


JEWISH SOCIALIST

— The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group —

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Race in class: could do better
Hierarchies of powerlessness
— the appeal of fascism

The hijacking of Jewish ethics
Staking claims to Auschwitz

Israel's oriental Jews: an oppressed majority

Remembrance or forgetfulness?
Britain, the Jews and the War

Editorial

There is something particularly poignant and artificial about divided cities so their reunification is an emotional experience. This is the case whether it comes about through military conquest, as in the case of Jerusalem in 1967, or unarmed mass action, as in Berlin in 1989.

Both as Jews and as Socialists some of us will treat the recent events in Berlin with caution. Perhaps the Left treats the threat of a resurgent German nationalism too lightly, particularly at a time when West German politicians, of both the extreme and mainstream Right, are beginning to use the vocabulary of that nationalism again. Recent references by Chancellor Kohl to the German *Volk* are an example of this.

In addition, as the facade of state socialism in eastern Europe crumbles, uncomfortable spectres loom. Take, for example, the resurgence of Russian nationalism, with groups such as Pamyat using the rhetoric of anti-semitism to attack Gorbachev. Or take the Polish church, one of the important backers of a Solidarity government in that country, but whose attitude towards the Carmelite nuns at Auschwitz, as James Baaden reports on page 4, is symptomatic of a deep-seated antisemitism finding new expression today.

At the same time, the possibility of a new form of socialist politics and society emerging in eastern Europe, particularly in East Germany, is a sign of real hope. The breaking

down of the Berlin Wall can also be seen as the breaking down of the fossilisation of practical socialist politics into state socialism as practised in eastern Europe on the one hand, and social democracy as practised in western Europe on the other. Such a division has, in essence, existed since 1919 and it is appropriate at this point to remember the European socialist parties, such as the Independent Labour Party and the Bund who, in forming the "Two and a Half" International, tried to pose a third option for socialists.

As state socialism reforms there is scope for a new type of participatory socialist politics which does not see consumer goods or consumption *per se* as the main goal of human endeavour.

Within such a politics, the aspirations of minorities, including the Jews, must find expression. The changes in the Soviet Union have already led to a much freer Jewish cultural life, including a renewed interest in Yiddish. The changes in eastern Europe may have very real lessons for the west if national affirmation of minority and majority cultures can find its expression in cultural creativity and the toleration of, and interest in, the culture of others as opposed to a renewal of intolerant and expansionist nationalism. Time will tell. But suddenly the stakes for both socialists and Jews seem much higher than even a few months ago.

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Cover photo: Wreath-carrying marchers (Jewish Socialists' Group, left) unite against racism and fascism, November 1989. Ernie Greenwood, *Morning Star*.

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Out of the attic

"They have hijacked Anne Frank tour" Tories accuse left wingers. This headline in the *Nottingham Evening Post* reflects the furious attack by local Conservatives on the Steering Committee which brought the Anne Frank In The World exhibition to the county.

The Tory councillors chose to focus on three or four events out of the 70 we had put together for the duration of October-November: Bernie Grant MP, talking about black people and the single European Market; Denis Goldberg from the ANC; Peter Tatchell talking about the Pink Triangle; and, astonishingly, Gerry Gable talking about the modern far right were amongst those chosen to be attacked. These events, according to the Tories, "sullied the purity of the Anne Frank message".

Enough of such nonsense. It would take long pages to describe the content and significance of months that included a film season, dance and drama, major exhibitions, radio programmes, music and

an impressive array of speakers, all well attended and appreciated, but still a few moments spring to mind: Majer Bogdanski lamenting the disappearance of his beloved Yiddish culture and engaging in a heated debate about the evils of Zionism; Bernie Grant relating being stopped for interrogation upon arrival in the Channel Islands and only later informing the increasingly embarrassed and turning purple Customs Officer of his MP status; the jamming session that evolved between Royte Klezmores and a local women's klezmer band; Marian Morrihan quietly and proudly recounting on the opening night how her Jewish lesbian group had initiated the whole event.

Not that the going was easy. Some elements of the orthodox Jewish community objected because of the involvement of lesbians and socialists, and refused to even have our posters displayed in their *shul*. One particular member of the *shul* went as far as lobbying the council to withdraw their generous support! At the same time, though, several of the most active Anne Frank workers were from the orthodox community.



Primary school children visiting the Anne Frank exhibition

The question of Israel and the Palestinians came up and caused heated debates leading to the Foundation in Amsterdam forbidding us from engaging with those issues publicly. Some of us, however, are still keen to do so and will separately organise a broad-based meeting to discuss peace proposals between Israelis and Palestinians. How can we ignore what is still happening in the occupied territories?

As the message that we intended to pass on from our activities was not only about remembering the Holocaust but also dealing with racism here and now, a programme of events was organised by a

local black education project entitled "In Search of the Motherland".

In general, the Left ignored our activities, apart from picking up on our initiative in relation to Israel and the Palestinians and organising their own meeting in support of the Intifada, perhaps showing their insensitivity or even a whisper of antisemitism by setting it for the anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Finally, we are in debt, so donations are welcome. Helpful cheques can be sent to Nottingham Anne Frank Committee, YMCA, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham.

ROSS BRADSHAW AND
RONY ALFANDARY

Gathering strength

"Red Ruach" was formed in 1988 by socialists, some Jewish Socialists' Group members and some not, who attended the Ruach conference. Since then it has met four times: in Sheffield (twice), Manchester and, most recently, Hackney. The atmosphere at the meetings has intentionally been quite informal. There has been no attempt to develop policy or take collection action as "Red Ruach": the main aim has been to provide an opportunity for discussion of political issues and their relation to Jewish identity. Thus, for example, issues of multiculturalism, racism and fundamentalism have figured prominently. Participants are involved in local and national campaigning groups, and one of the main functions of the network is to promote communication between Jewish radicals in different parts of the country and in different groups. The other primary goal of "Red Ruach" is to have fun! Each meeting has taken place over a weekend with a social event in the evening and one day devoted to a walk.

The discussions in Hackney covered different aspects of antisemitism, in the morning, while, in the afternoon, we tackled a subject close to the heart of many Ruach participants: the relationship between politics and spirituality. On Sunday we enjoyed a somewhat wet ramble round Hampstead Heath.

The next "Red Ruach" gathering will be in north-west London in January/February (see Fifth Column for details). We hope that the presence in Hackney of large numbers of newcomers, particularly from out of London, will be repeated.

DAVE KING

Security risk

A member of the Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) was recently refused entry to an all-ticket meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on War Crimes, even though he had an entrance ticket.

When the Simon Wiesenthal Centre revealed in 1987 that it believed there were at least 17 Nazi war criminals living in Britain, the JSG became one of the first Jewish organisations to take this issue up. We welcomed a speaker from the newly-formed All Party Group and publicised a statement calling for Nazi war criminals to be brought to justice as a matter of urgency. Yet at a meeting to step up the campaign on 24 October 1989, a JSG member who had been selling *Jewish Socialist* magazine near the venue was refused entry by the goon squad (security personnel) supplied by the Board of Deputies. The organisers ignored appeals to intervene. Of course, such

meetings must be kept secure but why does the All Party Group need to employ people who can't tell a fascist from an anti-fascist to look after their events?

