

# JEWISH SOCIALIST

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£1

Toward the achievement of this, the Palestine National Council affirms:

1. The necessity of convening an effective international conference on the issue of the Middle East and its core, the Palestinian issue, under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and all parties to the conflict in the region, including, on an equal footing, the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; on the understanding that the international conference will be held on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the safeguarding of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which is the right to self-determination, in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter.



## ISRAEL AND PALESTINE:



## COEXISTENCE OR NO EXISTENCE

*Speak*  
with the PLO  
**PEACE NOW**

Public meetings on this subject will be organized soon.

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# JEWISH SOCIALIST

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## EDITORIAL

1988 closed with a series of dramatic events that promise to have far-reaching consequences for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and more broadly for the Jewish world. On 1 November Israel went to the polls against the backdrop of the Palestinian *intifada*, then in its 11th month. True to form, Israel's Labour Party passed up a golden opportunity to offer a serious, radical and popular peace platform and instead fudged its way into another bankrupt national coalition with Shamir's *Likud* party. The real success story belonged to the fundamentalist religious parties who are sure to increase their reactionary influence and to the ultra-nationalists who earned a respectable share of votes and seats on a platform of planning to "transfer" the Palestinians (to the east?).

Undeterred by this grim result, the Palestine National Council, which met in Algiers two weeks later, confirmed its momentous peace initiative with its explicit, unambiguous call for a two state solution based on UN resolutions 242 and 338, its renunciation of terror and its declaration of independent Palestinian statehood.

The conditions for negotiation that America and Israel had hoped and prayed, respectively, that the PLO would never fulfil were now fulfilled and confirmed to the world at the delayed UN debate in Geneva on 13 December. The delay was caused by the US government — which welcomes to its shores representatives of regimes it supports, however murderous — denying a visa to Arafat to address the UN in New York.

In the wake of Geneva, the USA, Israel's long-standing paymaster and ally, agreed to open talks with the PLO. Meanwhile, Peace Now, Israel's largest but most cautious peace movement, which took eight lean years to put a Palestinian speaker on one of its public platforms, has called on its government to open direct talks with the PLO. Here, its British support group, belatedly following the pioneering efforts of the Jewish Socialists' Group, has invited a PLO speaker to address its next public meeting in February.

Even in the Board of Deputies, which seems in the past to have prescribed hatred of the PLO as an essential element in modern Jewish identity, significant voices are now calling for talks with the PLO. They didn't get too carried away though, and avoided taking a formal position, and no position means support for the status quo, in other words, no to talks.

So how do we explain these developments and what should we be looking for now? Those who have only just discovered that the political address of the

Palestinian people is the PLO claim it is the PLO that has dramatically changed. These latecomers are deceiving themselves and others in order to justify their previous backwardness and lack of imagination. All who held that it was up to the PLO to recognise Israel first and for the PLO to renounce violence are guilty of denying basic objective realities: that Israel as a state exists independently of who does or doesn't recognise it, while a Palestinian state does not exist; and Israel has been perpetrating state supported violence and terror on the Palestinians. Israel has yet to recognise Palestine; the Palestinian state has yet to come into existence; Israel has yet to renounce its violence and terror against the Palestinians — which has increased enormously in the last year.

And what, after all, was so new in Arafat's speech in Geneva? It echoed and logically developed PLO statements going back at least as far as 1974. The PLO position of seeking a negotiated settlement at an international conference under UN auspices also goes back many years. That is why many progressive Jews, including Israelis, have been talking to the PLO since the mid '70s. Those who did not wish to see or hear what the PLO was saying in these years chose not to. When it was convenient, the American and Israeli governments and even many very critical Zionists chose to ignore or deny past PLO statements which have laid the ground for the current explicit position.

The principal factor that has irreversibly changed the situation is not a one-off dramatic event; it is the continuing day-to-day resistance — the *intifada* of ordinary people throughout a whole society — that has made the occupation inherently unstable and ultimately untenable. And with the *intifada* has come the constant reiteration of political demands for an independent state under the political leadership of the PLO. It is both tragic and disgraceful that so many Palestinian lives, from babies through to elderly people, have been taken for these basic messages to sink home.

But better late than never. Those in the Jewish community finally taking the step of opening dialogue with the PLO need support and encouragement. We have a role to play in helping to build the broadest possible peace platform to dovetail with the PLO's initiative. And Jewish socialists have a responsibility to inject a deeper political perspective into that platform. This is a moment of great promise but it will not last forever. We must not allow either "friendly" opportunists and bandwagonists or powerful outright opponents to destroy it.

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## Europe unites against fascism

Berlin, during the week of the 50th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, provided a fitting venue for a conference at which anti-racists and anti-fascists throughout Europe met to discuss common issues and common strategies.

More than 150 delegates representing nearly 100 organisations discussed a host of issues ranging from neo-fascist activities in Europe to migrant and refugee policies to racism and reproductive technology.

As well as full discussions during the day the conference organised two evening public meetings held in the Passionskirche at Marienplatz. The first focused on 1992. Speakers warned that the Right were well prepared to respond to the coming greater European unity, in formulating policies of repression and control of migrants and refugees. It was urgent for anti-racists and the Left to develop a more coherent response. The second meeting was on antisemitism today with a large panel of speakers. This meeting was marred by an unhelpful contribution from Manchester-based Henry Guterman, who insisted on placing the Middle East conflict at the centre of discussion. Guterman has since

played a much more positive role in an anti-racist context (see page 4) but on this occasion his remarks caused much offence and diverted the meeting from its main purpose.

The conference adopted a small number of resolutions and it is planned that these, together with papers and summaries of discussions, will be available in a reader in



spring 1989. The most significant decision was the agreement to launch a Europe-wide campaign leading to a day of action on 23 April. Throughout Europe anti-racists and anti-fascists will unite around the slogans: No second class citizens! Equal rights! No foothold for racists and fascists! Stop racism, fascism and sexism! For an open Europe! Free movement!



## Berlin remembers Kristallnacht

"I was a schoolboy at the time," recalled the middle-aged Berliner. "As we walked down the street we saw a shop with its window completely shattered. We walked in and took some sweets. It was wonderful. Then we walked a bit further and saw the rubble, all that was left of the synagogue, and I began to realise what had happened. They call it 'Kristallnacht' but it should be called 'Pogromnacht'."

He was speaking at a public protest at Breitscheidplatz in the centre of West Berlin on the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht. The protest, called by a broad alliance of anti-racist, anti-fascist groups with the left-wing Judische Gruppe (Jewish Group) prominently involved, was in stark contrast to a silent protest organised the previous night by the "official" Jewish community.

The speakers at the public protest and the placards they wore proclaimed that, 50 years on, this was not a night for silent memorial but a moment to condemn fascism

and racism loudly and clearly for its murderous history and its legacy today, especially in the treatment of migrants, refugees and Gypsies in West Germany today.

An hour later, a militant anti-fascist demonstration, 3,000-strong, left Olivierplatz under the slogan "Kein vergeben! Kein vergessen! Kein amnestie fur das kapital!" (No forgiving! No forgetting! No amnesty for capitalism!). It made clear the responsibility of German capitalism for Nazism. The march stopped outside the heavily police-guarded Berlin office of Degesch und Degussa — the company that manufactured Zyklon B gas for use in the death camps and which continues to supply products to reactionary regimes today.

The rally at the close of the march heard a rousing speech from Fritz Tepisch, a German Jewish communist, now active in the peace movement. On the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the streets of West Berlin, at least, belonged to the anti-fascists.

DAVID ROSENBERG



## Manchester—sanctuary under fire

On 18 December 1988 a meeting was organised at the Manchester Jewish Museum about the American Jewish sanctuary movement in support of refugees from Central America. The main speaker was Sidney Hollander from a Chicago synagogue which is presently giving sanctuary to Ana Marie and her two children from Guatemala. Two other children of Ana Marie's were murdered by right-wing death squads in Guatemala. Other main speakers were Rabbi Michael Holton from the Menorah Synagogue in Manchester and Henry Guterman, President of the Representative Council. There were also speakers from anti-deportation campaigns — including the Viraj Mendis campaign. Sidney Hollander had himself been invited from the USA by the Viraj Mendis campaign as part of a national speaking tour to publicise the sanctuary movement in the US and to draw parallels with resistance to immigration laws in the UK. The Museum meeting was organised by three of us, Bill Williams, Ruth Abrahams and myself, who are all active in Viraj's campaign.

We distributed a publicity leaflet attempting to introduce people to the issues. It began: "Today as Jewish people we are aware of the plight of our sisters and brothers who are being denied the right to leave their own country. Which of us is not saddened and angered by the struggle of the Refuseniks? We concluded: "We Jews understand full well the meaning of being a refugee with no government or state prepared to offer safety and sanctuary.

For instance in Central America thousands of men, women and children are fleeing the most oppressive regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala and are trying to claim asylum in the United

States. Jewish communities in the US have responded in a noble and deeply religious way to this mistreatment of Central Americans. Over one hundred *shuls* (synagogues) and other Jewish organisations have offered forms of community sanctuary to these refugees... This reminds us of how Anne Frank was offered sanctuary by good people."

By most standards, this leaflet and the subsequent meeting were, at the very least, raising matters of legitimate concern. However, the standards of the self-ordained Jewish elite are very different. They immediately did everything they could in Manchester to get the meeting banned. The subject matter of the meeting—sanctuary and racist immigration laws—quickly became subsumed under another struggle, namely the right to free speech for any progressive views within the Jewish community. A McCarthyite witch hunt was launched against the meeting. The headline of the *Jewish Gazette* for 2 December was "Museum Storm! 'Left-wingers are taking over' claim". By 9 December the headline of the *Jewish Telegraph* was "Rep Council raps its Chief in Museum row". This reported a meeting of the Representative Council which had voted against its president, Henry Guterman, attending the meeting in an official capacity. Only one person voted in favour of Henry's going — Werner Meyer, chairperson of the Museum. Both Henry and Werner are refugees from Nazism. Both assumed very principled positions over this fight and both eventually spoke at the sanctuary meeting.

Further methods were used by different groups within the *makherai* (self proclaimed leaders) to prevent the Museum hosting our event. One individual wrote to the

Charity Commissioners inviting them to withdraw the charitable status of the Museum. Other letters were sent to the Chief Rabbi and the Bishop of Manchester. There were also death threats by phone. Private letters were sent to the organisers suggesting that the meeting be cancelled as it was causing disunity in the community. Censoring left wing views in the name of unity is and always has been a classic establishment ploy.

The central thrust of the objections to our meeting was anti-communism. The meeting had to be banned because Viraj Mendis is a communist. This was considered more important than saving Viraj's life, fighting racist immigration laws, or listening to the experiences of Jews in the USA. Where anti-communism clashed with respect for the views and activities of fellow-Jews then anti-communism had to prevail.

Another feature of the *makherai*' anti-communism is its crass hypocrisy. The same Representative Council that had condemned support for black refugees had opened its meeting with Glyn Ford, the local MEP, speaking about the rise of fascism and racism in Europe. The *Jewish Gazette* of 9 December reported this as though it occurred at a totally different meeting from the one attacking Viraj Mendis, himself a victim of racist legislation. The *Gazette* concluded by saying: "Mr Joe Nathan proposed a vote of thanks, expressing the view that the Jewish community is fortunate to have someone of the calibre of Mr Ford to speak for them." Well, Mr Nathan, the Jewish press and the Representative Council may want to express thanks when someone speaks out on behalf of Jews — but these *makherai* won't themselves speak out in support of black people subject to racism.

Nathan was one of those arguing most vehemently for the banning of the sanctuary meeting.

However, *makherism* and the *makherai* do require a class analysis because they represent a reactionary class force. Since 1945 *makherism* has not been simply dominant — it has been unchallenged except from the periphery. This is for two reasons. Firstly, Zionism has been such a triumphant ideology within the community that it has hidden all other internal conflicts (and the *makherai* have appropriated Zionism). Secondly, the general embourgeoisement of the community has meant that the material basis for internal class struggle has all but disappeared. Today opposition to organisations such as the Board of Deputies and the Representative Council is class struggle but in a very refracted way.

The meeting with Sidney Hollander, Henry Guterman and Rabbi Hilton — how did it go? It was wonderful. Defying the *makherai*, about 150 people came both to learn and to express a collective voice — the voice of Jews who are receptive to progressive ideas, who identify with the oppressed, who want to fight racism and who will not be cowed by anti-communist hysteria. It was a voice that echoed those Jewish trade unionists who at the turn of the century organised in Manchester against the imposition of immigration controls. Speaker after speaker at the meeting showed contempt for the Representative Council and expressed solidarity with Viraj Mendis. As a consequence of the meeting there are plans to establish a permanent structure for Jews to once again oppose immigration controls, called JAIL — Jews against immigration laws.

STEVE COHEN

## Lights unto the nations

Jews Against the Clause had their very own miracle of *Chanukah*, on 5 December 1988, the night of the launch of their Declaration against Clause 28. It was not miraculous that so many prominent Jews wanted to sign a strong statement as Jews against the iniquitous clause. Nor was it miraculous (although cynics may say surprising) that a photographer and reporter from the *Jewish Chronicle* came to cover the event. The miracle was more specific to *Chanukah*: when we discovered there were no candles for the *Menorah* the nearby Hillel House managed to come up with the legendary relief supply! (We don't know if the candles then burnt for the remaining five days of *Chanukah*...)

The launch of the Declaration was timed to coincide with two important anniversaries. The first was the initial appearance in Parliament of the clause as an amendment to the Local Government Bill in December 1987. (The clause is designed to stop local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality.) Secondly, it was the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights — a significant and ironic date, given the clause's huge assault on the rights of lesbians and gay men.

The three speakers, James Baaden, Professor Sir Herman Bondi and Rabbi Barbara Borts, gave the background to the Declaration, which states that Jews have particular reason to actively oppose



Left to right: James Baaden, Tara Kaufmann, Rabbi Barbara Borts and Professor Sir Herman Bondi at the launch

prejudice and discrimination against lesbians and gay men. They stressed that *Chanukah*, as a festival of freedom, is an especially relevant time to be working to protect the rights of other minority groups. The Declaration was signed by 50 well-known Jews, including writers, academics, rabbis and politicians. It will now be circulated within the Jewish

community as part of the process of informing people about the clause and why we as Jews must campaign for its repeal.

MARION JANNER

*Jews Against the Clause can be contacted at c/o LAGER, Room 203, Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ.*

## Israeli refuseniks

The recent imprisonment of two more Israeli army recruits brings the number of *Yesh Gvul* members jailed since the onset of the *intifada* to 50.

First sergeant (res) David Golan (36) has been jailed for 28 days for refusing to serve in the Gaza Strip. Prior to sentencing, Golan declared:

"I am a scion of the Jewish people which has fought throughout its history for the right to independence, without being dominated by another people. I find no moral right to deny others the dignity and independence I seek for myself. 'That which is hateful to you, do not do to others.' I do not wish to engage in repression, or in the physical degradation of someone fighting for his dignity. I believe in the Palestinians' right to a dignified existence, just as in our own selfsame right."

Golan is the son of Holocaust survivors: both his parents were inmates of the

Auschwitz extermination camp. He lives in Jerusalem, where he graduated from the Hebrew University with a degree in philosophy and education. He is married with a year-old daughter. Golan supplemented his three years of compulsory military service (in the navy, including duty during the 1973 Yom Kippur war) by voluntarily signing on for an extra year; in the reserves, he serves with an armoured infantry unit.

Another refusenik, Dudu Palma (39) of Kibbutz Kfar Hanassi, got 35 days (21 suspended) in his third conviction for selective refusal, after a 28-day sentence earlier this year. Palma likewise is the son of Holocaust survivors. He is married and has four children. An editor at the literary magazine *Shdemot*, his play about Hanna Senesh, a Jewish heroine of the Second World War, was staged at the 1986 Acre theatre festival.

Palma served with the

paratroopers; as a reservist, he saw combat duty in Lebanon, taking part in the battles of Sidon and Beirut. Again posted to Lebanon in 1983, he refused, drawing a 35-day jail sentence. Palma declared:

"Feeling responsible for the future of Israeli democracy, I can no longer be party to anti-democratic acts verging upon war crimes. The immediate choice was either join the herd (like the human-turned-beasts in Ionesco's anti-fascist play *Rhinoceros*) — or to protest... It is incredible that a people which so recently savoured its own political independence, should so lightly deny it to members of another people. By this step, I believe I am defending our fragile democracy which is being swept to the precipice by the rising tide of nationalism and Khomeinist fundamentalism."

