicants." These are all examples of functionalism; religion viewed as a consequence of certain economic formations, functioning inevitably, intentionally or solely in relation to these economic formations. Is this really Marxism? Does it really explain religion?

I would suggest not on both counts. A Marxist analysis, for me, should operate in Siegel's dimension and others. For example, one of Marx's insights tells us that human beings are both produced by their circumstances and also have opportunities to change them. However, these opportunities are limited by those same circumstances. More specifically, those circumstances can be summarised as being "the balance of class forces", a shorthand to mean the state of play between a ruling class and the class that does the work. In a Marxist book on religion, I would expect a writer to explore the balance of class forces that produces the religion, how people use that religion to try and change that balance of forces, and how religion helps or hinders them.

All this Siegel does, albeit at breakneck speed, in ways that many would find just too neat to be credible. The problem lies in looking at specific religions, specific societies and specific balances of class forces. If we want explanations for religious beliefs we need to know how these beliefs appear to satisfy people. How do the religions appear to provide solutions then and there to the events of death, birth, puberty, sex, the seasons, the position of humans on earth and the earth in the universe? The question is, what state of mind and body are people in to be satisfied with particular stories and symbols?

When Siegel comes to look at the relationship between people trying to change the balance of class forces and religion he is very sketchy. *Jewish Socialist* readers will look in vain for reference to the Bund. It is almost as if Siegel is afraid to give space to religion in case we might renege on our atheism. Or perhaps he thinks he is cleansing socialist readers of their religious remnants. Religious beliefs in this book flow too obviously from certain social formations. The problem is that causations are only neat and pat in hindsight. I have often wondered why no Marxist (that I read) predicted the rise of Islamic fundamentalism or the ordination of women priests. Perhaps a book that deals with the relationship between the adoption, development and rejection of specific religious symbols and practices on one hand, and the changing modes of production and balances of class forces on the other, has not been written.

MICHAEL ROSEN

WHERE WE STAND

Socialism has been central to the modern Jewish experience. The struggle for our rights as Jews has been closely allied with the fight of oppressed humanity. Collectively and individually, Jewish women and men have contributed enormously to working class struggles and progressive movements.

In Britain in 1988 our Jewish establishment actively oppose progressive causes; many Jews have enjoyed considerable social and economic mobility; and the general image held of the Jewish community, apparently confirmed by its institutions, is one of relative comfort and security.

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- * We fight for a socialist movement, embracing the cultural autonomy of minorities, as essential to the achievement of socialism.
- * We draw on our immigrant experience and anti-racist history in order to challenge antisemitism, racism, sexism and fascism today. We support the rights of, and mobilize solidarity with, all oppressed groups.
- * We recognise the equal validity and integrity of all Jewish communities, and reject the ideology, currently dominating world Jewry, which subordinates the needs and interests of Diaspora Jews to those of the Israeli state.
- * We support a socialist solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict based on recognition of national rights and self determination, including statehood, of the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples.

We believe that without a revived progressive political movement within the Jewish community in Britain, its present problems of individual identity, cultural stagnation and organisational apathy will grow worse. Without a transformation of the present economic and political structure of society, a widespread resurgence of antisemitism is to be expected. And unless the socialist movement abandons assimilationist tendencies and recognises the important contribution that different groups have to make in their own way, it cannot achieve real unity or the emancipation and equality to which it has constantly aspired.

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