Last issue we reported how another JSG member had been excluded from a Holocaust Memorial Service - also by Board of Deputies "security".

Both individuals excluded from these ostensibly anti-fascist events were part of a very large JSG contingent that marched with hundreds of others on Remembrance Sunday to mourn past and present victims of racism and fascism. The JSG laid a yellow star wreath alongside those of other organisations, including the Anne Frank Foundation and the Romani Union. The Board of Deputies and their "security" boys were surprisingly nowhere to be seen at this broad-based anti-fascist activity.

DAVID ROSENBERG

Coming soon ... Jewish Socialist fifth anniversary issue ... see back cover for details

Soul claim to Auschwitz

Over the past six months we have seen what appears to be a repeat of one of 1987's most emotive dramas: the Auschwitz Nunnery. There is a good reason for the return of this sad saga. The first uproar took place in early 1987, and was resolved by an agreement which clearly specified various measures which the Roman Catholic authorities undertook to implement by 1989. For one reason or another, this did not occur: the Catholic undertakings were not honoured.

The actual institution which provoked the original row, then, was a Carmelite monastery (Carmelite nuns term their communities "monasteries", not "convents") founded in 1986-87 on the perimeter of the grounds of the former Auschwitz I camp. Then, as more recently, the status of the different camps at Oswiecim (the Polish town known as Auschwitz in German) occasioned confusion and recrimination. The first camp at Oswiecim/Auschwitz, often called Auschwitz I, set up in 1940 by the German occupation authorities, was a relatively small concentration camp, not an extermination camp. As of late 1941, the majority of prisoners were non-Jewish Polish citizens, though already some Jews were held there.

Hitler's *Endlösung* (final solution), namely the mass extermination of European Jewry, was agreed by the Nazi leadership in January 1942. Shortly afterwards Auschwitz II, better known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, an extermination camp fitted with gas chambers and crematoria, was opened. It was a mile outside Oswiecim and about 20 times the size of Auschwitz I. During the next three years, perhaps 2 million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Gypsies were systematically annihilated there. Finally, after autumn 1943, Auschwitz III, some six miles from Auschwitz III, also called Monowitz, was opened. It was a slave labour camp next to the IG Farben petrochemical plant.

The opening of the Carmelite nunnery caused great consternation in the Jewish world. Furthermore, it more or less coincided with the Pope's May 1987 beatification of Edith Stein, the Jewish-born German philosopher who became a Catholic nun herself, indeed a Carmelite, in 1933 and was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. In its justification of her beatification (her ceremonial proclamation as "Blessed"), the Vatican had formally pronounced her a martyr, thus pretending that she had in some sense died for the Christian faith, rather than being murdered as a victim of Nazi racism.

These events combined to give many Jews and some Catholics the feeling that the church leadership was deliberately "colonising" the Holocaust, falsely depicting it as an attack on the Roman Catholic Church and encumbering it with the imagery of Catholic spirituality. In fact, anxieties had long focused on the proliferation of Catholic nunneries, chapels, monumental crucifixes, and so on, at a variety of camp memorials, including Dachau and Mauthausen. At the same time, Jews had become increasingly worried by signs that the church and other institutions in Poland itself were consciously downplaying the extent of Jewish suffering and instead giving distorted attention to the persecution of Poles. For instance, the official handbook published by the Oswiecim camp museum gave prominence to the plight of Polish prisoners and scarcely mentioned Jews. Meanwhile, at about this point, Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* graphically highlighted the continuing vigour of vicious antisemitism among many ordinary Poles. The nunnery controversy duly set off the inevitable explosion.

To be sure, many Poles were aggrieved, as has again become obvious this year, by a sense that Jewish objectors consciously ignored and discounted Polish sufferings at the hands of the Nazis. These concerns were aggravated, as has become even more obvious this year, by a good amount of purely antisemitic scaremongering about powerful international Jewish conspiracies. In any event, the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism and the World Jewish Congress came up with an agreement in February 1987. This

seemed to be accepted by the Polish church authorities and the Carmelites. According to it the nunnery would be moved by 1989 to form part of a new interreligious prayer centre at Oswiecim. This has not happened: hence this year's row.

Unfortunately, the immediate cause, namely the breaking of the 1987 agreement, soon vanished from sight as this year's dispute intensified. In the worst incident, in July, Jews and Poles physically clashed at one of the Auschwitz camp memorial sites. At the same time, efforts by liberal Catholic intellectuals in Poland to open a searching discussion on the hitherto taboo topic of Polish antisemitism were seriously undermined. On the Jewish side, there is a certain inability to recognise the historical fact that Poles and Catholics *did* suffer at Auschwitz, particularly at Auschwitz I, thus inflaming the conflict. Meanwhile, on the Polish side, church figures such as the Archbishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Glemp, startled the world with unmistakably antisemitic outbursts. Even more startlingly, the Vatican itself maintained a protracted silence, which was finally broken in October when it announced again that the nuns would be moved and the interfaith prayer centre established.

All of this took place, of course, against a backdrop of unique political upheaval as a Communist Party government relinquished power, giving way to a new administration dominated by Solidarity. Many Jews had followed the changes with not a little scepticism, particularly because of the much extended political and social influence of the church — something which the perspective of Jewish historical experience inevitably identifies as an alarming rather than a promising development. The last, and one and only, independent Polish state ruled by politicians of the "centre" and right, namely the 1919-1939 republic, was a disaster for its Jewish citizens, imposing antisemitic restrictions which rivalled those of neighbouring Nazi Germany.

During the 1980s, the western media's totally uncritical evocation of the Roman Catholic Church as the guardian of human rights *par excellence* has been observed by many Jews around the world with some bitterness. Their doubts are shared by some Poles: feminists are preparing for battles on abortion law, and the developing lesbian and gay movement faces Catholic demands for the criminalisation of male homosexual activity.

Meanwhile, what the nuns actually do has been largely overlooked — maybe due to a rather sentimental image of habited sisters praying for peace and justice. Not at all: in fact, the purpose of their prayers is the repose of the souls of the murdered; that is, they pray for the countless victims who for one reason or another are, according to Catholic teaching, in purgatory and therefore dependent on the prayers of the faithful on earth to advance them to heaven. Perhaps other, more immediate, objects for their prayers could be proposed.

JAMES BAADEN

A stitch in time

One hundred years ago garment production in the East End sweatshops was brought to a dramatic halt when thousands of Jewish workers went on strike. Their main demand was for the working day to be reduced to 12 hours!

קאמפן פון מאשינערס, פריעסערס
דיא שניידערס מייסערס אנגענומען

The story of the strike will be told by veteran trade unionist Mick Mindel at a Jewish Socialists' Group meeting on Sunday 3 December at 7.45pm at Friends International Centre, Byng Place, Torrington Place, London WC1.

DYBBUK'S DIARY

VIVE MARLENE!

Watching "Allo, 'Allo" the other night (I try to keep up with all these cultural programmes), I was annoyed (though I shouldn't have been surprised, I know) to hear René's bedridden maman, wishing to express her patriotism, cry "Vive Maurice Chevalier! Down with Marlene Dietrich!" OK, I know it's that sort of "comedy", but ... the injustice of it!