As the Palestinian *intifada*

enters its second year, *Yesh Gvul* foresees a sharp increase in refusals, with many reservists finding their military duties in conflict with the dictates of conscience.

Friends of *Yesh Gvul* (FOYGL) — a support group for Israeli army reservists refusing to serve in the occupied territories — held a symbolic picket of the Israeli embassy in London on 8 December, the first anniversary of the Palestinian *intifada*.

Drawing on the coincidence of this date falling on the sixth day of the festival of *Chanukah*, FOYGL improvised a *menora* (garden flares attached to a police barricade). Also displayed were posters and placards connecting the theme of *Chanukah* — freedom from occupation and oppression — with current demands on Israel to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and for freedom for the Palestinian people.



## From Geneva to London

Within days of Yasser Arafat's historic speech to the UN in Geneva on 13 December, the Jewish Socialists' Group hosted a public meeting in London with Jewish and Palestinian speakers calling for an end to the occupation, recognition of the independent Palestinian state and for peace negotiations now.

The meeting was originally planned to coincide with the first anniversary of the *intifada*, but following so closely on the Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers and the UN debate, it took on added significance.

The first speaker, Jewish writer and academic Donald Kenrick, recalled how, as a conscript in the British army in Palestine in 1947, he had witnessed the Jewish *intifada* against the British, with its mass resistance, illegal radio, its violence and terror. Sympathetic then to Zionism, he had rejoiced in the creation of Israel but resolved not to return until an independent

Palestinian state had been created as well. Highlighting missed opportunities in the past, he strongly urged that this chance today must not be missed.

He was followed by Ghada Karmi, a Palestinian doctor and writer exiled from her Jerusalem home in 1948. She urged the audience to recognise painful parallels in Jewish and Palestinian historical experience, describing both peoples as victims innocent of any crime and persecuted simply for being Jewish and Palestinian respectively. She welcomed the steps towards dialogue and negotiation but warned that there was no simple route from dialogue to a comprehensive settlement.

Richard Schwartz, from the International Jewish Peace Union, very much welcomed the clarification of the PLO position at Algiers. Now was the time, he said, to step up the pressure in Jewish communities here and in Israel, for a negotiated settlement be-



Left to right: Karma Nabulsi, Donald Kenrick, David Rosenberg, Ghada Karmi and Richard Schwartz

tween Israel and the PLO, reminding the audience that the future was "coexistence or no existence".

The final speaker, Karma Nabulsi, from the PLO, elaborated on the Algiers and Geneva declarations. She made specific reference to the paragraph in the PLO's political resolution adopted in Algiers addressed to democra-

tic and progressive Israelis and to the Jewish people. She assured the audience that the position recently confirmed by the PLO was not a temporary tactic but a long-term peace strategy. Karma particularly welcomed the opportunity of saying this on a Jewish platform and looked forward to more meetings of this kind.

Photo: Marian Shapiro

## Israeli feminists and the intifada

Members of the "Jewish Women Support the Palestinian Struggle" group are developing increasing links with women activists in Israel. We now receive news about "Women in Black", "The Peace Map", "Israelis by Choice", "Movement of Democratic Women in Israel" and others.

In particular, we have contact with SHANI — a Jerusalem-based group originally formed a year ago as "Israeli Women's Alliance Against the Occupation". The group has about 50 active members and attracts several hundred participants for special activities. Some members have been involved in Arab-Jewish coexistence work for many years, while others have become politically active for the first time in their lives. Among other activities, they organise bi-

weekly house meetings with Israelis and Palestinians about the effects of the Occupation, publish fact sheets and visit Palestinian women in the occupied territories.

"The first international conference on the empowerment of Jewish women" was held in Jerusalem last November. The topics included: Jewish Women and the Workplace; Images of Jewish Women; and The Changing Jewish Family. A topic conspicuous by its absence was Jewish women and the Palestinian issue.

Calls by women's groups to include this debate on the agenda were met with unease and hostility. So an alternative conference was organised: "A call for peace — a feminist response to the occupation". We are still awaiting news of this event which took place on 2 December in Jerusalem.

We have heard, however, that the American Jewish Congress warned its delegates not to participate in the alternative conference. Activist groups mentioned above distributed leaflets at the official conference. SHANI handed out a fact sheet, which also protested against the silencing of dissident voices in Israel and invited participants to the alternative conference. In it they stated:

"SHANI believes that Israel must recognise the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination... It is a matter of political wisdom as well as justice that Israel recognise the right of the Palestinian people to also achieve statehood. SHANI demands that the Israeli government meet with the PLO to negotiate an end to the conflict. The establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel with

sovereignty and security for both states is essential to the process of building trust and amity between our two peoples... As women, our recognition of our own need for equal rights and freedom from oppression is inseparable from our recognition of the human and national rights of the Palestinian people."

This statement, the existence and growing strength of SHANI and the united efforts of feminists from various political backgrounds in opposition to the occupation and their current struggle for coexistence with Palestinians are all significant features of current dynamics in Israel. Feminism in Israel has always existed against all odds and it is a credit to Israeli feminists that they have found renewed vitality now in this crucial time.

VARDA BONDY

## DYBBUK'S DIARY

### STAND DOWN?

Were you there at Trafalgar Square when, led by luminaries ranging from Frankie Vaughan to Manny Shinwell, we rallied to protest the danger that Lord Carrington might meet Yasser Arafat?

At the time, we were led to believe nothing less than a major catastrophe threatened our existence if the former Foreign Secretary shook hands with the PLO Chairman.

Rabbis thundered from the bimah. Youngsters were bused down from the primary schools and cheders. Lots of flags were waved. What happened in the end? I can't remember either.

Or maybe you sat in the more sedate surroundings of the Connaught Rooms wondering who was more uncomfortable, you or the Chief Rabbi, as he tried to make a convincing moral case for excluding Palestinian delegate Mohammed Milhem from talks at the Foreign Office?

This same dreaded PLO

"terrorist", a former West Bank mayor, had addressed US synagogue audiences the previous year during a joint tour with an Israeli general.)

Now for the good news. The Jewish community in Britain is no longer to be called upon to person the trenches in defence of Israel. The reserve army is being stood down.

I have this on the authority of the top man in the Zionist Federation, Dr Stephen Roth. He says (and I've seen it in the *Jewish Chronicle* so it must be true):

"Israel's defence policies are complicated, and Jews here shouldn't try to interfere."

Complicated isn't the word. It was reported yesterday that Arafat was trying to halt all raids on Israel from Lebanon. Whereupon the Israeli air force promptly staged a gratuitous raid on Sidon, just to show where such moderation will get you.

Of course, I almost forgot to mention that Stephen

Roth was commenting on the successful launch of Friends of Yesh Gvul here. You don't think he only means it's the peace movement we should stay out of? "Ours not to reason why" sort of thing?

Those days are over.

### HEART ATTACK

Did alert security at Alexandra Palace foil a plot by Trots, peaceniks and Lubavitchers (!) to disrupt the "Heart of Israel" exhibition?

On the Monday, the stewards kept out the president of Cambridge TUC who had dutifully turned up to hear Our Norm address a Histadrut rally.

They said, "We have you on our files..." — leaving him wondering who 'we' were and how he comes to be on their files.

Apparently, several people were turned away because they were on file — erroneously — as JSG members.

The following evening, three supporters of Yesh Gvul trying to distribute leaflets outside were ordered away by security men. So were three Jewish women, with children in tow, who had been talking

to them.

When one of the women started asking what was wrong, reinforcements came down to "make sure there's no trouble".

Earlier on, the women — not more dangerous Lefties, as the stewards thought, but supporters of the Chabad (or Lubavitcher) religious movement — had asked my name for a *Sefer Torah* (Holy Law scroll) to be dedicated to "Jewish Unity". They wondered why I laughed. Now they know.

### LAST OF THE MOHICANS?

At one of the Spiro Institute's popular adult education classes on Jewish history, the lecturer was trying to warm up by asking his new students about themselves.

"How many people here are Zionists?" he essayed. In previous years more than half the class would proudly put their hands up.

A lone hand hesitantly went up in the middle of the class. It was the lady who's an Information Officer at the Israeli embassy. Well, fair enough, I mean, it's her job, isn't it? *Nebekh*.

## Inside Israel

### FORMER SOVIET PRISONER OF ZION BECOMES TEHIYA CANDIDATE

*Ha'aretz*, 30 September 1988

Soviet Jewish organisations in Israel have reacted excitedly to the fact that former Prisoner of Zion Joseph Begun has joined the (far right) Tehiya party's list of Knesset candidates.

### RADIO AND TV BANNED FROM DETAILING ALGIERS RESOLUTIONS

*Ha'aretz*, 16 November 1988

The director-general of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, Uri Porat, yesterday took the rare step of convening a meeting with radio and television news directors to inform them of a series of restrictions imposed on the coverage of the Palestinian declaration of independence in Algiers.

His instructions banned

any interviews with Arabs in Israel or in the territories, as well as the use of the term "Palestinian State". They also banned the use of commentators to discuss the events unless they were relevant persons or officials such as the heads of the Israeli administration. Restrictions were also placed on the reporting of other nations' reactions.

In addition, he banned the broadcasting of all speeches made at the conference. Their contents may only be paraphrased. Although one may show background pictures and stills illustrating the mood of the conference, the speeches and declaration of independence cannot be transmitted.

Consequently, yesterday's edition of the *Mabat* news programme mentioned only one reaction from the Arab world, that of President Mubarak.

At the meeting Uri Porat hinted that his instructions were in tune with those issued by Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

### COURT CLEARS "GIVATI" SOLDERS OF KILLING

*Yediot Aharonot*, 18 November 1988, by Ziva Yariv

The four "Givati" brigade soldiers accused of beating an Arab to death have been cleared of the charge due to lack of evidence. It makes one wonder what evidence the court lacked. After all, nobody had denied that they had brutally beaten an unarmed Arab inside his own home, that they had broken a club or two over his head in front of his children or jumped on him in their boots. Nor did anyone disagree about the fact that the man had subsequently died.

The doubt was only about whether the four soldiers were indeed the ones who finished him off for good. As the judges put it, the man might have been beaten also by other soldiers, who unfortunately had not been identified.

It is quite obvious that if these unknown soldiers were found, they too would be released since, as has been

said, they too were not the only ones to beat the man. So how can one establish who actually killed him?

And if one cannot establish who actually killed him, then all of them are sent home, as if there existed no other offence apart from manslaughter, as if there was no law banning the brutal beatings of civilians, or the breaking of a club over the body of an innocent man, as if there was no law against vicious attacks or grievous bodily harm.

So, go home, soldiers! You have not been sentenced to even one day in jail. It is not certain that you killed the man, so you are set free.

It emerges that if an Arab is beaten by four soldiers, they are guilty of his death. However, if the four are joined by another two or three comrades, nobody is guilty of anything, because one cannot establish who struck the lethal blow. The lesson is obvious. We have legitimised lynching.



# SWISS ROLE

Aroused by the Palestinian Intifada, concerned by repression and the threat of "transfer", hopeful that something new was in the air from the PLO, over 500 delegates from many countries and diverse organisations came together.

The sense that something important was coming was strengthened by the participation of Soviet Russian Foreign

as legal rights in the Occupied Territories, socio-economic conditions, health and welfare needs, and new peace initiatives. These sessions benefited from expert and first-hand knowledge which some participants brought.

As an affiliate of the International Jewish Peace Union (IJPU), which has UN-recognised status, the Jewish



Khalid al-Hassan (in traditional *galabiya*) with IJPU members. Left to right: Jacob (Sweden); Per (Denmark); SK (USA); Miriam (USA); Khalid al-Hassan (PLO); Marilyn (USA); Charlie (JSG); Jay (USA).

Minister Vladimir Vinogradov, Labour's shadow Foreign Secretary Gerald Kaufman, and PLO spokesperson Khalid al-Hassan, whose moving, eloquent and inspiring speech in the final plenary session brought a standing ovation.

An 18-point final declaration from the conference saluted the courage and endurance of the people in the Occupied Territories, supported their right to self-determination, supported those Israelis campaigning for peace and against the occupation, and called on the UN and member states to take responsibility for ending the repression and calling for an international peace conference.

Workshop sessions during conference dealt in detail with such important issues

Socialists' Group (JSG) was able to send me to represent it in Geneva. It was a valuable and rewarding experience. In the Health and Welfare Workshop, I raised the issue of prisoners' conditions, and supported a motion welcoming recent support by Israeli health professionals to their Palestinian colleagues under occupation.

During an impromptu extra workshop on Israel's Oriental Jews and the peace movement, JSG views on the need for respect for their culture, and for the peace movement to take up issues of social justice and equality, were well received. A good rapport was established with delegates from groups like the Oriental Front.

Among the milestones along the way to the Palestine National Council's declaration of independence, and willingness to live with Israel, was the UN Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Geneva last September. Charlie Pottins reports.



Adam Keller of Israel's Progressive List for Peace

Above all, the conference was a great opportunity to meet lots of old and new friends — Palestinians, Israelis, Diaspora Jews, people from many countries and movements. One of my IJPU comrades heard some interesting things from a Soviet delegate — off-the-record — on prospects for Jewish culture in the USSR. I was pleased to see Nuri al-Okbi, whom I'd last met in a Bedouin tent in the Negev, and Adam Keller, fresh from military prison, and going strong. It was in Geneva that I met Amira Hass of Shalom Achshav, whom I'd last met in a Bedouin tent in the Negev, and Adam Keller, fresh from military prison, and going strong. It was in Geneva that I met Amira Hass of Shalom Achshav, whom I'd last met in a Bedouin tent in the Negev, and Adam Keller, fresh from military prison, and going strong. It was in Geneva that I met Amira Hass of Shalom Achshav, whom I'd last met in a Bedouin tent in the Negev, and Adam Keller, fresh from military prison, and going strong.

Discussions between Jewish and Palestinian delegates were not just formal. Genuine friendships were made, and IJPU members privileged to meet the PLO's Khalid al-Hassan informally after the conference were profoundly moved and impressed by his warmth and sincerity. "I really feel hopeful now," said one of the American women. Right. □

# WOMEN IN PRISON

Cath Senker outlines the part women are playing in the Intifada and the treatment they are receiving at the hands of the Israeli authorities.

The increasingly harsh methods which the new Israeli government is expected to use in order to suppress the "Intifada" in the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip are, if one is to judge by recent developments, likely to be directed against Palestinian women as much as against men. The authorities have already announced that if women take part in the uprising they cannot expect preferential treatment because of their sex, and events indicate that Palestinian women are prepared to pay the price.

Citizens' Rights Party MP Dedi Zucker estimates that at least 150 Palestinian women have been arrested during the uprising. Palestinians say the figure is much higher. The 30 or so women currently held fall into two main categories: women over 20 associated with the now illegal Palestinian Women's Work Committees, and schoolgirls aged 16 to 17 accused of stone-throwing or other so-called "breaches of the peace". Although women are held in ordinary prisons and not, like Palestinian men, in desert detention camps such as Ketziot, where conditions are, according to international observers, quite appalling, there is evidence that female prisoners routinely suffer humiliation and often also torture.

## DETENTION

A number of women who play key roles in Palestinian organisations have been singled out for harassment and maltreatment by the Israeli authorities. A case in point is 28-year-old Naila Ayesh Zakut from Gaza, who is currently serving a six-month administrative detention order together with her eight-month-old baby. Naila, who had trained as a laboratory technician in Bulgaria, was arrested in February 1987, a few months after her return, and held for questioning regarding her activities abroad. She was pregnant and, as a result of being tortured severely during interrogation, miscarried in jail.



Shortly afterwards, she was released on bail. Naila was charged with membership of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a faction of the PLO. During her hearing before an Israeli military court, she insisted that her confession to membership of a Marxist group in Bulgaria was obtained under torture. Her claims were never investigated, but her case was dropped.

Naila returned to her work for a "Save the Children" women's project and a committee supporting the families of deportees, and in August 1988 her husband, Jamal Zakut, was deported, accused of being one of the leaders of the uprising. At 1.30am on 5 October 1988, 35 Israeli soldiers surrounded Naila's home and took her into custody, ordering her to leave her small baby behind. After the Women's Organisation for Political

Prisoners and the Israeli Civil Rights Association intervened on her behalf, the prison authorities permitted the infant to join her. A petition signed by a thousand Israelis and Palestinians for her immediate release from detention without trial was rejected by the Israeli Minister of Defence, and an appeal against her six-month administrative detention order also failed. Naila Ayesh Zakut's experience clearly indicates the existence of an Israeli policy aimed at harassing the families of deportees and of those active on their behalf.