While Maurice was entertaining the Wehrmacht officers and collaborators in the nightclubs of occupied Paris, Marlene had refused to return to Hitler's Germany. Goebbels wanted her, as a Prussian officer's daughter and "Nordic beauty" to come home from Hollywood and make films for the Fatherland.

Asking to speak to him on the phone personally, she told the Führer's henchman what she thought of him, his Führer, and their regime. Goebbels said he was shocked by her "language".

Trying to placate the little Nazi, an obsequious Louis B Mayer hastened to apologise to Goebbels, assuring him that Dietrich's outburst was "untypical" of Hollywood's attitude to the Reich. So much for the MGM lion! And so much for so-called "Jewish power" in the movie industry.

DOES HE WANT A REPLAY? World War II was a Big Mistake; if only Neville Chamberlain had stuck to appeasement and not been pushed into interfering with Hitler's plans for Europe ... as it was, the outcome was tragic ... "Russian (and American) domination of Europe ... the destruction of Germany and the emasculation of the British Empire were probably worse for Britain than German domination might have been ... patience with Nazi Germany might have been rewarded."

No, it's not from the pen of some old Mosleyite, nor was it in *National Front News*. Maurice Cowling's article, "Why we should not have gone to war", was in the *Sunday Telegraph* (20 August). The Peterhouse, Cambridge Fellow says the War's outcome was a defeat for Britain. Not only did it bring the "emasculation of Empire", but all that stuff about equality of sacrifice, and state mobilisation of resources, made "socialism" sound respectable.

Still, things have been looking up a little: "Mrs Thatcher's achievement has been a necessary and painful reversal of almost every domestic assumption that the Churchill-Attlee coalition stood for".

The "Peterhouse Group" of Tory intellectuals is not without influence in high quarters (it also has some interesting friends in low ones). Changing views of history, deciding which continuity to follow, usually go with political turns.

Meanwhile, those drafting the government's compulsory menus for schools history, with Mrs T's recipe full of Gradgrind facts to chew on and enriched with "national values", have apparently decided to leave out the Nazis and World War II. The kids will have to make do with re-runs of "Dad's Army" and "Allo, 'Allo", I suppose.

Or could it be that, to change the metaphor, this exhibit has been temporarily removed from its glass case, pending rearrangement by the likes of Professor Cowling, perhaps? Watch out! If they'd like to reverse the War's outcome, they'll start by altering the history.

REDS SHOT IN HENDON
Worried about increased antisemitic incidents? Have no fear! The official defenders of our

community do not slumber at their posts; they are ever alert to danger. Take well-known intellectual Raymond Kalman, renowned authority on Jewish history and culture, guardian against "the enemy within" (that's us), and chairman of the Defence Committee of the Board of Deputies.

When some Jewish Socialists turned up on his patch in Hendon just before Yom Kippur, selling the magazine and leafletting shoppers, Kalman (reputedly known locally as Scourge Of The Late-Night Belgel-Fressers) had to do something.

After drawing on his mental resources to come up with appropriate abuse (eg shouting "cripple" at a JSG member with a limp), he rushed off home to return with his camera. Risking life and limb as he dodged the traffic, hotshot Kalman rushed about ostentatiously taking photographs of each Jewish Socialist — for his files? JSG members waved and smiled. One offered his name and address for a print, but the photographer didn't accept.

We hope that in his excitement he didn't forget to load film in his camera. Meanwhile, the residents of NW4 will, I'm sure, sleep sounder in their beds knowing that the ever-watchful Board of Deputies Defence officer is protecting them against the "real enemy".

Value judgements

by Maxim Ghilan

Our Jewish — and, for that matter, Israeli — ethics and morals are being hijacked, daily, by the likes of Shamir, Sharon and Kahane. Moving ever further away from what was the Jewish consensus for the last two thousand years, the Israeli establishment's leadership is defining Jewish and Israeli morals in terms of, first, what is good for Jews *only*, and second, in terms of what is written in the Bible...

continued overleaf

We cannot accept this. The time has come to liberate our hijacked ethics. Jewish religious morals as well as Jewish secular ethics developed throughout the diaspora because Jews had to live with others, among others, and thus felt the necessity to manage feelings and understood that differences are legitimate among living entities. The Jewish diaspora ethic was based on co-existence and mutual respect of various group-entities, Jewish and otherwise. The "New Jewish" garrison ethic is based on the belief that we Jews shall eternally live in our heads in ghettos, or xenophobic compounds, and exist at the peril of our lives in non-Jewish countries, obliged to keep apart from all nations while living in them. And, in Israel – the biggest, best armed ghetto of them all, a Massada-like fortress – to be condemned to eternal fighting or to immediate destruction.

We do not think this is right – or even true. The Israeli-spawned, fundamentalist "New Jewish" ethic is based on the "right" to impose our needs and decisions on others. Israeli and Jewish right-wing fundamentalists justify their views through two philosophically opposed arguments:

1. "Never again shall this happen to us. We shall do anything, pay any price, to prevent another *Shoah*, another Jewish Genocide."
2. "We must obey God's word, as vouchsafed in *Genesis* and as interpreted by Maimonides, and live, a people alone, on all of the God-given land."

These arguments are fallacious. They also are mutually exclusive. Any historian, economist, strategist or psychologist will promptly tell you that Jews are physically – and psychologically – less safe in Israel than almost everywhere else. Excluding perhaps Iran and Syria. The exclusivist, garrison-state spawned "never again to us" incantation inexorably leads to nuclear or chemical war in which Israel and some of its present enemies will be jointly destroyed.

Any Jewish theologian half worth his salt will tell you that Jewish Orthodoxy preaches bowing to God's will – be it as harsh as may be, as harsh as the European genocide, even.

Moreover, Judaism is based on a series of mutually contradictory views and analyses of the Jews' holy writs and oral tradition. Judaism is not *one* teaching or message: Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews are all true children of a tradition which has kept alive Jewish thought by adapting, shifting, changing, becoming more universal.

Finally, any reasonably sane thinker will agree that one cannot ensure security through belief. Ecstasy, yes. Personal fulfilment, surely – for some. But *security*?

National security, group security, can be ensured by three different means: dispersion of

the group – so that some of its components should remain alive, if the worst happens; an impeccably ethical group behaviour, which would evoke a similar response from other highly moral and sane group-entities; and finally, gathering sufficient strength – military, political and cultural power – to ensure the respect of somewhat less moral and less sane group-entities.

Note: Sufficient strength. Not too much, exaggerated strength, which would inevitably be considered a threat by others and evoke belligerent responses.

Therefore, in the words of Professor Martin Gouterman of Seattle, Washington: "Never Again" must apply not just to us but to everybody else, too. Never again a *Shoah*, a genocide, perpetrated against any people, any nation, any group entity." And it is our duty, as Jews and Israelis, to ensure that this should be so.

Because such have been the basic ethics and morals of the Jews, worldwide, for the last two thousand years. And now we pursue the Jewish, ethical mainstream. Sharon, Shamir and Kahane are ethical freaks, dissidents from the moral Jewish mainstream.

Our opponent, the so-called "New Jew", is a very sorry, pitiful, old kind of Jew: he (and she) belongs to the barbaric, theocratic era of the conquest of Canaan and the First Temple. They gather their strength, such as it is, from xenophobia and paranoia. While we believe in Jewish ethics, in Jewish liberation, in Jewish solidarity with the downtrodden, the oppressed and the underprivileged. We belong to the cultural and political mainstream of post-*Shoah* Judaism.