## BATTLE AGAINST INSTITUTIONS

The detention of Jenan al-Bitar looks very much like another strategic move in the Israeli administration's battle against Palestinian social and humanitarian institutions in the occupied territories.



Forty-six-year-old Jenan, who comes from Nablus, is the treasurer of the "Red Crescent" (Palestinian Red Cross) medical aid organisation. When she was arrested on 17 May 1988, the sum of 100,000 Jordanian dinars, which she had been holding in trust for Red Crescent community services, was confiscated by the military. Jenan was accused of having received the money from the PLO and, although this could not be proved in court, the judge found her guilty anyway, justifying his decision with reference to the Palestinian uprising. His decision reflects the present Israeli policy of preventing any outside financial support from reaching Palestinian institutions and individuals.

Another victim of the drive against all Palestinian organisations is 27-year-old Marian Ismail from al Hader near Bethlehem. She is a nursery teacher and the chairwoman of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees. Arrested on 20 February 1988, Marian was subjected to 33 days of solitary confinement and interrogation. In the course of her arrest, the teacher experienced several forms of what an Israeli government committee of inquiry had defined only last year as legi-

timate "moderate physical pressure", designed to secure a confession. She was made to sit with her hands tied behind her back for eight hours at a time outdoors in a yard on wintry February days and forced to lean against a wall with an iron pipe digging into her back. To ensure she remained awake, her jailers would periodically drench her with cold water. On one occasion, one of her interrogators became impatient with these "moderate" methods and instead removed Mariam's shoes and jumped on her bare feet with his boots. In July 1988, the court discovered a technical fault in Mariam's detention order, which led to her release.

#### YOUNG WOMEN

About 10 of the women currently detained are 16 to 17-year-olds accused of throwing stones or participating in demonstrations. The large number of arrests during the uprising has overloaded the Israeli judicial system and thus these young women are often not brought to trial for months. It was noted in early October that 10 women political prisoners from the centre and south of the West Bank had been in prison awaiting trial for four months (except one whose detention order was

extended by the court). Susan Abu Aker from East Jerusalem had her trial postponed seven times. The prison service in Ramallah stated that the postponements were due to a lack of police vehicles and guards to accompany the prisoners to court. One of the mothers commented after a whole day waiting for her 17-year-old daughter's cancelled trial: "It doesn't much matter whether she lives inside the prison or in the outside prison of occupation, but I do want her to go back to school."

The Women's Organisation for Political Prisoners, an Israeli women's group formed in May 1988 in response to the uprising, monitors the situation of the Palestinian and two Jewish political prisoners held in Israel, through contact with their families and lawyers. They disseminate information and campaign in Israel and internationally on their behalf, in the belief that the women are fighting a legitimate struggle against Israeli occupation. The organisation also publicises the methods used by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian population, including the arrest of the wives, sisters and children of suspects in order to pressurise them to give themselves up to the authorities. □

## Naming of parts

Many people have drawn analogies between Nazism and the 1980s, particularly in the campaign against Clause/Section 28, the law against "the promotion of homosexuality", which was introduced in Parliament one year ago. In our last issue, Tara Kaufmann looked at how and why such analogies are made. Now James Baaden checks the terms against the facts.

If in present-day polemics we choose to cite the dead and refer to their sufferings, then we must begin by respecting them; and this means that we must know what we are talking about. Nazi tyranny and inhumanity were expressed in varying forms and to different degrees; to be accurate and illuminating, analogies must take the distinctions into account. Restrictions on civil rights, occupation by a foreign invader, active persecution and full-scale systematic genocide are not all the same thing. Significantly, many analogies are general, rather than specific, suggesting an indiscriminating and fetishistic attachment to the Nazi spectre. In particular, there arise odd conflations

of the whole Third Reich era with the Holocaust, "camps" in general, the "Final Solution", and the Second World War. Defining *Third Reich* is at least uncomplicated; it signifies the whole 12-year period of Nazi rule in Germany beginning in January 1933 and ending with Germany's surrender in May 1945 at the end of World War II, which itself had started in 1939. *Holocaust* is less simple: one finds it used variously to mean all Nazi anti-Jewish persecution after 1933; or the mass murder of Jews by Nazis in general; or the highly systematic programme of extermination in death camps (the "Final Solution") implemented from the beginning of 1942.

#### DEFINING THE HOLOCAUST

Many who use the word probably are not aware of these distinctions at all. *Holocaust*, coined in this particular context by Elie Wiesel about 30 years ago, had formerly been a rather obscure classical term, usually applied to sacrifices in ancient Greek religious ritual, its literal meaning in Greek being "wholly burnt". Mr Wiesel applied it in a collective and slightly mystical sense to the deaths of all six million Jews murdered by the Nazis. But by the 1970s it had developed into a generalised historical shorthand, the vagueness and ubiquity of which have in turn facilitated the most far-ranging analogies: acid rain has been described as

a "Holocaust of trees" and AIDS in America as a "mini-Holocaust". The Greek context is unknown now, the reference in people's minds is Nazi persecution.

But what sort of persecution? As the term's usage increases in frequency, so people's understanding of previous meanings fades. Thus Elie Wiesel's original purpose is as forgotten as the older classical application, and it is not uncommon to hear assertions that "many people other than Jews died in the Holocaust". The definition implied in this broader usage obscures the central and unique position of the "Jewish question" in Nazi demonology from the very beginnings of National Socialism. The Final Solution was the Nazi answer to this "question" and no other; the Wannsee Conference, the meeting of the Nazi leadership which devised this programme of extermination in 1942, dealt only with the Jews. When *Holocaust* comes to mean all Nazi cruelty, the unique features of Nazi antisemitism are forgotten, and the idea of the Jews as but one among many equally persecuted groups gains currency.

Recognition of the extraordinary nature of the Nazis' anti-Jewish programme, however, must not permit concealment of different campaigns of persecution endured by other communities. After the outbreak of war in 1939, oppression was the everyday lot of millions in the occupied nations; all the same, they were not slated for wholesale extermination, despite instances of local "reprisal" massacres by German forces, as in Lidice and Oradour. In fact, some nationalities, such as the Dutch and the Danes, were classified as "racial equals" of the Germans. Even Slavic nations deemed inferior (though still "Aryan"), such as Slovakia and Croatia, were permitted autonomous satellite states. No such possibilities were open to the Jews. In 1933, six and a half years before the war, Germany's Jews had already become second-class citizens; with the 1935 Nuremberg laws they became non-citizens; after the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 they were scarcely recognised as human beings; in 1939 the war began to extend this misery beyond Germany's borders; and from late 1941 the only destiny prescribed for the Jews was annihilation.

#### CAMPS AND TRIANGLES

"Camps" often crop up in analogies, so it would be useful to bear in mind the difference between concentration camps and extermination camps. The former were built in Germany from 1933 onwards as places of mass confinement for diverse persons considered dangerous by the Nazi authorities, who classified inmates with a

series of triangular badges: red for "political" prisoners; violet for Jehovah's Witnesses; pink for (male) homosexuals; brown for Gypsies; black for "asocials"; green for criminals; gold for Jews. (The star worn by the Jewish population in general did not appear until 1941.) The extermination camps, however, introduced in 1942, constituted the machinery of the "Final Solution": sited by the Nazis in occupied Poland, not Germany itself, they functioned more as mass-murder centres than as places of internment.

The one group which perhaps more than any other came to share the same fate as the Jews was the Gypsy community. Although largely ignored by Nazi theory or invective, they were defined as "non-Aryan" and in 1943 were added to the extermination system already in operation. The extent to which the two

protest, if ventured, could be effective; but there is evidence too that the whole process was something of an experiment in mass murder by gas, a trial run-through for the "Final Solution" devised only a few months later.

Although their purpose was not mass annihilation, the concentration camps in Germany — the most infamous being Dachau, Belsen, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück — spelt death for many prisoners. Some were shot, usually on the pretext of having broken camp rules, but most died of malnutrition, torture, exposure, and epidemics (especially typhus). Jehovah's Witnesses, then called "Bible Students", were one group who underwent especially harsh persecution: many spent the entire Third Reich — 12 years — in camps. Communists were another: the party leader, Ernst



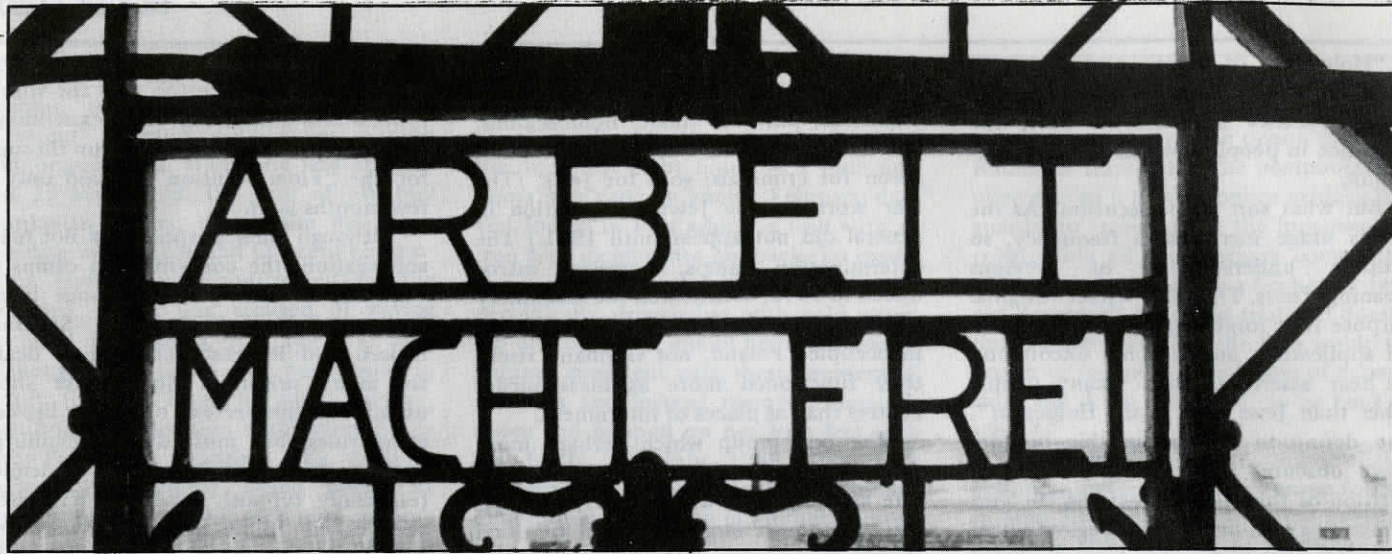
peoples were affected varied, however: two-thirds of Europe's Jews were murdered, whereas of the four million European Gypsies, about 250,000 (some 6-7%) lost their lives in the death camps. The Jews and the Gypsies were the only two communities for whom Hitler decreed systematic annihilation in the extermination camps, although approximately 70,000 Germans were killed in the slightly earlier "euthanasia programme" halted in August 1941 following public protests by Count von Galen, the Catholic Bishop of Munster. Over a period of 18 months, medical committees had combed through Germany's hospitals and nursing homes, selecting patients with severe disabilities who were judged incapable of work and thus "unworthy of life". They were then murdered in gas chambers in six specifically designed killing-centres. The programme's end may suggest that

Thalmann, was killed in Buchenwald in 1944 after an ordeal of many years, and the present-day East German leader, Erich Honecker, also endured a long incarceration. The "asocial" category was used at the time of the 1936 Berlin Olympics to round up the homeless: 1942 guidelines on its definition cited alcoholics, prostitutes, drug addicts, the habitually "workshy", vagrants, and beggars.

#### GAY MEN AND LESBIANS

The Nazi view on (male) homosexuality had already been enunciated during the Weimar Republic, the short-lived democracy which preceded the Third Reich. For many years a movement led by the Jewish scientist and humanitarian Magnus Hirschfeld had demanded the repeal of Paragraph 175, the law which criminalised certain male homosexual acts (as in





Britain, there were no laws against lesbianism). In a statement in May 1928, the Nazi party condemned law reform, announcing that "anyone who even thinks [of homosexuality] is our enemy". Germany's priorities must be strength, purity of race and rapid population growth, the statement explained, so "male-male love" — later specified as one of the "malevolent impulses of the Jewish soul" — had to be condemned.

In February 1933, within a month of achieving power, Hitler had all establishments catering to gay men or lesbians closed down, and in May, Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Sciences was plundered and his books publicly burnt. Revelations of homosexual "scandals" figured conspicuously in the Nazi media's enthusiastic justifications of the June 1934 "blood purge", the massacre in which hundreds of Hitler's rivals and opponents — some of them Nazis, some anti-Nazis — were murdered. The killings were presented as part of a moral crusade, a theme uncritically echoed by the international press, then as now more interested in sex than human rights. Some anti-fascists on the left were likewise prepared to play the same card, occasionally trying to characterise Nazism as a homosexual plot. (The USSR was in the process of reinstating laws against male homosexuality at this very time.) Homophobic tactics were denounced by others in the exiled German left, such as the writers Klaus Mann and Kurt Tucholsky, but the damage that was done still lingers: thus the Tory peer Lord Beloff, praising Clause 28 in the House of Lords in February 1988, strove to link homosexuality with Nazism.

In 1935, a harsher version of Paragraph 175 was introduced, laying down sentences of up to 10 years for any manifestation of male homosexual desire: no evidence of actual physical contact was required. The jurist in charge of producing the

government's revision of the law, Dr Rudolph Klare, felt that although lesbianism also should intellectually be "recognised as deserving punishment by law", other considerations spoke against law change: lesbianism was "essentially alien to the German woman" and was caused by a dearth of men, he said, so it therefore represented "no political problem such as is the case with regard to male homosexuality".

During 1936, underscoring its preoccupation with population growth, the government established an "Office to Combat Homosexuality and Abortion": in February of the following year, Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, explained that "only a nation which has very many children" could view itself as "qualified for world power and world domination". Male homosexuality, he said, was transmitted by the "Jewish bolshevist" values of Roman Catholicism(!), and the answer was Hitler's *Mein Kampf* ideal: universal heterosexual monogamy with reproduction starting at an early age — around 15 or 16.

Statistics from Buchenwald and elsewhere indicate that the great majority of gay prisoners died in the camps: the "men with the pink triangle" were usually assigned the most gruelling forms of hard labour. Fragmentary records from Auschwitz confirm that a certain number were transferred there from German camps. The total number of gay men in Germany arrested and imprisoned specifically on account of their sexuality during the entire Third Reich is estimated to be at least 50,000, most of whom died in the camps. It is not known how many suffered in the various occupied countries during the war.

Research has not revealed any cases of lesbians arrested directly because of their sexuality, though the German writer Ina Kuckuk has found evidence of seven women prisoners in a camp in northern

Germany who were isolated in their own barrack after the camp administration learnt they were lesbians. Some lesbians may have been among women viewed as resistant to Nazi standards of social order and thus judged asocial, but the great majority of the "black triangle" prisoners were men; as Tara Kaufmann has pointed out in *Jewish Socialist* already, the notion of the black triangle as a lesbian emblem is mistaken. It would probably be most accurate to say that total invisibility was the prime form of persecution meted out to lesbians under Nazism. Finally, it must be noted that lesbians and gay men were, of course, among the millions persecuted and murdered on other grounds, such as race and politics; for instance, Kurt Hiller, one of Germany's leading gay rights campaigners, was tortured in Sachsenhausen as a "red triangle" Socialist prisoner.

After the war, the full 1935 Nazi version of Paragraph 175 was adopted into the laws of the Federal Republic (West Germany); not surprisingly, gay survivors of the camps were denied any recognition (or compensation) as "victims of fascist persecution". Indeed, several were again arrested and gaoled before the law was finally partially repealed in 1969. East Germany, meanwhile, rejected the Nazi law and reinstated the Weimar era version, and only enforced this relatively seldom before repealing it completely in 1968. Several occupied nations, such as Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, repealed their existing pre-war laws against male homosexuality as soon as the war ended.

The bare recital of such facts should show the way towards points where accurate analogies between then and now may be drawn. A respect for truth and accuracy is not only an expression of respect for our fellow human beings subjected to persecution in the past or today, but is the only basis on which we can challenge such persecution in the future. □

# The uniqueness of the Holocaust

Continuing the debate on Holocaust analogies, Dave King argues that it is possible and useful to see the Holocaust as unique without abandoning political analysis.

In issue 13 of *Jewish Socialist* the Editorial Committee warned against "the widespread and understandable tendency to claim the Holocaust as unique and incomparable. We believe this to be analytically and politically mistaken." I understand this to be a reaction against attempts, particularly on the part of Zionists, to use the Holocaust for obvious ideological purposes. Nevertheless, this approach fails to face up to the real issue of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. It is possible to argue that there are senses in which the Holocaust is unique, without falling into the kind of explanation which presupposes an eternal, unchanging, ahistorical hatred of the Jews which is a necessary characteristic of all non-Jewish societies (particularly Christian ones), and sees the Holocaust as being the culmination of this ancient hostility.

The making of "Holocaust analogies" implies that one understands this event, in order to compare another event to it. I don't believe that most people do understand it: the self-righteous liberals who think it's enough to boo Waldheim or watch an occasional documentary, least of all. There is a tendency to explain the Holocaust using simplistic formulae of various types. This is merely another version of the avoidance of thinking about it at all. Undoubtedly a level exists at which it simply cannot be understood: as George Steiner and Elie Wiesel have said, the language to describe it does not exist. Yet between this level and the surface there is space for deeper investigation.

## CRITICAL THEORY

It is only a worldview which assumes that political analysis is all one needs to understand the world that could lead to the assumption that if you're not engaging in this kind of analysis then you're "standing back aghast and paralysed by its [the Holocaust's] horror". While not wishing to deny the validity and usefulness of political analysis, there is something which even the best of such analyses tend to miss, something which can only be understood through the kind of philosophical/sociological analysis which was carried out by the Marxists of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Briefly, their "Critical Theory" approach rejected forms of Marxism which relied on simplistic and dogmatic materialism, regarding these as forms of positivism (the uncritical worship of science). The Institute's leading

writers, who included Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, insisted on the importance of cultural phenomena as well as economics in understanding historical trends and events such as the Holocaust.

Their analysis of modern society led them to a critique of the "culture industry" (eg Hollywood, the pop music business) and its role in creating an easily manipulable mass society. This analysis went hand in hand with a fundamental critique of positivism and its roots in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Among their most significant achievements was an explanation of antisemitism and totalitarianism which demonstrated that the Holocaust was not some aberration or "accident" but a very possible, though not inevitable, result of the whole development of modern Western society. We therefore need to question that society at the deepest level, not merely at the level of the political. There is a spectre haunting Europe and it's not the spectre of Communism...

## MASS SOCIETY

What follows is by no means a complete coverage of the debates surrounding the Holocaust, mass society and the Enlightenment, but merely some ideas which need to be considered. One question this article does not address is that of the responsibility of certain 19th century German philosophers such as Fichte and Nietzsche for Nazism, and their attitudes towards the Enlightenment. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, especially in Nietzsche's case, his attitude to the Enlightenment is complex and often contradictory, and his contribution to Nazism highly controversial. There is not space here to do justice to such matters. Secondly, in their critique of the Enlightenment, the main target of the Frankfurt School thinkers was not the philosophers but rather those who tend to dismiss philosophy altogether, ie the positivists who argue that true knowledge is only to be gained through science and that philosophy, including philosophy critical of Western technocracy, is a waste of time.

Firstly then, we need some understanding of the social psychology of

Fascism. Modern society is a mass society, in which traditional structures, hierarchies and sense of community have broken down, and nothing has replaced them. Witness the tendency, even now, to resurrect "the family" and religious hierarchies as ways to give people a sense of place in the world, the craving for an "organic" society: Thatcher's Victorian values try to fulfil a real need. Marxist-humanists talk about this in terms of alienation: from ourselves and each other, from nature and the products of our labour. Isolated alienated people are no longer real, distinct individuals, but merely part of the mass. They behave as totally manipulable less-than-individuals, incapable of resisting orders however criminal and, conversely, subject to mass enthusiasms, such as Fascism.

## LOSS OF MEANING

Life in such societies has lost *meaning* (meaning arises from *structures* and the relationship of elements in those structures, both in language and society). This loss is intolerable, so people fill the gap with something to worship, to give meaning to the world. Since the Enlightenment, it is no longer possible to believe in God, so people worship pure naked power, ie the State. Fascism is State worship.

We live in a mass society today. Capitalism tried to supply meaning, the only way it knows, through the worship of the consumer commodity. But for most people life still has little meaning and they still lack the dignity of unique individuals, in control of their own lives. That is why Fascism is an ever-present danger (witness France), despite the much-praised liberties of capitalist democracy. Fascism is the disease, not of "backward" societies, but of "developed", "civilised" modern ones.

The question remains though: how could the Holocaust actually *happen*? For most people the Holocaust is merely the most extreme example of the evil that is racism. But in nearly all other cases, extreme racism leads to pogroms, massacres, and not to the systematic slaughter of millions. The very irrationality which generates the passion to lynch is not normally capable of organising the vast bureaucracy which was the Nazi death machine.

The most prominent present-day case of racism, South African apartheid, is an intermediate case. Like Nazism, it is a vast bureaucracy supported by racist



ideology yet it serves a simpler, more pragmatic aim than Nazism: to preserve white dominance at all costs. Thus it can claim a certain kind of rationality: whites who support the government will nevertheless say that they don't actually hate black people. At present South African apartheid does not have the genocidal potential of Nazism, which is, no doubt, small comfort to those who suffer under it.

# THE RATIONAL MASSACRE

The unique feature of the Holocaust is the way in which antisemitic irrationality was combined with bureaucratic logic: it was the supremely rational massacre, racism elevated into a science. And the utterly logical character of the event, the effortless translation of holocaust in theory into Holocaust in practice is what makes it uniquely terrifying, because such a rationality knows no limit. Had the Nazis been victorious the Jews would have

been wiped out completely, then the Slavs, then ... who knows? This is what Orwell means in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, when O'Brien speaks of the future as a boot stamping on a human face, forever.

The sheer efficiency of the death machine points to a debate which has often become highly polarised, but which we cannot avoid: the question of the Enlightenment. The 18th century Enlightenment can be understood as the development in philosophy and politics of the seed sown by the scientific revolution of Galileo and Newton. Science seemed almost infinitely capable of illuminating the world and bringing it under human control. Reason alone was glorified by the Enlightenment thinkers, who would have no truck with tradition or religion as sources of truth. The prevailing mentality was a self-confident reformism which aimed to do away with

superstition as a barrier to human progress by opposing it with "universal" scientific truths. It opposed Deism with humanism, and ultimately, idealism with deterministic materialism.

The principal method that reductive intellectual reason adopts in describing the concrete world is that of abstractions, but, as Adorno said, in abstraction, the qualitatively different and non-identical are forced into the mould of a quantitative equivalence. This is closely related to, and necessary for, the capitalist principle of universal exchange. We no longer think of the world as composed of radically different things but examples of general types: difference and qualities become ironed out and we are left with a homogeneous world which is easier to control and manipulate for human purposes. Science as the domination of the world becomes supreme.



Demonstration of concentration camp survivors



The totalitarian mentality — a Nazi book-burning ceremony

# SEEDS OF TOTALITARIANISM

Adorno and Horkheimer argued that this process reflects a desire for totality and total control; banishing into non-existence that which human minds cannot easily grasp in terms of rules, laws or numbers. When such a mindset operates in politics and the social and historical conditions are right, it results in totalitarianism. The Jews as that non-identical element, which must always resist and cannot be assimilated into the totality, cannot be tolerated. And a mentality which cannot admit difference, which allows no exception to its universal rules and has no respect for the other, knows no bounds in the application of its theories to create new practical realities. Thus holocaust in theory becomes Holocaust in practice.

This view of Enlightenment, which emphasises the seed of totalitarianism within it, is very persuasive. It is also one-sided and extremely dangerous. Nazism was both a child of the Enlightenment and a violent reaction against it. It was an atavistic reversion to the realm of the Volk, blood and soil, and loyalty to the tribe: a reaction to the disenchanted rationalised world that the Enlightenment had created. Thus the combination of Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment ideologies created a political force the like of which the world had never seen.

Further, we must not forget the benefits of Enlightenment: the creation of liberal democratic political culture and its accompanying freedoms and human rights. Few of us would want to live in a society which still believed in the divine right of kings.

# EXAMINING REASON

In any case, Enlightenment is irreversible. Despite their profound criticism of the Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer, in their classic *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944, Verso 1979), held on to a central notion of enlightened reason: their message was that Enlightenment must examine itself. In other words, we need to examine the ways in which reason itself is socially constructed. We must find a way of doing this which avoids the wholesale trashing of the Enlightenment which occurs in much alternative politics and spiritual movements: positivism, in its fear of superstition and charlatanism, creates the perfect ground upon which they can flourish. George Steiner is right when he says that Western civilisation has failed to work through the meaning of the Holocaust, and that this failure is central to our failure, still, to create a truly human(e) society. Such a re-examination must necessarily be a self-criticism, including a criticism of the very way we think and reason: only thus will we create a true socialist pluralism.

The points I have made here are not meant to substitute for a historical and political understanding of the cause of Nazism; rather to fill a gap which is present in many of the most serious discussions of Fascism, and which I perceived, maybe incorrectly, in the phrases I quoted from the *Jewish Socialist* 13.

I have argued that the Holocaust is unique in a number of senses, which can be partially summarised in the following remark, adapted from Brecht: what the Holocaust uniquely and irrefutably

demonstrated was that the great monuments of European culture were built upon dogshit. An emphasis on the uniqueness and importance of the Holocaust understood in this sense (and not in the reactionary sense of claiming priority in a hierarchy of oppression) would be a necessary cornerstone in constructing a (dare I say it?) truly Jewish socialism. □

# Nu-look!

The face of Jewish socialism is changing. The next issue of your favourite magazine will come to you in a new design — making it more attractive and more accessible. But new concepts do not come cheap, and having held the price down to £1 for nearly two years we are forced to raise it to £1.20, at least this side of the collapse of capitalism!

As part of this new look, we will be including a regular listings column giving details and contact addresses of radical and progressive Jewish organisations who want to reach a wider audience. Send your details (up to 50 words plus address) to Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX, to arrive no later than 17 March.



# BROKEN GLASS AND SHATTERED ILLUSIONS

Kristallnacht was a final warning to the Jews of Germany of what the Nazis intended to do.  
Stephanie Seckelson and Margot Sreberny look back at their youth in the Third Reich.

**I**n 1932, when Hitler was on the horizon, Germany was in a terrible mess because of all the reparations they had to pay, people lived in very bad conditions, and there was no unemployment money. When Hitler came and said: "Follow me, I'll get you out of the mess," they gave him a chance.

I was born in Berlin but at the end of March '33 I started to live in a small town near Berlin where friends of mine had had a factory making furniture fittings. They had a lot of apprentices and if they did something wrong and the foreman told them off, they went to the Youth Union and they took him away and accused him of being a communist. That kind of fear grew and grew until nobody dared say anything. Young boys, 18 years old, had the power to denounce people even if there was nothing to denounce. This was the beginning.

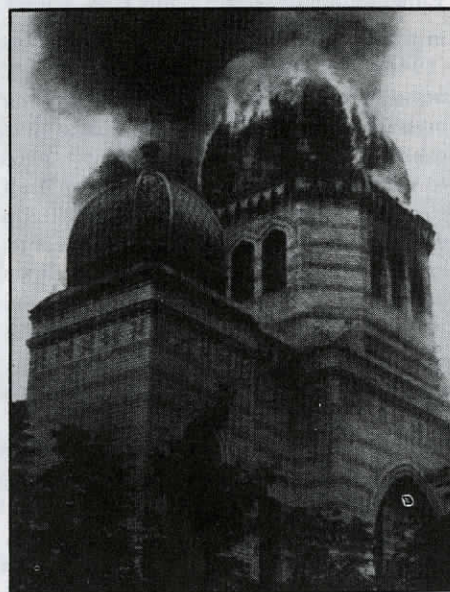
On 1 April 1933 there was a boycott day. All Jewish shops had to close. Some of them were smashed up. There was a young doctor couple living nearby. That day the Nazis threw a stone into their window and tried to get hold of them so they had to flee. That was already in April '33.

In 1936 all of a sudden things had calmed down and life for the Jewish people became much easier because there were the Olympic Games and Germany wanted to make a good impression for foreign visitors, but after the games were over it became very difficult again.

I came back to Berlin in 1937 and I started work there. We were not allowed to go to theatres any more so we had our own theatre, naturally with the best actors! We were not allowed to sit on just any benches in the park. There were a few benches for Jews. I had a boyfriend who had a paddleboat and one day we went to one of the lakes. Jewish people were only allowed to bathe from a little spot. We were on our boat in the lake when I saw a terrific commotion on that little spot where the Jewish people were sunbathing. I got nervous and said let's take the boat to the other side of the lake and carry it back to the boathouse. He

said we were safer on the water. What happened is that the Gestapo had come and taken all the people away. If my guardian angel had not been with me I probably would not be sitting here today.

Zur antisemitischen Pogromnacht  
vor 50 Jahren:



The great synagogue on Orienburger Strasse in flames

Some time later I had a date at one of the coffee houses on the Kurfurstendamm in Berlin. I was a bit late so I started to run. But when I got there I saw that the Gestapo were outside so I didn't go in. The Gestapo had come and rounded up all the Jewish people in the coffee house and if I had arrived on time, I wouldn't be sitting here. Things like that happened time and time again.

Then, I was working for an organisation to help get people out of Germany. In those days we were even able to get a few out of concentration camps. Lots of countries didn't allow anyone to come in. Britain had a special law that allowed in only people who were necessary for some professions. I came over as a domestic — I smashed all the dishes! America had a quota. I had an affidavit for America but my quota would only have been due a year later and I got scared. We had to send some people to China because that was a place where we could get them in, but we were not allowed to send them through Italy which had made an arrangement with Hitler not to let them through. So we had to send them through Russia, but there was the stipulation that all the windows had to be closed and the trains were sealed. People were not allowed to get out until they were in China.

Then came the *Kristallnacht*. When I came to my office the next morning there were queues of women fainting and crying because their husbands had been taken away. We tried to help them as much as we could. We tried to locate their husbands; sometimes this was easy, sometimes not. Most of them had been taken to concentration camps. We had to contact as many foreign embassies as possible to get passports for people to get them out. People, including myself, were not allowed to take any more with them than 10 marks currency and two suitcases. That's how they arrived in China. That would mean sleeping under bridges. They couldn't speak Chinese and couldn't get any work at first. It was a very hard life but at least their lives were saved.

Our organisation had a spy in the Gestapo and a fortnight after *Kristallnacht* he told us there would be another chasing out of mostly male Jews. They put me in a train and I was travelling right through Berlin from one Jewish community to another to warn people to go underground. Most people were saved in this way. At this time I already lived on my own; my mother had died when I was three, my father when I was eighteen, so I took a room with another woman and we hid

about six men in that flat. Once, one had a coughing fit and we put a cushion on his face because the neighbours were Nazis and we were scared stiff they would inform the Gestapo. In the building was a Jewish doctor who listened to foreign news on a radio. He was denounced and taken away immediately, but there were also some very nice stories. For instance, we had a friend of the family who was a writer. She had a friend who had received the order to prepare herself for the concentration camps and she went there to say goodbye. The daughter of the shoemaker who had also gone there had promised herself that she would save the next Jewish person she could and as it happened it was our friend. Our friend didn't want to endanger this girl and she said, "No, I won't go with you." The girl replied: "No, I want to do it. If you don't want to I'll take someone else, but please come." She took her belongings and went with her, and she stayed with that girl all through the war. She had no special rations. They came to visit us after the war.

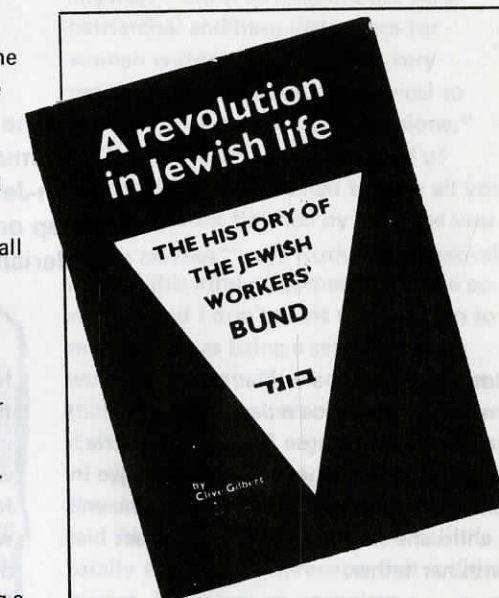
Another woman was a maid in a Jewish household. Only women over 40 were allowed to take work in a Jewish household. There was a baby in the house and when the order came for the family to prepare themselves for the concentration camp, she took the baby and pretended that it was her own illegitimate child, and she brought that baby up.