Religious morals and secular ethics

Before I wrote this paper, some left-wing Jewish friends argued with me that these thoughts would only be of interest to believers: liberal religious Jews, for instance those who might identify with Marc Ellis's Jewish Liberation Theology. They argued that left-wing Jews do not act as members of the Jewish group-entity – or entities – but rather as "individual" Jews who identify with left-wing political causes. I believe they are wrong.

Of course, many liberal-religious Jews, whether Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist or independent, will identify with this call for the reconquest of Jewish morals by all decent Jews, anywhere. But I am also convinced that Jewish ethics are an urgent subject of interest to many Jews who have become estranged from Jewish communities, whether in the diaspora or inside Israel, because of what these communities and their official or "major" organisations have become, how they

have been corrupted.

How many times have I heard the words, "I do not like the Jewish communities and institutions"? Yet, always, they were uttered by Jews who felt strongly. Exceedingly so.

Such Jews often live and fight according to liberal or left-wing ethics, but still feel very uncomfortable when the Middle East conflict is involved. Some abstain from dealing with the Palestinian issue altogether. Others, on the contrary, become anti-Israeli militants.

Why should this be so if they felt non-Jewish? If they did not feel, at gut level, that they belong to the Jewish group-entity or group-entities, that they, as individuals are threatened by this conflict? Or, at best, that since these things are being done in their names they owe it to themselves to do something?

And very properly, too. Being of the Left means being ethical. And what are ethics but responsibility towards others as well as toward oneself, at the individual, family, entity-group, national and universal levels?

True, most original left-wing thinkers, from Bakunin to Marx and from Engels to Mao, opposed the state, wanted either to destroy it or to have it "wither away". But internationalism at the end of the 20th century is not what it used to be. Nowadays, Marxist and left-wing thinkers are willing to grant at least the psychological and cultural permanence of group-identities.

Sometimes in odd ways. For instance, many left-wing Jews still have an affectionate yearning for the group culture and the group ethics of the Bund, the Yiddish-speaking, Jewish workers' movement which was active in Eastern Europe until genocide swept it away. The Bund's, too, were Jewish ethics.

Certainly no less – but also no more so – than progressive-Orthodox group ethics based on those positive biblical teachings summed up in the dictum: The Law, work and good deeds, "*Torah, avodah u'maassim tovim*".

Moreover, nowadays, Israel and the doings of the Israelis sweep Jews anywhere in the world into the orbit of the Middle East conflict. If you are Jewish, either you are bound to oppose deeds of the Israeli establishment, or you identify with it and say, as so many criminal patriots did before you, "My country, right or wrong". Adding, "Even if I do not live in it".

The only other alternative is to put aside your Jewish roots, fully integrate into another culture and/or religion. Forget. Leave.

This, of course, is possible, even theoretically legitimate, as any individual has the right to choose his or her life and even to change it at will. (Although as any healthy member of any group-entity, I, as a national but not religious Jew, personally deplore such a decision: I like keeping my Jewish group-identity strong.)

But if you are ready to continue being a Jew, you are virtually forced to relate to the Middle East. To Israel. To the Palestinians. To the war between the two. And fight for what is right, according to your own views and thinking.

Of course, I believe that any honest, good-hearted, rational Jew will then have to oppose the Israeli establishment. Will join the Israeli and the Jewish peace camp. Will fight for an Israel which shall live with others – with the Palestinians and the Arabs in that part of the world. (Not with the Finns or the Australians. Just with those who are Israel's immediate and larger-area neighbours.) I also think that if you are a good Jew and a rational one, you will adopt Jewish secular ethics or Jewish religious morals, as your case may be. And you will start actively fighting Jewish fundamentalism and cruel, irrational "New Jewishness".

Polycentrism or Israelocentrism

There are two ways of looking at Judaism worldwide: the Zionist way and the non-Zionist way. They lead us to philosophical as well as practical considerations. Zionism affirms the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, anywhere. At best, Zionists claim, Jews should emigrate to Israel, practise the "ingathering of the exiles". At worst, they can live elsewhere but follow political strategies dictated by Israel's leadership – *whichever* leadership happens to rule in Israel, whether Labour, conservative, right-wing or downright fascist. And, Zionists of course believe, Jews must support financially – nay, nourish – the Israeli state, whatever its deeds.

One justification given for this view is that Jews were killed by the Nazis, massively, during the European genocide and that persecution of Jews throughout history "proves" that all Jews have to get together to be safe and be strong. But who leads? The most ruthless or the most sane?

Non-Zionist Jews believe in the multi-centrality of Jewish life. They see that Jewish life was able to survive because Jews lived in dispersion, in various parts of the world; because they respected the behaviour and belief of others; and because this contact with others cross-fertilised their own culture and psychology – as indeed it influenced positively that of the group-entities where Jews lived. In the diasporas the Jews had to survive, be ethical, compete as well as co-operate with others. On the other hand, after a state was created in Israel many Jews there became nationalistic, rabbis became judges rather than what they used to be – teachers; co-existence gave way to exclusivism, wry self-deprecating humour to pompousness and paranoia; and ultimately – to xenophobia, the hatred of foreigners.

As an Israeli old-timer, a kibbutznik, once told me: "As long as we had to live with others,

we had to be smarter than most. As soon as we got a state, we became as stupid as the rest."

Jewish liberation

The problem of our hijacked Jewish ethics and morals pre-dates the violent, decisive outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities in 1947. This ethical problem was not caused by Jewish fundamentalism alone, not even just by the birth of Zionist ideology. In fact, the post-genocide ethical predicament of the Jews arose out of two parallel and connected developments: (1) the evolution of Jewish, or Zionist, nationalism in the historical land of Palestine-Eretz Israel, where another people, the Palestinians, was likewise developing its own national framework of existence; and (2) the destruction of European Judaism by the Nazis, which gave birth to the paranoid "never again to us" syndrome, thereby reinforcing exclusivist tendencies inherent in Israeli (and Jewish) nationalism, or Zionism.

On the other hand, Jewish fundamentalism, while deeply influenced by the *Shoah*, or European genocide, would not have been able to develop in its present form without a purely Israeli sociological development – the growing together of what were, originally, two contradictory and warring ideologies: secular Zionist nationalism, the then-ruling current which was originally based on Zionist Socialism and on the "Secular religion of Labour"; and traditional religious Orthodoxy, which in the forties and fifties rejected all nationalisms – including Zionism.

David Ben-Gurion, Labour's leader and founder of the State of Israel, lay the seed of disaster by granting to the Orthodox ideological control of the Israeli school network, of marriages, divorces and burials, of funds granted to Jewish as well as Christian and Moslem institutions, and, ultimately, control of all walks of life in Israel. By so doing, Ben-Gurion allowed the Orthodox to indoctrinate two generations and replace the state's originally predominant Zionist-Socialist ideology. The Zionist-Socialist ideology meanwhile withered away on its own, as the state became more and more dependent upon the United States and world Judaism and as the writer and the labourer gave way to the entrepreneur and the colonel as cultural paradigms.

Thus, when we address ourselves to the huge but not impossible task of liberating ourselves from dissident Jewish and Israeli ideologies based on theocratic fundamentalism and the "New Jew's" group selfishness, we become aware of two interlinked but separate tasks: Jewish liberation and Israeli liberation.

Israelis have to get themselves free from their present war-oriented ideology and culture, which allow fundamentalism to encroach on all

walks of Israeli life. They have to seek peace with the land's other people, the Palestinians. To work together with them. To share the land. To establish a more just, more rational, also a more productive and fraternal society inside the state of Israel. And next to the State of Palestine.

Jews throughout the world have to set themselves free from "false gods", from Kahanism, from the lure of the "New Jew" fundamentalist morals, from remote control exerted by one single – be it the most important – Jewish community. Judaism throughout the diaspora has to free itself from dependence upon Israel; from one religious congregation's ascendancy over all others; from cultural alignment upon Israel; from group egoism and group separatism. In other words, from selfishness and stand-offishness.

And, in order to practise their twin ways of ethical Jewish life – Jewish liberation and Israeli liberation – they have to help each other. Liberal and left-wing Jews must become the allies of the Israeli peace camp as well as fight for Palestinian human and group rights. Israeli peace fighters must understand that diaspora Jews are waging a separate struggle for their own, good, moral diaspora reasons; that they are the peace camp's allies, not out of some abstruse proto-Zionist and "left-wing" obligation to Israel, but rather because they have their own, moral, ethical, social and political concerns which stem from their own agenda.

Jewish and Israeli liberation is not a theoretical matter. It has everyday applications. Those who believe in it, inside Israel, will have to support Palestinian striving for self-determination and the plight of Third World countries, these "economic and financial servants" of the developed western world. Who so believes, in any given Jewish community, has to express solidarity with ethnic minorities, with the black and Latin communities in the United States, the Pakistani community in Britain, the Turkish and Kurdish minorities in Germany, the African and Arab communities in France.

Finally, let me also remind all of you, who are perhaps hesitant to take the first step on the long path toward Jewish liberation. This is not only something which we have chosen to do. It has been imposed on us by the other side, by those who have perverted Israeliness and are hijacking Jewish morals. Should we fail in our task, stop along the road, Judaism will decay and Israel disappear. Inevitably.

Without morals, Jews are nothing. Without ethics, an Israeli state is worse than a nightmare; a distortion condemned to rot and ultimately collapse into another genocide, another *Shoah*.

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The courage to say no

Simon Lynn visited Israel and the Occupied Territories as part of a NALGO delegation in August. While he was there he talked to soldiers who are refusing to serve in the Territories, some of whom have been imprisoned repeatedly for that refusal. We have not used their real names because it is illegal for them to talk to the press.

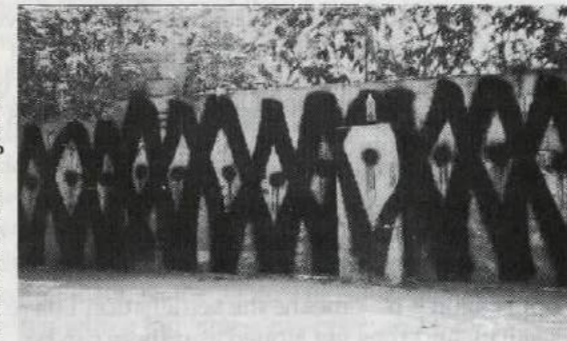


Photo: NALGO delegation
Gaza, where Israeli soldiers have covered the whole town with these menacing graffiti as part of the intimidation of the local population.

Simon How did you come to the decision not to serve in the Occupied Territories?

Avi By the time I was 13 or 14 years old I had already started to think about what was happening in this country. When I went into the army I decided that I wouldn't cross the Green Line (the pre-1967 border of Israel).

Simon Was the decision an easy one to come to?

Avi The decision was easy. When it came to the point of having to say no, it was more difficult, but I had to say no because I couldn't do those things. I was the only one in my unit to refuse.

Simon Did you have discussions with fellow soldiers about refusing?

Shmuel I have had a lot of arguments with people who believe that the Occupied Territories should be ours. I try to change their minds, but they won't listen. They have a clear mind about what they need to do. They want to go and kill people, shoot them, beat them.

Simon Did any people in your unit support you?

Avi Yes, of course. When they were ready to leave for the occupied Territories and I was staying behind, they wished me luck and said goodbye.

Shmuel I got lots of letters in prison. This kept me strong and kept my mind clear so I didn't break down. It's very hard in

prison, but I won't go to the Territories. Never!

Simon How has serving in the Occupied Territories affected soldiers?

Avi Some have become more aggressive and they hate all Arabs. Others have become more like me; they don't want to go to the Territories, they are just afraid of gaol.

Simon Some people say that you need to go to the Occupied Territories and argue against aggression and brutality with the soldiers there.

Avi Bullshit! When you go there you become bad. The situation changes you. You can't do anything about it.

Simon No women have yet been imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories, but women are prepared to refuse. Can you say something about this?

Miri Women are in the same refusenik organisations as the men – *Yesh Gvul* and the *Shministim*. *Yesh Gvul* works in the reserve army, and *Shministim* is the youth organisation which deals with people under 18 going into the regular army. The government is very afraid about the effect imprisoning women would have on public opinion so I don't think they will do it.

Tova They want the boys to do the fighting so they send them. They want the women to do things like office work. They take very few to serve in the Territories, and those are the girls who don't care. They think that if they routinely take girls to serve in the Occupied Territories, and any refused to go, that there would be a great test case about it because it would be the first time a girl had gone to prison. This whole subject is very sensitive. The journalists are looking for stories; the government doesn't want any more fuss than there is now.

Miri It would be an honour for me to refuse, but I'm not sitting and waiting to be sent to prison. I hope they won't ask me

because I know it is very hard in prison. I'm helping those who are resisting, so maybe it's not necessary for me to do it myself. I send letters, demonstrate, argue.

Tova Women have refused to go. Once some women refused and shouted out that they were prepared to go to gaol, but this did not happen.

Simon How many people are in gaol?

Miri At any one time there are one or two – a maximum of three. The trouble is, they take one or two and stick to them, sending them back again and again, trying to destroy them. But they fail. The refuseniks have not cracked.

Simon Are you succeeding in influencing others?

Miri Yes. In the late 1960s and '70s there was only a small group of radicals who thought about refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories. Now people who support Mapai, Ratz – parties of the centre left – have been convinced that this is the right thing to do. The Intifada and these campaigns against the Occupation have made the contradictions very clear. The right have moved further to the right, and the left have moved further to the left. This situation makes people think that the Occupation is not a good thing for Israel. But it still makes the right want to kill more Arab people; to make the Arabs leave the country and all this sort of thing.

Simon What would you like to say to people in England?

Miri Organise demonstrations at the Israeli embassy; send letters protesting about the Occupation – the government is very sensitive about this. Show them you know what is going on; that you care; that you know everything is not so beautiful in Israel. This is important because they think they can do anything in the Occupied Territories and no one will know about it. Write to people in prison; support and make contact with *Yesh Gvul* and *Shministim*.

What's left in Israel?