**I** was still a school pupil on 9 November 1938 in a city called Koenigsberg — home of the philosopher Kant. My mother had a phone call very early in the morning telling her not to let me go to school that day. My father had already died, my two sisters had gone on *aliyah*. There was just my mother and I left. Of course, I didn't go to school that morning but I did sneak out that day. You listened to the radio and you didn't really know what was happening. I walked down the little street into the main road which at that time still had a number of Jewish shops — not too many because people did leave. And I saw

the *kristall* — the glass, the broken windows, the SS flash, the swastikas, the "Juden Raus" (Jews out) and I saw the rest of the population, walking along, once in a while stooping a little and snatching something out of the shops. I walked a bit further to where the old synagogue was and that's the thing I shall never forget, seeing the *Torah* (holy scrolls) on the ground and old Jews picking it up, the decorations on the floor with the glass broken and the old Jews kneeling, trying to gather together the *Torah*. I then went home. I don't remember exactly what happened next. I certainly never went back to school. That was the end of a promising career!

I can tell you many stories like being a kid and falling off a bike and someone offering to help me and me saying "go away, I'm a Jew", knowing the danger of having someone, who was Christian, helping you in that situation.

It must have taken me 25-30 years to come out and say I will be a political being again. I was so intimidated when I came with the *kindertransport* (children's transport) to England. I lived with a family, then I went to school and I got married — the usual stuff! But for me to join a political party and stand up and say *this is right or this is wrong*, took about 30 years. This is what it does to you and this is why I am now getting older and older, more political, fighting more and shouting more ... and look where we are. I was at a meeting in Islington Town Hall last week about a very good anti-racist, anti-sexist school in London that helps Bangladeshi kids. The same thing is happening in England in 1988 as I lived through in 1938 and this is where I am fighting and I don't know if we are fighting enough. I don't think we are. There is a self-satisfied society out there. Why celebrate 50 years of *Kristallnacht*? What happened all the other 49? How do we educate the world in a different way? *Stephanie Seckelson and Margot Sreberny were speaking at a Jewish Socialists' Group meeting held in November to mark the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht.* □



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# LIVING TOGETHER

The orthodox establishment of the Jewish community sees "marrying out", or living with a non-Jewish partner, as a betrayal and as the last step on the road to assimilation. Julia Bard and Marian Shapiro talked to two "mixed couples" about their experiences.

**Ros and Elsie** are a lesbian couple who live in London. Ros is Jewish, the daughter of a refugee from Nazi Austria; Elsie's family are not Jewish. They live in Liverpool. Her mother died when she was a child and now she has little contact with her father.

**Ruth and Alistair** live in London with their three children. Ruth comes from an orthodox Sephardi Jewish background. She was brought up in London, but her parents live in Israel now. Alistair, who is not Jewish, went to boarding school in Britain while his parents worked abroad.

## FAMILIES MATTER

"My parents are very orthodox," says Ruth, "and they laid it on the line to me in my late teens that I was not meant to have relationships with non-Jews. This was the most acute point of confrontation between us. They would have preferred all my friends to be Jewish, although in fact not very many of them were. They said I was not to have non-Jewish boyfriends and if I did have a relationship with a non-Jew they would do their utmost to break it up. That meant that from then on any relationships I had had to be clandestine ones, which just made living at home impossible.

"When I was 18 I left home and went to live with somebody who wasn't Jewish and that caused a complete break with my family for about a year. They forbade my brothers and sisters to have any contact with me. My father wouldn't sign my grant form for quite a long time, so there was the threat that I wouldn't be able to go to university. Eventually my mother talked him round but he obviously

felt fully entitled to respond like this. He thought it was what any normal father would do. He told me years later that when he changed his mind and signed the form, it was such an act of charity that it was only because he was a Jew that he'd done it. He didn't think that any gentle father would have behaved as charitably towards me as he had done."

"My family were vaguely Christian I suppose," says Alistair. "My father would take us to church once a year but I don't think my mother's been to church since he died. I went to private school and we had to go to chapel every day, but that wasn't religious, it was just something we had to do.

"We don't talk to each other very much in my family, so it's quite difficult to say exactly how my mother feels about my living with a Jewish woman and having Jewish children, but I have no reason to feel she's displeased about it. She's never brought it up or mentioned it."

"My mother's first generation English and my father's a refugee and I've got an older brother," says Ros. "Elsie and I went out together for three years before I told them that I was a lesbian. Elsie could have been a Martian; the fact was, she was a female Martian and whether or not she was Jewish was really quite irrelevant.

"They're not pleased about it, although my father is very accepting of our relationship and of Elsie. And my mother is quite accepting now. She's resigned to it. For them it's quite problematic that there are no children. My Jewish identity has been very much formed by Holocaust experience; that's what I grew up with: that you've got to recreate the generation

that was lost. They say things like 'Well this is the last of the line, that's it.' My cousins have got children but they're not from the refugee side, so it's not the same."

"My family don't know I'm a lesbian," says Elsie. "I don't see them but we keep contact at birthdays and Christmas. Who I am, what I am, everything about me is a total blank to them so it's just not an issue as far as my family is concerned.

"My mother died when I was 11, and my father subsequently remarried and has had other kids, so it's a whole new family. There's no great tie. They're not a religious family but they are very traditionally what I would call right wing, working class and they think I'm different and odd anyway. But I've made it so they're sort of proud.

"When I was at school, I had black friends, Catholic friends and Jewish friends. It was never an issue. It was as though individuals were OK, but the great mass out there became a racist stereotype. I can remember my grandparents and my mother using expressions like 'the Jew-boy landlord down the road' but it was different once you knew people. I don't know how my father would react to this relationship. I think he would have so much to handle if I rolled home one day with Rosalind on my arm..."

"I used to be very angry with my father's attitude that Jews are better than non-Jews," says Ruth. "It was about the whole principle, the whole business of being expected to take their word for it that there are only certain kinds of people in the world that it was all right to associate with; that some people were more OK than others."

## CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

"I have always felt that I was looking for a different conception of living in a community," Ruth continues. "I was brought up within this family and community setting where you had a very suspicious and critical view of your neighbours who were not Jewish. I didn't want to be part of the Jewish community as opposed to another community. But I don't want to be isolated from other Jews and I don't want my kids to be either.

"Because my family are Sephardim I never really felt we were mainstream Jewish community. That didn't mean we were any less Jewish, it just meant we didn't quite fit in with the sorts of things that were going on in Edgware and Stanmore. I never belonged in those communities and I don't want to, but I don't want to be completely out of touch.

"What I am in touch with is a network of more radical Jews, a fairly disparate collection of individuals. I would like the children to know other Jewish children who have got parents more like us. But I don't want them to grow up thinking their friends have got to be Jewish."

"My only experience of expressing myself as a Jew", says Ros, "has been within the radical Jewish community — a community of outcasts — where I am allowed to express myself as a Jew with a mixed relationship.

"I think the extent to which you can express yourself as a Jew within a mixed relationship is to do with the extent to which you have a free relationship anyway, the extent to which you can express yourself as anything within the relationship. We need to talk about what we mean by expressing yourself as a Jew. I'm not religious, so that doesn't come up as an issue. I'm talking about a cultural expression."

"I think I see it in political terms in which I would include all classes and all races," says Elsie. "We've been together for five years. In that time you can't not have spoken about some of these things. I think we can talk about them because we've already got a shared political perspective. Whereas for Ros it's Jewish identity, for me it was class identity. We're not playing the 'who's most oppressed?' game, but through class and Jewishness we've actually been able to make some comparisons, to reach some understanding and to see some of the differences as well."

# DON'T MAKE THIS MISTAKE

If you are thinking of  
marrying out,  
think again!

DO YOU REALISE?

★ That 70% of all intermarriages end in divorce and that many of those that do stick together are filled with unhappiness.

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Before you rush headlong into intermarriage — you can do it to yourself — to consider very carefully what will happen to your children. For after all loving and devoted children are the rewards of a successful marriage. Do you realise that the children of such marriages are confused and perplexed children of our age, are they? At one set of grandparents the children are Jewish and at the other an Xmas tree. How will they feel when their schoolfriends ask them what they are? How will they feel when your children will accuse you of many things? Before ruining their lives? Before guilt and remorse so deep that they will consider all aspects of the situation. Please do — the Millions of heroic Jewish Martyrs who gave their very lives — in order that you and your children should remain Jewish. Dare you insult their eternal memory by marrying out of the faith. For by doing so you will be instrumental in destroying our beloved Jewish people.

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## THEORY AND PRACTICE

"My father's come to terms with it as far as he's ever going to," says Ruth. "Although he would prefer it if Alistair would convert. He doesn't have any power over me any more, especially since the children were born, and that's quite a big change."

"I'm a bit sceptical about conversion anyway," says Ros. "I don't quite see the point of it."

"You can only convert to a practice, not the essence," says Elsie. "You can't

convert and take the culture on, can you? You can learn certain things by rote from a bible or whatever. You convert to a religious practice and if your Jewish identity is not religious then what are you converting to? Also what would I be converting from? Atheism? In a lesbian relationship it would be very problematic anyway. I think all religions are very patriarchal and have little place for women within them that isn't very repressive. It would be nonsensical to even think of it in those terms alone."

"I was brought up in the kind of household where you had to have all your domestic work finished by the time you lit the candles," says Ruth. "The festivals impose this kind of domestic routine on women and I don't want to pass it on to my children as being a set of rules. I would rather say: 'Here are these things that Jews do — we can choose to do them if we want to.'"

"When I first met Ruth it was some time before I realised she was Jewish," said Alistair, "and at that time I had the totally erroneous impression that it didn't matter. There was an unspoken assumption that she was 'just like anybody else'. It took me some time to realise that Ruth was Jewish and that this was important."

"I sometimes ask myself, if I was living with somebody Jewish, would we have this immense amount in common and would it make for a much more fruitful wonderful relationship," said Ruth. "I don't believe it would. I believe there's a view which has more going for it politically and morally which is that you do not differentiate between human beings in this way. There are times when I am struck by how little I have in common with other Jews and I think what matters is you have faith in somebody else's basic moral or political position and you know they're not suddenly going to let you down over that."

"I have an immense trust in Elsie," says Ros. "It was proved to me when we went on a lesbian strength march once. We had been followed by a few members of the National Front and we were all sitting down in the street. I had my Star of David on and some NF guy was eyeing me up and Elsie noticed it. I was encircled by Elsie and my non-Jewish friends. I actually know what they would do. I don't have any doubt whatsoever. That's very, very important to me. If this was 1933 I know where Elsie would be." □



# FITTING BEHAVIOUR

Jewish radicals are under pressure from within the Jewish community to conform and from the wider society to assimilate. Five women confront these issues.

**Rosalind:** My experience was always of receiving a rather mixed message. I come from a non-religious family; a refugee family. It was: keep a low profile; don't stand out; assimilate as much as possible; nevertheless always remember that you are Jewish. There was a kind of push and pull. The assimilation idea was a question of survival, but there was also a notion of politeness — the kind of thing that you ought to do in the "host country".

**Adrienne:** I've never been brought up with any kind of idea of assimilation and I've always been honest about being a Jew, taking the Jewish holidays off work and so on. That's been quite difficult at times when we were busy, and it's hard to explain to people that you're going to take certain days off to represent being Jewish, but not others. In the end, though, I think people have respect for you. I know that a lot of people in the Jewish Socialists' Group call themselves secular Jews, but I've never quite identified with that description. I've never

called myself "religious" in the accepted sense, but there are certain religious things that are important to me.

**Karen:** We were one of the few Jewish families in Twickenham. We were also one of the few families who weren't Tory churchgoers, and I always felt we really stuck out. Until about five years ago I was obsessed with wanting to be English. I was aspiring as hard as I could to what was around me, and I was embarrassed by all the Jewish stuff. But at the same time I had a growing feeling that I despised the people who were my role models. I never quite fitted in anywhere.

Gradually lots of incidents at school, at college, at work started to add up. My brother was subjected to appalling anti-semitism at school, but my reaction was to be embarrassed by it. I didn't have any tools to deal with it.

Our family, whilst not being terribly religious, did keep some traditions. But I have missed out on vast chunks of education. I went to Hebrew classes and I can remember it like I can remember how to sightread music — residual memory. But I feel bereft educationally and yet not part of anything else. So for a long, long time I've lived with a feeling of not quite believing, but being quite aware at the same time, that I'm pretty well assimilated.

Some American friends made me face the realisation that I was pretending I didn't have a particular "race", and they gave me confidence. Since then I've been trying not to assimilate in that same way.

**Judith:** When I first heard about assimilation it was a completely novel idea. Even being brought up in Hampstead Garden Suburb (in north west London), my parents managed to establish a secular Jewish identity. We were the people who didn't go to *shul* (synagogue) on *shabbos* (the Sabbath) and holy days; we didn't go to *kheder* (Hebrew classes); once somebody told my father off for cleaning the car on *Rosh Hashona* (Jewish New Year).

Going to school in that area, my problems weren't about assimilation; they were about being *me*, rather than being a practising Jew — which I didn't want to be. I never expect to melt into the scenery; I never feel I can. I always assume people will know who I am. Once when I was at university another student was amazed to find out that I was Jewish. He said: "You can't be; your accent is too classy!" That was the first time I'd been so totally misconceived by anybody.

I think it's strange that anyone should want to "pass" or even think they could. Surely someone would notice or they'd let something slip. The main thing I learnt from my mother's experience in Germany was that you couldn't possibly hide it. It would always come out at some point.

**Julia:** I came from a very traditional family but I was also given a mixed message. Everyone in our family "looked Jewish", which I thought about a lot when I was younger, because there was no way I was going to be thought of as pretty — not in any accepted sense of the word — not because my nose was big but because I "look Jewish". That cast quite a long shadow over my adolescence in a way. I didn't talk about it a lot, but it certainly affected the way I thought. That's just the externals of it.

I didn't accept the religion, although I did accept quite a lot of the rituals and what you could call markers in the year. I don't believe in God, but I think there are times in your life — when somebody dies, or someone's born; the big events — when you need some kind of structure that you don't have to think about. Some people call it religion; some call it ritual. I think they are traditions which work and I am happy to use some of them. But I was brought up to believe that was something private.

The way I publicly dealt with being Jewish in my teens was to become a Zionist. That made my Jewishness acceptable. The question of "normalisation" which I think is central to Zionism: we can have a state and an army like anybody else; we can be dustmen, professors, anything like anybody else — now I think that is a global expression of Jewish assimilationism; a way of rejecting the diaspora. Zionism was a liferaft for the post-Holocaust generation — a way of saying "We're the same as everybody else". But we're not the same and nobody should be the same as everybody else. This attempt to merge into the woodwork is actually a disorder.

**Rosalind:** My father wants me to keep a low profile in spite of having filled my head with socialism. What they expect of children I really don't know — to be a quiet socialist? You can't keep a low profile, and if it is going to stand out, I might as well shout about it in the first place.

**Julia:** I would say our survival depends on us coming out and saying: "This is what

we are." It's not just a question of whether we're going to be found out in the end. I was always told "It's not good assimilating because someone will come along, like Hitler did, and tell you you're a Jew whether you know it or not." But when I wanted a *Mogen David* (Star of David) for my birthday a few years ago, my father accused me of "foisting it on people".

**Rosalind:** This is an argument people use when talking about lesbians and gays — not ramming it down people's throats. It's the normative group not wanting other groups to force things on them. The other side of it for me was feeling embarrassed about other Jews. Open Jews, for me, were either those refugees who couldn't do anything about their accents and who pushed you around in John Barnes (a department store in Hampstead) — you know, those old German ladies who did your ribs in — or else East End Jews who were loud. There was a whole class issue.

**Julia:** I went to a rather pukka secondary school where there were a lot of Jewish girls but their parents didn't come from the East End like mine. I remember one of those girls referring to us as "fried fish Jews" and I knew exactly what she meant. I was paralysed. I remember going home to my mother and she went completely mad. I was so relieved that she did. I remember when I suddenly knew what my mother meant by people "looking Jewish". What she meant was "fried fish Jews". Most of those Jewish girls at school weren't that kind of Jew and they didn't "look Jewish". It wasn't to do with their noses or their hair. It was to do with their culture; with being assimilated.

**Rosalind:** My father is Viennese, and they've got their own bag of nonsense about all the other Jews in Europe! I was sent to a French school so I grew up with this kind of "cosmopolitan" background.

**Karen:** Dead classy!

**Rosalind:** Absolutely! Yes, I was Jewish, but I was cosmopolitan — a citizen of the world, and so I could apparently get away with being different. Not so much because of the Jewish bit, which for me was negative because most of it was associated with the Holocaust — the pain and the shame — but I could be this very European thing...

**Julia:** What my mother calls "Continental" — well cut clothes and very nice cakes.

**Karen:** A sacher torte Jew instead of a fried fish Jew...

**Judith:** I'm always interested in why people want to wear *Mogen Davids*. We didn't in my family, except my grandmother. My younger daughter was given a *Mogen David* when she was seven or eight and she insisted on wearing it when she

was going for a session at the hospital. I just couldn't face that. I don't know why. Perhaps it was because people wore them on their arms and backs; I've never really sorted it out. I couldn't take it that day, so in the end I said: "You can wear it, but not when you're with me."

When I was at school there was a dividing line between girls who wore them and girls who didn't. My sort didn't because we were totally areligious. We were secular, Communist Jews and we didn't do that sort of thing. But why I reacted so strongly with my small child, I don't know.

**Rosalind:** I wear a *Mogen David* but I won't wear a pink triangle. I couldn't possibly wear one because it represents a symbol which was not created positively as part of my history. The *Mogen David* is not a Nazi symbol — it is 2,000 years old.

**Adrienne:** Choosing to wear something because you want to be identified is very different from being forced to wear it because someone else wants you to be identified. When I was a child I used to wear a *Mogen David* for years. I suddenly stopped wearing it when I was about 17, and my parents wanted to know where it was and why I wasn't wearing it. "What's the matter with it?" they wanted to know. They couldn't understand why I'd stopped.

**Rosalind:** I think the reason why I wear it is probably because I actually think it's confrontational...

**Judith:** I do see it as confrontational. I expect people to recognise me without my wearing symbols, and I don't know if 6-year-olds can choose to confront in that way. It made me uneasy. I thought my daughter was too little and didn't really know what it was.

**Karen:** My family would be delighted if I wore one — they'd see it as a way of sticking together. If you do anything different, you're more than an aberration; you're considered treacherous. Not knowing for so long that there were socialist Jews, it was just a feeling as if I was a bit of flotsam.

**Rosalind:** But all this begs the questions of to what extent "identification by choice" is really an illusion.

**Judith:** It's not to do with what you were born; it's to do with what you took in when you were a child, and what was presented. In a lot of families who went through a very Communist phase, the bit about being a Jew got completely lost.

**Julia:** There's a political question there. We're not just victims of parents who are members of the United Synagogue or of the Communist Party. What's interesting is the range of people sitting here, from all these different backgrounds — and

*"I never expect to melt into the scenery; I never feel I can. I always assume people will know who I am."*

*"Once when I was at university another student was amazed to find out that I was Jewish. He said: 'You can't be; your accent is too classy!'"*



we're talking about the same things and actually agreeing about quite a lot of it. The question is what one ought to do: "ought" in the sense of giving oneself the best chance of survival, of changing the world and making it into a better place for everyone. To resist both the pressure to assimilate and the coercion of the Jewish community, in order to make coherent choices about how to act politically.

**Adrienne:** I wonder if people's attitude to assimilation has changed over the years. In Manchester, when I was a child, I don't remember seeing black people at all. We were the only minority. Now in the part of Manchester which used to be the Jewish area, there are a lot of Asian and Afro-Caribbean families and people's attitudes towards identifying as a minority in Britain have changed — partly because there are more minorities around.

**Judith:** I think assimilation is actually a spectrum — but is it ever a good thing? And if so, which bit? In terms of culture I was probably assimilated, but I would never have said I was, because I didn't want to be and I had no other identity except to be Jewish, so how could I be assimilated?

**Rosalind:** We need to make the distinction between assimilation and integration. To me, assimilation is a one way process whereby a minority culture moves into the host culture and loses its image. Integration is much more where you maintain your culture as well as learning from the host culture, but it's a two way process whereby the host culture also changes to an extent.

**Karen:** There's a part of me that chooses to identify as Jewish as a way of *not* identifying as English. I'm so disgusted with things that go on that I'm absolutely delighted to be able to say: "I'm not English." And I believe I'm not. I think of myself as a British person with a particular minority background, and I derive strength from that.

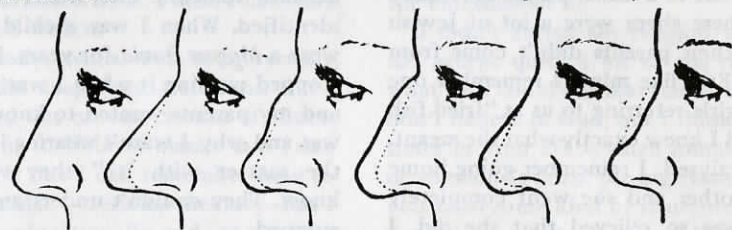
**Rosalind:** I've always identified as British, but I have a feeling that my passport can be taken away as quickly as my father's, and therefore my nationality and rights. So I can never really fully identify as a citizen of this country. I don't take it for granted; I don't feel it's my right. To my father this is just another reflection of the damage that the Nazis did.

**Julia:** Do other people think about running away all the time? I think a lot about what would happen if things turned nasty; where we would go to; whether we would stay and fight; and the fact that I haven't got a diamond ring to cash in.

**Rosalind:** Many moons ago I married an American and I've got a Green Card — a

residency card. We were divorced but I've kept the Green Card. To keep the Green Card you have to go every year, for 24 hours in a year. For seven years I went back to America and I never went anywhere else because I spent all my holiday money *shlepping* around to keep this damn Green Card. Now am I going to live in America? It's so unlikely; the only reason I kept it was because I need this visa. My grandparents almost got a visa, then didn't and were killed.

I finally gave up this Green Card because I wanted to go to Crete. But I actually felt I had just committed a crime. **Judith:** My parents spent quite a lot of time telling me how lucky I was to be born and bred in England. I often think about the possibility of moving; I tried Israel and that wasn't too good. I go to Scandinavia quite often and that's lovely. I spent six weeks in the States and when I came back I realised that I felt more at home here than anywhere else I'd ever been. If that's assimilation, then I must have got assimilated!



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**Julia:** I lived abroad for three years and I spent the whole time thinking: "God, at least I've got the choice to go back." I used to think incessantly about what it must have been like to be a refugee.

**Adrienne:** That reminds me of a meeting I went to at the Manchester Jewish Museum to compare the experiences of Jews and Tamils. The Jewish refugees who had come over in the 1930s all said how grateful they were, but it doesn't seem to have made them more responsive to other people's difficulties. Some of them were quite racist and can't see the similarities between their stories and other people's.

**Julia:** I think one of the things which has contributed to assimilation is, oddly enough, the Jewish establishment view. Despite its rantings and railings against intermarriage and so on, they're quite happy to lose socialist, gay or lesbian Jews from the community, and there's a very conformist kow-towing to the

British establishment which is itself assimilationist.

**Rosalind:** I always think a good visual representation of this is an Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen march with the men in bowler hats...

To some extent you can choose whether you're going to be "out" as Jewish or not — as opposed to if you are black — and I do make that choice. Today a locksmith came round to my house and I thought there was going to be haggling about the price, so I swung my *Mogen David* behind my neck because I thought if he knew I was Jewish he might up the price. I've done this many times and it makes me feel very ashamed of myself.

**Julia:** In the end it's inescapable: a Jew is a Jew and it's not because they "Let something slip". People pick up and identify clues in complex ways.

**Judith:** But it's not necessarily a hostile thing.

**Julia:** The only defence against what may be dished up is to say: "This is what I

am," and to say it together. Some people do assimilate successfully; people do move from one group into another. But most don't.

**Judith:** Assimilation means literally disappearing into the woodwork, and seems to be more to do with indifference than to do with what you came from.

**Rosalind:** We should think about positive ways of expressing Jewish identity so that you can *not* become assimilated. It might be easier for the next generation.

**Julia:** There have been times when I've felt that I have been part of a Jewish, radical, secular culture. We've got to find something that is a bit more positive and concrete than a response to antisemitism or a response to pressure to assimilate or a reaction to the Jewish establishment — all those very reactive things.

**Rosalind:** If you look at other cultural groups, you get Bangra rock, reggae... I'd so love to find a fusion — that's really what I mean when I talk about how I'd like my culture to be... □

# LETTERS...

## A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

"...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 the individual not the collective level."

This is a quote from David Cesarani's review of his experiences of *Ruach* (JS14). If these were questions raised by people who were presumably Jews, then I consider them to be extremely serious questions and profoundly disturbing by implication. It is not the question, but the fact that it is framed by Jews that is disturbing and it should, I think, concern all of us who wish to create a community.

I do not know to whom he is referring, but this type of questioning is likely to be a legacy of the Holocaust in many indirect ways. *Ruach* attracted many Jews, marginalised on the left, not a part of the already existing Jewish communities and of varying political persuasions and religious convictions. People have assimilated for a variety of conscious reasons, including dissatisfaction with the prevailing political values of the Jewish community or loss of religious belief. However, assimilation is also motivated by the inheritance of our parents' experiences and by covert messages which were received as we grew up.

One way to avoid antisemitism is to become invisible, to make no ripples; even to forget one is Jewish. The most extreme versions of this were refugees who came to this country having lost all family and possessions; many of these people decided to protect their children by bringing them up unaware of their origins. Some did not tell their children that they were Jewish; others told them but did not practise the traditions nor the religion. Some of the people who are asking "What are Jews and am I one?" are the children of these people. Some really don't know what it means to be Jewish but they are aware it means *something*.

There are, of course, those who were less personally affected. Some families have long lived in Britain and they were affected in more subtle and less obvious ways. Whilst I am aware that this is an oversimplification of a complex set of issues, I do feel that we should not forget that it was the intention of the Third Reich that not one of us should have been born. No wonder for some in our midst, "the bedrock, the shared values are so dreadfully weak or undermined".

In a society where racism and inequality are evident, those who oppose it need to establish a strong base from which to do so. The seeds for such action are held within the diverse experiences of our families. The inherited history of Jewishness is complex and includes the devastation of European Jewry only 40 years ago; this should neither be mythologised nor ignored; there is much to learn from it. When a person who knows he or she is Jewish asks the question which David Cesarani so dismisses, they should be taken very seriously and helped to find the answers, not ridiculed. This is personal but it is also political; it is private but it is also communal.

Joy Schaverien  
Leicester

## MORE, PLEASE

I would like to say how much I enjoyed Tara Kaufmann's article "Nuremberg Revisited", in issue 14. She deftly combined a tightly argued discourse with a clear and personal approach. The article made me think and did so with what felt like a light but persuasive touch.

Many magazines on the left, this autumn, have featured the theme "identity politics and whither socialism" but I haven't read anything that deals with the issue as completely as she does. The very specificity of the subject gives it a special resonance and commitment which seems to be sadly lacking within prevailing attitudes.

I would also like to praise the layout of her article! It was accessible and striking, the content *and* the form of this article made it feel as if the magazine was really reaching out to its readers. Unfortunately we live in a climate where we are bombarded with design at every level of our

lives. It is necessary to consider, perhaps more carefully than in more halcyon days, precisely what impact the visual images we present have. I think this article demonstrates an appropriate direction for the magazine and look forward to many more.

Karen Merkel  
London E15

## REFORMER'S PLEA

As a dual Israeli-British citizen who has lived in Israel for 21 years, I implore my Reform and Liberal Jewish brothers and sisters in the Diaspora to change their strategies of support for Israel for a number of reasons.

The first is the proposed "Who is a Jew" amendment, including all its substitute proposals, which attempt to delegitimise the very existence of all streams in Judaism other than Orthodox. Even without this amendment, converts who manage to obtain Israeli citizenship are often blacklisted for marriage and burial. Other reasons include:

- Severe discrimination against women in religious courts (which use the most severe interpretation of archaic laws).
- Gross inequality for Arabs in all facets of life. Apart from the human rights aspect, this also endangers the Jewish population of Israel. Repression and frustration lead to hatred. As an inhabitant of the Negev for 20 years, I fear the hatred of my Bedouin Arab neighbours. I don't want to have to say "they are right", if ever they decide to rise up against us.
- The reluctance of Israel to give up territories for peace — led by politicians who are unable and/or unwilling to hear the PLO's call to the negotiating table. This reluctance may lead us to another, even more devastating war.

I propose the following strategies:

- Re-channel all financial contributions to Israel through the Reform and Liberal movements. It would help them gain a power base, strengthen their own movements in Israel, yet continue the funding of worthwhile projects started by other organisations.

Jewish Socialist  
BM 3725  
London WCIN3XX



- Institute information campaigns about Reform and Liberal Judaism in Israel. Israelis know about us only from orthodox propaganda.
- During the next Israeli elections, subsidise transportation for community members who have voting rights in Israel (as do the ultra-Orthodox).

Israel makes itself an issue in English political campaigns, in foreign policy and government votes; Reform and Liberal Jews are their allies in this. Israeli politicians come to the US and England to campaign and fundraise for their parties. Therefore you are involved! This involvement obligates you to take action for what you believe in.

Ora Cohen-Cummings  
Arad  
Israel

#### BRENNER BITES BACK

Although Dresser in her review of my book, *Jews in America Today* (JS12), does not dispute a single fact or statistic it is "ultimately distorted". She really

objects to one of its central theses.

"The thrust of Brenner's argument here is that modern American Jewry's role as a progressive political force is played out... If American Jews are going to be increasingly concentrated in the intellectual stratum, even if only a minority join the barricades, would it not mean that they are going to constitute a disproportionately large percentage of radical (ie progressive) intellectuals? Brenner would undoubtedly answer that their progressivism would have everything to do with their position as individual intellectuals and nothing to do with their Jewish background... cultural values are dismissed as mere reflections of the economic base with no causal force of their own. A sense of communal identity is invariably condemned as intrinsically reactionary and chauvinist."

I stated that "given their weight within the intelligentsia, Jews, as individuals, will be prominent in any forthcoming left upsurge". However, it is ludicrous to think that most of these future radicals will become so because of their Jewish heritage.

Elements like your Jewish Socialists' Group and New Jewish Agenda won't accept that the vast majority of youth are in fact assimilated and will never join any Jewish organisation, regardless of ideology. Their appeal is limited to such as "red diaper babies" coming out of Yiddishist socialist groups, and to the remnant pseudo-left factors of the Zionist movement like Peace Now. Those elements do not understand that their "Jewish socialist heritage" is usually nothing more than Stalinism or reformism and is indistinguishable from similar gentile Stalinists and reformists and as discredited. As to the Peace Now types, what can one say? Except that a progressive Zionist past there never was and a progressive Zionist future there never will be.

*Jewish Socialist* is well intended, but every sociological study of Jews shows assimilation to be an irreversible process. Ditto the statistics on the upward mobility of Jews away from the working class. I'm only the messenger. Stop trying to shoot me.

Lenni Brenner  
California, USA

We began by talking about the ideas of Reconstructionism which was founded specifically with 20th century American Jewry in mind, with the intention of trying to tackle some of the intellectual and social questions raised by modern Jewish life. It was founded by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan. Born in Lithuania, he had trained initially as a Conservative rabbi but was then influenced by American pragmatist philosophy and modern sociology, as well as by the *Haskalah* (The "Jewish Enlightenment"). This led him to define Judaism as "the evolving religious civilisation of the Jewish people". Each component of this definition is important. "Evolving" implies the continuous, responsive and changing quality of Judaism. "Civilisation" encompasses culture, arts, language, religious traditions, communal structures and history. It is broader than religion but religious values are at its heart. The concept of Jewish peoplehood is stressed. Reconstructionism is a humanistic and

naturalistic ideology which rejects the traditional supernatural concepts of divinity and a world to come and emphasises instead the creation of a just and co-operative society based on the values inherent in the religious tradition.

Reconstructionism originally operated within the conservative movement. Kaplan first founded *The Reconstructionist* magazine and then in the 1930s founded the first synagogue. Today there are some 60 congregations and *chavurot*, with about 7-8,000 members. The idea of *chavurot* (informal participatory groups) began in the reconstructionist movement. It has since spread and in America today Jews from secular to orthodox participate in *chavurot*. Reconstructionism advocates pluralism, egalitarianism and democracy within the Jewish community. Women are ordained as rabbis and the rabbinical college is probably the only one in the USA which has an open admission policy towards lesbians and gay men.

In appearance, a reconstructionist service looks very like a reform one. However, it omits supernatural references, such as the concepts of chosen-ness, miracles, the Messiah, or the revival of the dead. Yet reconstructionist rabbis are as likely to find work organising in the community as preaching from a pulpit. Kaplan would not have called himself a socialist, but social justice is a cornerstone of reconstructionism. Although it is not a political movement, its stress on social and democratic values causes it to attract adherents from the left. Michael thought that the stand against religious involvement characteristic in this country is less pronounced in the United States. Jews there, he felt, are more able to combine politics with cultural and religious forms.