Reuven Kaminer is an Israeli peace activist and member of Shasi (Israeli Socialist Left), a non-Zionist group which advocates a two state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. He was one of the four people convicted under the Israeli "anti-contact" law after his visit, with 20 others, to Rumania in 1986, to talk to the PLO. This was the first such meeting after the law was promulgated. The appeal against the convictions has progressed through the Israeli legal system, and the verdict on the final appeal before the Supreme Court will be delivered in the next couple of months. David King met Reuven Kaminer during his recent visit to Britain.

DK: Could you say why you decided to break the "anti-contact" law and what you feel you've achieved?

RK: In November 1986 we were faced with a dilemma. We usually operate within the boundaries of the law, not because we have any illusions about the overall justice of our system, but because our strategic operation is based on lawful activity. But this was really raw. There were two aspects that demanded response. First, Israel has a surfeit of legislation against "terrorist activity" (our British friends have given us a full set of emergency regulations that are still intact in Israel: you can do anything to anybody with these regulations). The second law is a specific law against terrorist organisations, quaintly enough passed in 1949, by Ben Gurion against the Irgun and Stern gang, against Mr Shamir and his friends.

So this was a very raw vulgar piece of draconian legislation even by Israeli standards, which are almost colonial in their essence. We felt it was not enough to say "this was a bad law". That was the first thing.

The second thing was the cop-out element. If we hadn't shown up and continued the dialogue, then the Palestinians would have said, "Well, the sincerity, the motivation of our Israeli peace people is sort of thin, and really can't withstand a little bit of governmental pressure." So we decided to challenge the law head on. I want to stress *challenge*: it wasn't that we decided "we're breaking the law" – we felt that we had some sort of chance in the courts of fighting the law. We pointed out that the law was a new and negative development in the Israeli legal system. Our lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, summed up the whole case very

succinctly when he said that this is the first time a political norm became a criminal norm.

So we fought this legal battle and in fighting it we created space over a number of years where the legal situation was at best cloudy. And in this political space, the dialogue between Israeli peace people expanded and developed in the sense that more people in the peace movement in Israel and more of centre and mainstream Israeli society participated and met with the PLO after the law had been passed. Our contribution was to prevent a chain being broken at a particular stage, because if we had opted out we would have created a fear with regard to future visits. So we contributed to the continuation of visits and the visit contributed to a maturation of the realistic line of the PLO that found expression in the November decisions of the PNC and the famous speech by Arafat in Geneva.

DK: What is the current state of public opinion in Israel, in general and with respect to talking to the PLO?

RK: A number of processes have come to a head, and still left the scene at some sort of a deadlock. There is an overall awareness in Israeli society that it is the Palestinians, the PLO, that has to be talked to if you want to solve the Palestinian questions.

That was signified by the shift in the Peace Now position also around December '88/January '89 where they came out for talks with the PLO, again in the wake of PNC decisions. That reflected the culmination of a process in the educated middle classes which actually said: we cannot continue the way we're going, we must seek a two-state solution. Now the good news is that among the middle classes that approach is almost hegemonic, especially among people who are not directly involved in military or government establishments.

On the other hand, the tensions on the ground that are the result of increased oppression – that means the settlers don't have security and they get stoned and there can be kidnapping of Israeli soldiers – have been tremendous grist to the mill for the waves of chauvinism and reactionary responses. Polls at the same time showed mounting public reactionary sentiment in the direction of deportation.

People understood that the status quo was crumbling and something had to be done, and that was massive sentiment talking: either give them a state or expel them. We hope that as that unfolds and it becomes clearer that the

reactionary option doesn't really exist, or if it does exist the price will be something that Israel will be unable to pay politically, people will understand that the only viable solution that can be pursued is the two-state solution. So that's the position: not a basis for optimism, but not a basis for pessimism either.

The political significance of this is the weakening of the Labour Party, the strengthening of Left Zionist forces, that is Civil Rights and Mapam, and dovish forces in the Labour Party, and the strengthening of the right. Labour looks feeble and it's almost too late for them to say anything on the PLO without harming their constituency and alienating their right wing. On the other hand, if they don't move forward they're just going to be caught in the middle.

DK: What in your opinion are the probabilities of fascism or of a theocratic state developing in Israel?

RK: The danger is not of a theocratic state. That's a question of form. There are dangers of fascism and that's a question of substance. The dangers of fascism exist and stem from the continuation of an untenable status quo, which has so many volatile, explosive elements that can lead to undermining every sense of order, law and democratic tradition. It's all up for grabs, because the cycle of violence and tension is so connected with day-to-day life.

The settlers play a major role in this. I was looking for analogy; you have the National Front here in England: just imagine if all of them were armed and had walkie talkies and signals and had government budgets, and their own settlements and so on and so forth; they would be a lot more dangerous, and that's the situation with the settlers and they have an infrastructure which feeds into the military system. They will certainly make serious moves in the direction of fascism if any kind of serious peace development takes place. Now, how they will do this is classic; they'll provoke a confrontation with the Arabs. They have a system: you see this woman pushing the pram, pregnant and dragging another two toddlers along with her, going through the centres of the Arab markets, often with a gun slung over her; and they're letting their kids hike around Arab villages, just in the hope that some Arab will lose his cool, organised or not. And then they'll make a gigantic push in the direction to initiate a mass expulsion or some sort of confrontation with the government of Israel. They have enough supporters within the government of Israel to make the result of a confrontation between the settlers and the government an open question.

The theocratic issue is important but just as an embellishment on that situation. Israeli fascism if and when it comes will probably be

fairly theocratic, but that's not the important aspect.

DK: What is the role of Sephardi/Mizrachi Jews in the peace process?

RK: First, there is a section of dovish activity and sentiment in the Israeli Sephardi/Mizrachi community as they prefer to be called. It found fine expression in the meeting in Toledo which took place last July where there was a sizeable delegation of Israelis of oriental background, another in the chain of meetings with the PLO. That exists. But to think that we could bring over a working class community to the peace movement without bridging that development with the contribution of the left and/or the peace forces fighting for the social questions is the height of idealism. Who can move a working class constituency onto a peace basis, on the basis of an abstraction?

Incidentally, there were some developments between people in the development towns and people in Peace Now. They came to Peace Now and said change your name to "Peace Now – Equality Now". Peace Now discussed it very seriously and said they are an interclass structure, we can't take a class position. Not only are most of our people non-socialists, they are bitter anti-socialists or people who mock socialism; and not only do they not believe in class struggle, they think that's an archaic, Marxist jargon that they're very glad to overcome. They're people of the '80s and '90s. Sounds familiar?

Shasi believes in cultivating support of the masses for peace but it won't be done unless certain sections in the struggle for peace do active political, social and economic work in that constituency. Now the forces who can do that, who are clear on that question are dreadfully small in Israeli society. The strength of Shasi has to be clear: we're talking of a group of 50 people and maybe 500 supporters, which is a large group when you go outside of the party structure in Israeli politics. The difficulty is that we spend almost all our efforts in the peace movement in one way or another. And this is a classic deviation which we cannot prevent ourselves from doing.

● Veteran Israeli peace activist and popular broadcaster, Abie Nathan, was sentenced on 3 October to six months' imprisonment with 12 months suspended after pleading guilty to meeting with Yasser Arafat during 1988. He told the court: "I knew about the law and that breaking it entailed punishment, but I acted to save the lives of people and I am prepared to continue breaking the law to achieve this."