We went on to talk about the community in Philadelphia where the Reconstructionist College is based, Mount Airy. It was established in the late 1960s and has been partly responsible for drawing many young radical Jews to the area.

There are now some 300-400 mostly young Jews in the Mount Airy neighbourhood; families, single people, single parents, lesbians and gays. However, while the college has been responsible for bringing into the area people who are keen to devote their time to Jewish organising and thinking, it is only one of a number of centres of a vibrant Jewish cultural, political and religious life in the neighbourhood. Nearby is the German-town Jewish Centre, which in the last 15 years has become the focus of a variety of innovative and creative cultural activities. There are congregations based at the centre experimenting with different liturgical forms and involved in discussions on the Torah, relating it to current issues and concerns. At the same time they are involved in social action projects.

There is also a lot of Jewish feminist activity in the neighbourhood, including women's groups for the study of ritual and a "feminist task force" of New Jewish Agenda. There are consciousness-raising groups and lesbian and gay groups with their own *shabbat* services. A neo-Hassidic group, *P'nei Or*, also has a high profile. This was founded by an ex-Lubavitch rabbi who in the 1960s explored forms of Eastern and Jewish mysticism, fusing them with what is termed "New Age Judaism".

On a more political level, New Jewish Agenda (the largest American Jewish left organisation) is well represented. It has around 350 members in Philadelphia and many of these live in Mount Airy. New Jewish Agenda (see *Jewish Socialist* 12) is organised around task forces dealing with different issues. These include the Middle East, feminism, Black/Jewish relations, Central America, Jewish identity and nuclear disarmament. It has also been heavily involved in promoting the idea of sanctuary for Central American refugees within the Jewish community.

New Jewish Agenda also works on a number of issues with the Shalom Aleichem Club. This is a secular and

Yiddishist organisation. Most of their members tend to be in their 50s and over. It is their children in many cases who are the New Jewish Agenda activists. They have gone on demonstrations together and participated in cultural events, such as secular Seders. They have also organised joint meetings on issues such as Black/Jewish relations, the Jesse Jackson campaign and around Central American and local politics. However, the Shalom Aleichem Club is the only organisation in Mount Airy with a strong pro-Yiddish orientation. There is not much interest in Yiddish in New Jewish Agenda and Reconstructionism emphasises Hebrew rather than Yiddish.

Kaplan wanted to see a cultural revival of the Jewish people, hoping to see Israel as a beacon of Jewish values but nevertheless affirming and valuing Jewish life in the Diaspora. The question of Israel and Zionism has caused much debate and rethinking among modern-day reconstructionists.

There are certain reasons for the strength of the reconstructionist movement in Mount Airy. Among them are the democratic traditions of Philadelphia and a strong tradition of immigrant and union organisation. Mount Airy is the oldest integrated neighbourhood in the city and different communities pay respect to each other's values. For instance, Martin Luther King Day is celebrated in synagogue. However, there are tensions. The Jewish community can at times be very insular and it was significant that the rabbinical college moved four years ago from a black area to a largely white and Jewish suburb.

Michael Feinberg feels the Jewish left has a lot of work still to do. The movement is generally middle class and often seems remote from "real life" concerns. Many Jews are involved in professions such as teaching, social work, or alternative health. They may seem like people interested in life style experimentation and communal living but with little analysis of class issues. Shades of *Ruach*? □

# RABBIS WITH A CAUSE

Michael Feinberg is a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia. Adrienne Wallman and Michael Heiser spoke to him about both the ideas of Reconstructionism and the community in which the college is based.



## Community cares

**Socialists have ignored the problems of an increasingly ageing community, particularly as they affect women, says Diana Neslen.**

The media discovered an anniversary last year. Surprisingly it was a time of left wing excitement: homage was paid to 1968. One son asked his mother where she was at that time (left wing struggle in his family being a female prerogative). "Looking after you," was an answer which disappointed him.

In 1968 the women's struggle was just beginning. Today most progressive organisations at least pay lip service to the notion that childcare provision is necessary if women are going to be able to participate in political activity. But if childcare has been recognised as important, another issue of major impact on women is still unrecognised. Unnoticed and surreptitiously, a demographic explosion is coming along for which we, in the west, are not prepared. Our population is ageing rapidly. By the end of this century the number of the most vulnerable elderly — those over 75 — will have increased by 53%. This group is most likely to suffer the sort of global (physical, emotional and social) crises which will require constant care and/or intervention. Yet we have not begun to consider the effect of this on all of us.

There has always been a tendency to dismiss the problems associated with age and the limitations on activity that often go with them. At a time when the proportion of very elderly people was small and the structures to serve their needs were just about sufficient to cope, many hospitals retained beds where frail old people were nursed. Those who required care but not nursing could be accommodated in local authority residential homes. Most authorities also maintained services to sustain the elderly at home. Families had a role to play but it was within bounds that most found acceptable.

Now the situation has changed. An increasingly ageing population requires more health and social service provision.

The bulge in our elders' demands has coincided with the rhetoric that pits the private sphere — the family — against public and communal provision. The state has closed its long-term hospitals for the

elderly and is limiting its funding to local authorities to provide care in the community. While the private sector has the resources to deal with one-off, non-emergency treatment, it is wholly incapable of responding to chronic need.

Ultimately families are expected to cope with hardly any supportive resources. The member who is targeted to do the work is usually the one considered the most expendable. The likelihood of assuming a carer's role is in inverse proportion to the importance of the person's position in the labour market. Therefore, daughters who are not working or spouses who are retired are more likely to take on this role.

The mere fact of undertaking this task is sufficient to limit and, indeed, undermine, the status of the carer. While, in the beginning, the demands on the carer may not be great, they will increase as the elderly person becomes more frail. In extreme cases the demands can be continuous: 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, with no break and no recognition of the work. The state and the community expect families to provide this service, and they give only derisory rewards.

The state often finds funds to reimburse those who offer such a service for profit. But to those who give the declining years of their life and most of their energy, the state and the community respond with a patronising pat on the head.

Taking on the burden of caring often leaves the carer isolated from friends, social life and perhaps family as well. Sometimes there is help for people to pursue employment by a judicious provision of day care. This often means that the employment itself becomes the leisure and social activity of the carer. There is no respite once the carer returns home.

The Jewish community likes to see the results of its fundraising and therefore has built a number of large residential homes. It is harder to exhibit the results of fundraising in terms of services provided than it is in terms of bricks and mortar; nevertheless, even what exists in that form is

less than what is needed. Most help in the home is provided by local authorities. The provision for day care made by the Jewish community is limited by geographical constraints and problems of transport. The transport provision is too poor to offer a regular service to most recipients and the centres are increasingly dependent on a diminishing pool of volunteers. As concern becomes privatised, people feel less committed to performing public social functions.

The Jewish community has had a long history of "looking after its own". Unfortunately, it often considers that "its own" live in Israel, and the bulk of the money raised is exported there, to the detriment of social provision here.

The Jewish community reflects the larger community of which it is a part. It marginalises the most vulnerable members of this community and limits their involvement in communal affairs — seeing them as net recipients of charity, not as contributors to the mosaic of society. And those who care are marginalised together with those they care for.

The job of caring for vulnerable people demands patience, organisation, understanding, commitment and energy. Nevertheless, it is considered unskilled because it is usually performed by women. The status of the work depends on the gender of the worker. But people who have committed their lives to caring often do so from choice and eventually would want no other role. At the same time, they have a set of specific demands. Their expectation is that they are servants of the state and people with dignity in their own right. As such, they demand that their role be recognised with the same rewards of salary and holiday that all workers are entitled to. This is a legitimate demand that should be pursued and supported by all people who consider themselves to be socialists.

Most vulnerable people need to retain roots in the environments where they are most at ease. Residential care at its best is still residential segregation. We do not learn to deal with our physical and mental decline by shutting the sufferers away, nor by callously letting the frailest members of our society loose on the streets to sink without trace. That is not the action of a concerned society.

Socialists should begin to consider this as a major issue. It will creep up on each of us without our being prepared and in time will affect us all, either as subjects or as objects. □

## J'accuse antisemitism in France

**Today's racist and antisemitic trends in France can partly be explained by looking back into history, says Tony Blend.**

During the Third Republic, a discussion on the Jewish Question took place. This was no genuine debate. The participants in it were predominantly antisemitic. Present-day attitudes towards Jews in France have their roots in a hundred years of antisemitic literature published between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War.

A genre of sub-literature, the anonymous tract, often violently antisemitic, sprang up in France. The most famous example is the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. It dates back to Tsarist Russia, one early edition appearing in 1905. This prophetic, antisemitic, anonymous tract contained a violent diatribe against an alleged world Jewish conspiracy. ("Protocols" has been repeatedly and widely re-published in translation since.) In 1937, it resurfaced in France to make its contribution to the debate on the Jewish Question, as did a children's ABC, with antisemitic pictures by each letter. Authorless, and without substantiated references, such anonymous tracts were able to vilify Jews without fear of either legal retribution or critical challenge.

Not all antisemitic writings took the form of the anonymous tract. Many were distributed by reputable publishers. Denöel, Bernard Grasset, Baudinière and Les Documents Contemporains were active in publishing collaborationist works, or in re-publishing "classic" antisemitic texts. Many were written by known writers of considerable reputation, such as Céline.

A study of antisemitic literature published in France during the Third Republic reveals a widespread attempt among participants in the debate on the Jewish Question to present a coherently argued thesis. Antisemitism was presented as a defensible intellectual proposition.

Furthermore, classic examples of the antisemitic thesis invariably followed a similar pattern of logic. There were often three stages to this logic. The writer first claimed to identify certain specifically Jewish racial traits. These were then used as a basis for a moral indictment of the Jew, and the Jew's social influence.

Finally, this was used to justify antisemitic solutions to the Jewish Question.

Edouard Drumont's classic nineteenth century antisemitic treatise entitled *Jewish France* (1886) exemplifies this three-stage antisemitic approach. Re-published in 1943, it provided a prophetic Third Republic vision to those collaborators in search of an antisemitic ideological precedent. Drumont's line of argument is divided up as follows:

1. *The Jew*
2. *The Jew throughout French History*
3. *Jewish Paris and French society*
4. *The persecuting Jew*

Drumont sets out to identify the existence of specifically Jewish traits. There is none so immediately recognisable as the Jew, he claims. The evidence? He sets out the following general description of the Jew's alleged psychological traits:

*The Semite is mercenary, greedy, scheming, subtle, cunning; the Aryan is enthusiastic, heroic, chivalrous, unselfish, frank, and trustful to the point of naivety. The Semite is earthly, seeing hardly anything beyond the here and now; the Aryan is a son of the skies, ceaselessly preoccupied by superior aspirations. One lives in the real world, the other in the ideal world. The Semite is a born merchant, his vocation lies in doing deals, he is a genius when it comes to bargaining... The Aryan is a farmer, a poet, a monk and, above all, a soldier: he is in his element at war, going joyously off to face danger, and brave death. The Semite has no capacity to create; by contrast, the Aryan is inventive. Not the slightest invention has come from the hand of the Semite, who nonetheless exploits others, causing them agony, exploiting the Aryan's invention to make profits which he naturally keeps for himself.*

In fact, Drumont's Jew appears to be little more than a negative projection of the Aryan. But what is significant is Drumont's emphasis on designating specifically Jewish characteristics.

A later exponent of this three-stage antisemitic method was a Swiss doctor, Georges Montandon. A collaborator under Vichy, Montandon was also a self-proclaimed specialist in the field of 'racial ethnology'. He wrote a series of articles and books claiming to conduct scientific investigations into Jewish racial characteristics. One such study, *How to recognise the Jew* (1940), was divided up as follows:

1. *Physical characteristics of the Jew*
2. *A moral portrait of the Jew*

The opening section attempts to prove the existence of specifically Jewish features, with the help of photographic plates depicting facial profiles of different racial types. The second section contains a moral indictment of the Jew.

Having claimed to establish the existence of specifically Jewish characteristics, and sought to trace the Jew's pernicious influence in society, the latter were then used as a justification for antisemitism. Thus, in *Jewish France*, Drumont writes:

*The Semite's defects explain why that natural antagonism which has existed between Aryan and Jew has perpetuated throughout the centuries.*

This highlights an important feature of the antisemitic thesis: the reversal which consists in asserting that the Jew causes antisemitism and a Jewish Question to come into being. Again, the logic rings familiar: the archetypal Jew exists, his character is evil, his influence pernicious, and antisemitism is a justified response. The Jew is a problem; to remove the problem, we must remove the Jew.

Nazi ideology was not of exclusively German origin. The germ of the Final Solution — the extermination of world Jewry as a solution to the Jewish Question — is to be found in many French writers: in Gobineau's theory of racial hierarchy, in the pathological ravings of Céline and in the nationalism of Brasillach. In Drumont, too, we find the unequivocal call for the Jew to be driven out of France and Europe. As early as the 1900s, antisemitic writers in France had called for the Jew's forcible expatriation. A French priest, Abbé Charles, in *Solution to the Jewish Question*, set out his plan for removing the Jew from France, concluding:

*The Jewish colony will once again be*



driven out of France. Rich, free and happy in our beautiful land, we shall once again assume with ardour its immortal destiny.

Later on, under Vichy, Thomas, in *The Causes of Anti-Judaism* (1942), sought to justify the deportation of Jews as a punishment for their "Jewish" ways:

*There is not a nation in Europe which is not haunted, hampered, troubled, and, for some of yesteryear, ruined by the presence of Jews on its territory. The Jew spreads unease, unrest, illness, unnecessary hatred, madness throughout society, wars both external and civil, and public or secret torment. A decision must be taken today in France, as it has been taken in Germany, Italy, Hungary and Roumania; the Jews and the Jewish half-caste foreigners must be eliminated from our country.*

Céline, in *Massacre* (1937), called for all Jews to be forced to take up position, defenceless, in the front line of the forthcoming war, and to be kept there throughout its duration, until slaughtered: "Jews to the frontline". He propagated the myth — prevalent among much antisemitic writing of the period — of the Jew as bringer of war. The Jew was the cause of the war, and the enemy, not the German:

*Did you know that all wars, and not just the last one, are planned by the Jews, long in advance?*

Lucien Rebatet, in *The Ruins* (1942), concluded:

*The Jews offer us a unique example in the history of mankind of a race for whom collective punishment is the only just reward. They stand before us with their crimes.*

Here the three stages of the antisemitic thesis come together: the Jews are different; their influence is evil; they must therefore be punished.

#### RECURRENT THEMES

One major and recurrent theme of such antisemitic writings was the idea that the Jew was dominating the Aryan. The Jew was deemed to control key sectors of the nation's public and private institutions. In propagating this myth, such antisemites were able to shift the attack on the Jew onto a different dimension. None too sure

of the answer to the question "what is a Jew?", they turned to ask another question: "where is the Jew?" The reply was simple: the Jew is everywhere.

The titles of antisemitic journals of the 1930s illustrate the myth of the ubiquitous Jew: *I am everywhere, France in Chains*. An exhibition organised in Paris in 1941 entitled "The Jew in France" was designed to stir up antisemitic fervour. The cover of the exhibition catalogue depicts the archetypal Jew according to antisemitic myth: bearded, aged, ugly, thick-lipped, conspiratorial and clutching a globe.

Céline, too, propagated the myth of the ubiquitous Jew. His antisemitism was pathological, his attitudes towards the Jew fundamentally irrational. In *Massacre*, he saw the Jew as depriving the Aryan of his national heritage. The France of 1937 had become "a Jewish colony". In Céline's world, there was no sector of activity free from the contaminating presence of the Jew. Céline compiled a list of alleged Jewish trusts which, he claimed, control key areas of French interests. The list is extensive: national finance, culture, commerce, industry, the media, energy, even the Vatican(!); in Céline's world, the Jew controls them all.

A further feature of antisemitic writings of the inter-war years and under Vichy is the advent of the phenomenon of the antisemite as pseudo-scientist. The antisemite sought to create a new, purified, Aryan science, from which the Jew was to be excluded. A proliferation of pseudo-scientific research centres sprang up under Vichy: the *Institute of Studies into Jewish and Ethno-Racial Questions* and the *Union for the Defence of the French Race*. Vichy quickly banned Jews from all areas of state education and science.

Precedents had already been set for the undertaking of such spurious research. In the mid-nineteenth century, Gobineau had alleged that the human species could be subdivided into a hierarchy of races, of varying degrees of advancement of "civilisation". He placed the white races at the top of this racial ladder. In his *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, written between 1848 and 1851, Gobineau set out his theory of racial hierarchy:

*History shows us that all civilisation stems from the white race, that none can exist without the help of this race, and that a society is only great and illustrious to the extent that, and the longer that, it con-*

*serves that noble group which created it, the group which constitutes the most illustrious of the species.*

What of the Jew, within this tripartite perception of the human species? The Jew transcended the classifying criterion of colour. He could be white (European), black (African), or yellow (Chinese). All the more need for a distinction between Aryan and non-Aryan races.

Such pseudo-scientific studies invariably entailed the misappropriation of scientific terminology. Montandon, the pseudo-ethnologist, attempted to lend credence to his antisemitic thesis by adopting the jargon of the scientific research paper. He produced a selection of photographic plates depicting allegedly typical Jewish and Aryan eyes, noses, lips and profiles (the details of which do not merit repetition). Montandon's theories are dressed in pseudo-scientific language to disguise their unscientific basis. Yet this disguise invariably degenerated into a virulent and blatant antisemitism. Thus, having sought to hide behind apparently authentic scientific terminology, Montandon then proceeds to designate a particular "Jewish smell". He further claimed that Jews were more likely to be the carriers of certain diseases (diabetes, arthritis and leprosy) than non-Jews.

So we can draw the contours of a hundred-year antisemitic debate on the Jewish Question in France. It is within this framework that we can set present-day antisemitism in France. Since the war, it is true, a more genuine debate on Jewish identity has taken place in France. However, the antisemitic participant in the debate has returned to take the place of Drumont, Céline and Montandon. The continuity of the phenomenon is striking. There is nothing new in what is being said today on the far-Right in France: in the designation of the Jew (or the immigrant generally) as different from the rest, as an evil influence in society, as someone to be got rid of. Nothing new, either, in the attempt to present racism as a defensible intellectual proposition, in the recourse to spurious scientific or statistical evidence to support such a proposition, or in the claim that "they're everywhere". There is still a battle to be fought. □

All of the texts referred to can be consulted at the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Centre, 17 rue Geoffroy-l'Asnier, Paris.

# A new black agenda

I welcome the publication of *The Black Agenda* as an act of political defiance and wait to see whether, as the introduction hopes, "it will form the basis for debate among anti-racists inside and outside the Labour Party, paving the way for a firm set of policies decided by Black people to be finally put into practice by British local and national government".

*The Black Agenda* is a very important document in that it brings together in one place a synoptic history of Black struggle in Britain with an analysis of recent political activity and campaigns, an account of current policy changes and legislative measures and an analysis of how these will affect Black people. Its 13 chapters, each devoted to a different topic, are packed with a wealth of information concerning detail of legislation, statistics and the names of campaigns and groups undertaking particular activities. Some chapters like the one on education contain analysis of new legislation applicable to all, Black or white. More than this, it tells the wider community, outside Black communities and outside the Labour Party, that Black people are continuing to fight racism coherently, consistently and unrelentingly.

But it is for me exactly at this point that the document begins to run into problems. A confusion in its target audience is apparent. *The Black Agenda* is a campaign document created to promote local discussion: a tool to enable Black self-organisation. The reality is that by confining itself to a statement of commitment to anti-racist activity it misses out the material which would make it useful as a campaign tool.

The stark fact is that Black people have been organising for decades and *The Black Agenda* fails to explain why support for Black sections locally will make any difference to that organisation now, and to show the implied links between socialism, the Labour Party and anti-racist philosophy. Many Black people who participate in anti-racist activity locally do not want to be card-carrying members of any political party, and in many instances the language used in the document speaks to the convert.

Central to the issue of local organisation and a source of bitter disagreement is the question of solidarity with oppressed people who are not Black. There is no consistency in the document on this point. "Black" is variously described as "politically Black" and "Asian and Afro-

Caribbean". It is recognised that racism has its roots in imperialism but no regard is given to the effects of the Prevention of Terrorism Act on the Irish community, although there is a demand for its repeal. In contrast, the chapter on racism and fascism contains the plea that "Labour Party members should be prepared to work alongside others in broad-based campaigns to counter race attacks" as "in the thirties when the Labour movement played a major role in repelling attacks by fascists on Jewish people".

If *The Black Agenda* is flawed on what it says, its omissions are even more apparent. I feel particularly aggrieved about these in the chapter concerning Black women workers which concentrates solely on the failure of the Labour movement to support Black women. It gives no recognition to the many instances of Black women organising together both at work and away from it. Black women are also at the centre of life in their communities. They act as support and mentor to their young people and as the organisers of self-help and local political action. In addition, many continue simultaneously to study. The profits of fashionable businesses are subsidised to an alarming degree by Black women forced into home working and by other forms of casualised labour. Yet there are no proposals for, for example, the reinstatement of protective employment legislation, or the tightening of health and safety measures. Nor are there proposals for the provision of opportunities and resources for Black women of any age to continue in formal education, or for the provision of specialist support health services for women, or the enhancement of maternity rights or even a demand for guaranteed places for Black women on Black section committees. There is only a superfluous exhortation to continue struggling, but now in Black sections.

Throughout *The Black Agenda* there is a recognition of the importance of elected local government to Black communities. Reliance is placed on it and a number of specific demands are made that councillors behave in particular ways; for instance, that they resist the poll tax legislation or that they act more promptly and appropriately in cases of racial harassment. Nowhere does the document seem to recognise that local government in the form in which we know and have come to love it is imminently threatened and will not be here to be influenced at all if there

Julia Burdett and Michael Heiser, respectively Black and Jewish Labour Party members who support Black Sections, take a critical look at the Black Sections' new plan for action.

are no clear alternative policies for its defence and regeneration.

Similarly, the document contains no reference to environmental issues, the position of the elderly, Black people in Europe especially after 1992, Black lesbian and gay people or indeed about controls over multinational and transnational companies, their profits and assets, to mention just a handful of omissions.

In the final analysis, my support for a Black section within the Labour Party is to provide a structure for influencing all the party's policies. A commitment to anti-racist policies and strategies is a minimum commitment. If *The Black Agenda* is to be a successful campaigning document, it must extend its scope and expand its content.

The Labour Party Black Sections have been in existence for some four or five years, albeit unrecognised by the party nationally. They have now produced *The Black Agenda*, a fairly substantial policy document. This covers areas such as state racism, immigration legislation and the threat of race attacks from specifically fascist groups. It also covers education, employment, housing and health. There are chapters on Black workers and Black women workers. The document contains a large number of legislative proposals in these areas, all presumably addressed to a future Labour government. The length, form and style of each section varies. Some sections contain complex analyses of legislation; others restrict themselves to a general introduction and a few campaigning points. The document could have stood being rewritten in a more consistent style.

An important section chronicles the effect of nine years of Conservative government on the inner city where most Black people live. It casts doubt on any success the "enterprise culture" is likely to have among Black communities, particularly if new small businesses are not backed up with support services and sources of further finance. Local authorities, in which a number of Black people have come to play a prominent role, have been able, to a partial extent, to shield inner city communities. But government expenditure curbs such as ratecapping, not to mention the threat posed by the poll tax, have severely limited the extent to which this is any longer possible. Housing legislation threatens the position



## REVIEWS

of large numbers of Black tenants and the viability of Black housing associations.

The section on education considers that the main issue that should be addressed is who is to control inner-city schools where the pupils are already largely Black, but where the staff and governing bodies are predominantly white. There is a need for an increase in the number of qualified Black teachers and governors, says the document. This should be the priority rather than the creation of a small number of independent "Black Schools". However, "Black religious schools" (which presumably means schools catering for particular religious minorities such as Hindus and Moslems) should have the same rights to voluntary-aided status as Christian and Jewish denominational schools.

The document warns that "The Tory tactic of control, through the development of a small Black elite and containment through oppression and enforcement will blow up in their faces". As against this, we are presented with an extensive list of policy proposals which the government could adopt. These include the government taking a lead through the establishment of contract compliance policies and the setting of "equality targets", the repeal of the policing and immigration legislation passed by the Conservatives,

the setting up of elected police authorities for all parts of the country.

But there is one crucial question that the document does not answer. This is how to build an alliance so as to ensure that the policies it supports come into being. The Conservative strategy towards the inner city is one of internal colonialism; but how is the largely Black inner city to make alliances with other sections of society so that it may command a majority? One answer is "Rainbow Coalition" type politics, which the document does not discuss. One step towards applying this in the British context may be to look at the scope for alliances with other minority nationalisms. Although the document mentions Ireland, within the context of supporting British withdrawal, it does not look at the alliances that could be made with Scotland and Wales.

But of course this raises the wider question of where is the Labour Party going and where is the Black Section going within it? Can the Labour Party, with its roots firmly in the white male working class, now accommodate the demands of national minority groups? Interestingly enough the section where the possible contradiction between a view of society based on "national" and one based on "class" oppression is mentioned is the section on Azania (to use its terminology).

The very existence of Black Sections has been hotly disputed by the more traditional sectors of the Labour and trade union movement. We wait to see if the new affiliated "Black socialist society" agreed at the Labour Party conference last year can meet the aspirations of Black Sections activists.

As Jewish socialists, it is tempting to look at the parallels between the position of the Black Section in the Labour Party and the demands of the Bund for autonomous status within a federal all-Russian party before the First World War. At other times in its history as a mass movement, the Bund proposed a strategy of cooperation with socialists from other minority groups and with those socialists from the majority ethnic group who were favourable to such alliances. When the Socialist Workers Party shut down their own Black section a few years ago they accused it of "Bundism", drawing upon the classic polemic between Lenin and the Bund.

By drawing up *The Black Agenda*, the Black Sections raise the question, at least implicitly, of how to put it into practice. In doing so, are they putting the politics of Bundism, by any other name, on the agenda of British politics? And what reply will they receive, both inside and outside the Labour Party? **MH**

## News of the Veld

*Middlepost* by Antony Sher  
Chatto & Windus £11.95

I was really looking forward to reading this book. My grandparents were Lithuanian Jews who emigrated to South Africa at the turn of this century and in Antony Sher's much praised first novel I hoped to find both echoes of my own family's history and a narrative which would focus on Jews in South Africa.

The book follows the misfortunes of Zeev Zali, sent by his family to pave the way for their future immigration to South Africa from Lithuania and to meet his uncle who is already there. Our anti-hero blunders through the book. He initiates nothing; events happen to him and he accepts them uncomprehendingly, a characterisation which carries uncomfortable resonances of the stereotype of the passive Jew. On arriving in South Africa, Zeev loses all his possessions but gains an identity. In order to earn enough to go to Calvinia to meet his relatives, he becomes a travelling peddler, *Smous* in Afrikaans, and thus, through no fault or desire of his own, acquires a new name as well as a new profession.

Truly an innocent abroad, with no language other than Yiddish, *Smous* survives his first years as an immigrant. A stranger in a strange land, he never really understands what is happening and fails utterly to communicate with any of the other characters he meets on his travels. A running joke is that he cannot even pronounce the name of his final destination, Calvinia, correctly and thus continually fails to get any further in his journey.

The action alternates between *Smous'* past life in Lithuania and the events leading to his departure and new life in South Africa. *Smous* copes with both his lives with incomprehension and an unnatural passivity. Indeed, alienation and failures of communication are the main themes of the book. *Smous'* most constant companion, Naoksa, is lost in her own country. She thinks he is taking her back to her people, *Smous* understands neither this nor anything about her. Even their eventual fumbling sexual relationship is characterised by *Smous'* ignorance and misunderstanding.

The book is peopled by bizarre and exaggerated characters such as April, the

Shakespeare-quoting Xhosa servant whose identity and language had been colonised by his master, Quinn, the drunken English former major; his ex-batman Garbett who owns a pet ostrich; Breedt, the embittered Boer, and many others. They form a parade of disparate types rather than naturalistic characters, an effect emphasised by Sher's deliberate use of heightened almost Dickensian language. Their lives coincide by chance rather than desire, and the clash of cultures and expectations lead to some tragic events.

Presumably this is meant as an allegory of South Africa's history. Yet the book has a very ahistorical feel to it. The sections in Lithuania ring true and give some vivid pictures of Jewish life there at the turn of the century, but the episodes in South Africa are, although more dramatic, far less real and immediate. Events are not set in a wider context and the characters are so strikingly peculiar that your interest is drawn to them as individuals rather than to the broader historical canvas in front of which they play out their lives.

MARIAN SHAPIRO

## An immigrant's tale

*Phineas Kahn, Portrait of an Immigrant*, by Simon Blumenfeld. Lawrence and Wishart, £5.95

At one point in this novel a Russian Jew sits in a sweatshop in London making cheap caps for black Africans in the British Empire. It is a vignette that with no apparent effort or artifice strips to its essentials the web of the global economy in the age of imperialism.

*Phineas Kahn* gives a richly textured description of life in the Pale in the 1890s, spanning through the story of the Kahn family the transition from traditional orthodoxy towards secularisation. Migration to the West is a part of this process, sweeping the central characters into the economic vortex of the industrial countries. Blumenfeld gives a graphic account of arrival and settlement in London's East End, the role of *landsleit* (home-town contacts) in providing work and accommodation, for less than altruistic reasons.

Kahn begins as a greener, experiences the vicissitudes of trades unionism, and finally goes into business for himself in an attempt to free himself from exploitation. But, despite his "independence", he finds that he is working longer and harder. His family live and work in a cellar that resembles a damp cave. As is often the case today, self-employment was a stage in downward social mobility and not the external sign of upward-thrusting entrepreneurship. It meant employing family because profits were so marginal that paid labour could not be afforded, and entailed back-breaking hours of toil with no respite from anxiety.

After his health finally collapses, Kahn goes to the United States, but returns to London and a brief spell of prosperity as a ragsman during the First World War. By now the Kahns live in an Irish neighbourhood to which they moved with trepidation, but where they encounter a working class solidarity that eventually triumphs over sectarianism, welded together by the indiscriminate terror of German bombs. The post-war slump wipes out Kahn's meagre financial advances and he is once again a recipient of aid from the Board of Guardians. Blumenfeld gives a sense of what this signified when he includes the

telling detail that the pots which poor Jews carried through the streets from the soup kitchen to their homes were stencilled with the kitchen's address, so the supplicant was not spared the public shame of poverty.

After the death of his exhausted wife, Kahn's life is invested with meaning through the aspirations he holds for his children. These ten offspring represent a cross-section of second generation immigrant Jews. Two get scholarships to schools and university and become teachers, one trains as a chemist, another as a doctor, a third as an accountant. Two go into the retail trades, one is a clerk (with a passion for body-building), one girl becomes a musician, another a housewife. Those that marry do so to other Jews. The research chemist moves outside London to a non-Jewish district where he feels cut off from a *Yiddishkeit* (Jewish culture) he thought was no longer important to him and dies of consumption, possibly a symbolic fate. Kahn's eldest daughter marries a Russian Jew she meets on holiday in the USSR. The couple settle in Biro Bidjan and it is to there that Kahn travels to live out his last years.

In some ineffable way it seems appropriate that Kahn should return to Russia. As his ship moves down the Thames and past the Tower, he reflects that "There it had stood at his very doorstep, embodying nearly a thousand years of English history, and he had never felt the desire to get closer to its grey stones. Somehow it had always seemed alien to him ... it represented a culture in which he had no part." Perhaps, Kahn muses, his children would feel more rooted there? Yet from the author of *Jew Boy* this ending sounds a false note.

In *Phineas Kahn*, as in his first novel, Blumenfeld delineates poverty with an unsparing eye. Throughout the book, music is a metaphor for all that is good and beautiful in human potential. Phineas could have been a talented player and composer but his skills were wasted because society condemned him to a life of poverty and toil. Blumenfeld could be accused of reducing his characters to cyphers of historical causes and his prose is superficially passionless. Yet this is part of his style and achievement. With merciless precision, he shows how human beings are swept along in the currents of mass migration, global economics and geopolitics. There is little room for emotion and creativity for most ordinary people in this world, and Blumenfeld erases the obvious marks of his own artistry as a tribute to the effacement and helplessness of those whose life stories he tells.

DAVID CESARANI





# 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 1989 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.

But there is an economic and political power structure in the community and this picture is drawn in the image of its more affluent and powerful elements. The Jewish community is diverse, as are the social positions and interests of its component parts.

In Britain today, with mass unemployment and economic stagnation, an increasingly authoritarian political atmosphere in which racist and chauvinist ideas have gained "respectability", we view the interests of most Jews as linked with those of other threatened minorities and the broader labour movement. Our common interest lies in the socialist transformation of society.

- \* We stand for the rights of Jews, as Jews, in a socialist future.
- \* 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.

JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP NOW  
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