Eight other Israeli peace activists, charged with meeting the PLO in June 1987, pleaded not guilty. Their trial has been postponed to March 1990.

Observing Jews

Sharon Chazan
photographed by her
mother, Valerie Chazan



Contrasting cultures in East London



Saturday afternoon meeting of the Friends
of Yiddish at Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel



Relaxation time in the orthodox
Jewish community

Sharon Chazan was a talented and courageous young photographer whose commitment to her subjects and their surroundings provided the drive to portray facets of life which other people flinched from even seeing. Sharon was murdered two years ago by one of her subjects. She was only 24 but she left behind her writings and many, many pictures showing sides of Jewish life which large sections of the community prefer not to acknowledge.

The Jews of East London, often very poor,

are so far from what counts in the right wing climate of today that their images and the fabric of their lives are utterly denied.

Sharon's death was a terrible tragedy, not only for her family and friends but for all those who, through her pictures, have been able to glimpse behind the facade, but who will never, now, see her fulfil her promise.

These pictures were taken less than three years ago. They are still an accurate portrait of life in the Jewish East End of London.

JULIA BARD



I Lisky, editor of Britain's
surviving Yiddish newspaper

Hasidim in Stamford Hill



A regular attender at the Friends of
Yiddish, Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel



While fascism was slaughtering Jews in occupied Europe and Britain fought its anti-Nazi war, what was the position of Jews in Britain? Tony Kushner investigates.

"I hold no brief for Hitler," wrote a man from Accrington to the National Council for Civil Liberties in 1943, "but personally I would be prepared to shoot Jews till my arm fell off from doing so." Would he have really done so if given the opportunity? What would have happened to the Jews of Britain had we been successfully invaded in the summer of 1940? Both questions fortunately need not concern the historian. But there is a dilemma facing those who study antisemitism in Britain during the Second World War – a danger that a historical comparison with the events on the continent will be made. On the one hand, statements like those from the man in Accrington can be used as evidence that nothing was different in this country. On the other, the fact that no one was killed in Britain during the war because of their Jewish ancestry might suggest the essential feebleness of antisemitism in this country. Neither position helps us understand the subject.

To make direct comparisons between British racism and the Holocaust is to belittle both subjects – Britain would hardly register on a scale of prejudice that has the attempted destruction of Europe's Jews as the basis for measurement. Yet the real impact of racism in this country against religious, ethnic and racial minorities cannot be denied. White and black, even Jew and Gentile, have inhabited different worlds in twentieth century Britain because of violence and discrimination. In short, we must take British racism, including antisemitism, on its own terms.

Reluctant recognition

But what does this actually mean when we look at antisemitism on the Home Front? So many people asked me when I was doing

research on this topic, "Well, was there any?" Even now, having published a book on the subject* and having had time to reflect on it, I still cannot produce a simple or satisfactory answer. The difficulty in communicating the significance of British antisemitism is largely because of a general reluctance to take its domestic context seriously. Antisemitism in Britain during the 1930s and '40s is most commonly identified with Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirt thugs. Here connections to the fascists of Europe are easily made. But, despite the undoubted terror that the Mosleyites created in the East End and other Jewish areas, a concentration solely on this form of antisemitism is dangerous. Ultimately the British Union of Fascists, like the National Front in the 1970s, failed politically. In the war fascists contested four by-elections and won a total of 1,549 votes! Fascist violence and political activity in Britain must not be minimised but it must also not be allowed to monopolise debate about the nature of racism in society. In short, the major threat to immigrant and minority groups in Britain, both today and in the recent past, has not come from extremists but from mainstream society and its dominant liberal ideology. Fascist and antisemitic coteries survived the Second World War in Britain – hence their speedy revival post-1945 – but it was not their activities in the conflict in particular that caused difficulties to the Jews.

Then, as now, the role of the state was vital in determining the position of the minority in society. A surface examination of this role might exonerate the war government and justify the endless statements that have been made to the effect that there is no antisemitism in Britain or that it is of a harmless nature. Put bluntly, the state not only disapproved of antisemitism, seeing it as a weapon of the Nazis, but also viewed it as a threat to its own well-being. Furthermore, it is rare to find officials expressing a blatant form of antisemitism in

government debate. One who did, complaining about "wailing Jews" wasting the government's time over the "exaggerated" problems of their co-religionists abroad, was widely rebuked by his colleagues. What then is the problem? The odd snide comment by some public school snob does not suggest the existence of profound prejudice within society as a whole. But such an analysis again uses a Nazi yardstick to measure intolerance in a liberal democracy. The opposition to "antisemitism" from the British state did not imply any support for Jews at home and abroad or sympathy towards Jewishness in society as a whole. On the contrary, the liberal analysis of the causes of antisemitism put the emphasis on the Jews themselves and on alleged Jewish behaviour.

Jews to blame

The individual who typified this approach best was Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary from 1940 to the end of the war. Morrison has been portrayed as a friend of the Jews, a Socialist Zionist and anti-fascist. His opposition to fascism, despite his releasing of Oswald Mosley from Brixton in 1943, cannot be questioned. Yet Morrison always held that Jews were somehow partly to blame for the growth of fascism in the East End. Their supposed activities as sweated employers, bad landlords and communists had encouraged the Blackshirts, argued Morrison in the late 1930s. In the war Morrison was to develop the logic of this theory further and put it into action as state policy. Any rescue attempt that might lead to the influx of more than a few hundred foreign Jews into Britain was rejected by Morrison because such a policy might lead to serious antisemitism. Why? Because the alien Jews would bring prejudice with them, he believed. A sense of caution is necessary here – there was a distinct limit to what the British government could have done to help – but in no way did individuals like Morrison push

policy beyond a cautious, indeed tokenist, stance. Such caution was based on a paranoid fear of antisemitism spreading amongst the British public. This in turn was founded on a distrust of the Jews and a belief that the Jews themselves created antisemitism.

My own detailed investigation of public opinion based on Mass-Observation records, the government's own Home Intelligence files, diaries, press debates and other contemporary material suggests that the fears of Morrison and others were misplaced. People did not necessarily like the Jews – indeed there is widespread evidence of quite powerful cultural antipathy at this time – but the vast majority, unlike the man from Accrington, wanted the government to do its utmost to rescue the Jews of Europe. Like so many historians and commentators of today, the British government of the Second World War did not differentiate types of antisemitism in society. Jews in the 1930s and '40s were still excluded from large sections of British society – from jobs, clubs, housing estates, schools, medical colleges and even certain government departments. Those on the right, including a large section of the Conservative Party which unofficially supported an antisemitic but respectable weekly, *Truth*, saw the Jews, even British-born Jews, as essentially alien. Those on the left believed that Jews, through international finance, had tremendous power in society. In the war all these stereotypes and prejudices came together in the shape of the alien Jewish "blackmailer" – a character invented to act as a hate figure to release all the pent-up frustrations of the Home Front. Yet, despite all this prejudice and antipathy, only a minority actually supported the Nazi extermination programme or would have begrudged efforts to rescue the perishing.

Distrust of Jews

So far this account has stressed the role of the state in the

persistence of prejudice. In the internment episode in the crisis period of 1940 the state, or sections of it, was again crucially important. But here it must not be seen in isolation – the general public and the media were also involved in the policy to intern and deport 27,000 "enemy aliens", most of whom, of course, were Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. Why did it happen? Was it a military necessity? The military situation cannot be ignored. After all, in June 1940 a Nazi invasion seemed imminent. But why intern a group probably representing the most anti-Nazi section of the British population? To explain this we must again turn to the fundamental distrust of Jews amongst powerful forces in Britain. Those demanding mass internment – the right wing popular press and the military and security forces – had never trusted the Jewish refugees. The crisis of spring 1940 – political and economic as well as military in nature – allowed a change to take place within the state. The security forces were now able to direct policy and instituted mass internment. Yet at the same time no opposition to this treatment of the refugees was heard. Surveys showed that only one per cent of the population objected to internment and even the *Jewish Chronicle* and *Manchester Guardian* welcomed the new measures. Moreover, Mass-Observation believed that it was now quite respectable to express openly antisemitic sentiment. In short, the normal restraints operating in British society had simply disappeared. The state, rather than trying to calm down the public, actually encouraged intolerance by allowing alarmist broadcasts about the "fifth column" to be made on the BBC.

The internment of refugees in the war shows the limitations of that famed British decency when the country was under threat. In the war, however, other developments also indicated that pressure could be put on minorities without there being a crisis in society.

One brief example, that of evacuation, will illustrate what the historian Bill Williams has referred to as the "antisemitism of tolerance". Asevacuees, Jewish children faced many of the same problems of their gentile equivalents. But they faced an additional difficulty because of their religion. On the one hand, violence and outright rejection of Jewish children was rare. On the other, it was very common to pressure the child into accepting Christianity as the price for acceptance. The net result was that Jewish religious observance and identity was severely weakened during the war. It is this type of conformist pressure as well as the existence of racial violence and discrimination that has made the minority experience so difficult in twentieth century Britain.

Antipathy and insecurity

The Second World War was not an easy time for the Jews of Britain. They fought bravely in the forces abroad and in the civil defence units in the blitz at home. In both, Jew and gentile combined in common humanity. Yet the "Jew" was still seen as somehow different from the "Englishman". British Jewry was aware of this differentiation and of the existence of discrimination and widespread antipathy towards itself in society as a whole. Its behaviour, especially towards the government, was therefore timid – reflecting its general insecurity. The impact of British antisemitism therefore was not insignificant, it was not just a quirky feature of war society, a minor embarrassment or irritant. Taken on its own terms, British antisemitism influenced government policy and made life uncomfortable for the Jewish minority. The horrors of Auschwitz were avoided, but is that any reason to dismiss the tenacity of British racism, here illustrated clinging rudely to the Home Front?

* *The Persistence of Prejudice: antisemitism in British society during the Second World War*, by Tony Kushner, Manchester University Press, £29.95 (hbk)

'Only one per cent of the population objected to internment'

A Childhood



Liesl as a child

once removed

Many children escaped the Nazi genocide by being sent to Britain by their parents who stayed behind. Karen Merkel talked to the people who made the BBC film about the Kindertransport, *No Time to Say Goodbye*.

In 1938, the British government allowed 10,000 Jewish children from Europe into Britain. Ostensibly, the condition of their entry was that the Refugee Committees took full responsibility for them up to the age of 18 or until they could return home. It was assumed that they were essentially "in transit" to the United States or Israel where they would join their parents, but, of course, war broke out and that never happened. Each child had to have a guarantor in Britain in order to obtain an exit visa. As there was no financial support from the British government at the time, the evacuation was organised by volunteer refugee committees up and down the country – many of whom were Quakers. Some children had families to go to, others spent time in camps or hostels.

No Time to Say Goodbye, shown on BBC2 last August, told the story of four of those children who left their homes for Britain on the Kindertransport. The film begins with the recent reunion of over 1,000 "kinder" from all over the world. People told their own stories very simply, and they were inter-cut with dramatic sequences which dealt very effectively with the most traumatic events such as Kristallnacht. Fascinating archive material from Movietone News and the home movies still in the possession of one of the contributors was worked into the stories so they avoided becoming mawkish or nostalgic. It was particularly interesting to hear how the people themselves analysed that period and how they feel about it now.

One of the women in the film, Karola Regent, has written a book, *The Ninth of November*, about her experiences. She describes her happy childhood in Dusseldorf and how she and her little sister, Lotte, left home for England where they had some extremely mixed experiences. The book draws on her diaries, which she diligently kept for many years, and also uses the very moving correspondence she maintained with her parents until they were deported to the concentration camp of Lodz. I asked her why she was called Karola Regent when the name on her book appears as Hannele Zumdorfer. She said "that was who I was then, I married and changed my surname. No one here could pronounce Hannele and I have become someone else." This is an understandable reaction to her experience of Kristallnacht.

"My father in his nightshirt stood speechless beside the bed – he was on his way to fetch us – my mother was sitting up, her black hair streaming over her shoulders, her eyes wild with fear. She gathered us into the bed with calming sounds. Seconds later there burst into this room a horde of violent monsters, their faces contorted into raving masks of hatred... they were wielding axes, sledgehammers, stones and knives. They rushed about the room smashing, throwing, trampling. A Brownshirt advanced towards our bed... I was unable to move or utter a sound. My mother's legs were stretched beneath the sheet (the eiderdown had long ago been ripped away). I saw the monster raise his axe about to sink it into the middle of the bed and right through my mother's legs. Did I scream or only think I did?"

Later in the film she tells how her father, on hearing that many children had been taken from the trains before they reached the border, had jumped onto the back of the train (unknown to her) and hung on all the way until it reached Holland safely, where he

left unobtrusively and went home. Her descriptions of events aren't all said. There is a wry account of her first "guardian", Mrs H, whom she thought must be the Wicked Witch of Rickmansworth. Mrs H and her husband assumed that, being German, the little girls must be enemy aliens and be subjected to a stern interrogation.

Had it been difficult telling her story for the programme? "I enjoyed the whole business," she said. "I've gone through the trauma of going back to Germany before, so it became a bit like play acting. Obviously, recounting the experiences of 9 November was painful and I was worried about how they'd edit it, but in the event I thought it was very thorough and dignified. I've had marvellous feedback. I'm really glad I did it – so many people don't know anything about it."

Liesl Silverstone was another contributor. Her father was a keen amateur film maker and photographer, and fortunately someone kept all his home movies and family photographs for Liesl until after the war. Liesl said that for years she was unable to cry and mourn for her loss. She told of how her mother was rescued from a concentration camp and returned to live with her daughter, describing how the "mummy" she had left behind when she was a little girl, and had missed so desperately, returned as someone completely different. This led to heart-rending times. Liesl now works as a counsellor in London, and said of her participation in the programme: "It seemed quite appropriate to do it – it anchored the experience and reinforced things for me. I had a fear that they'd use me and issues would be distorted, but it absolutely didn't happen, they respected us. Afterwards, I had many phone calls and letters from people I'd known ages ago. People even stopped me in the supermarket! I think one of the reasons the programme seemed to have such wide appeal is because it represented a lot of issues about separ-

ation and oppression very well. I deal with this every day through my work and, not surprisingly, I am totally opposed to any form of oppression on a personal and political level. I am a socialist and know that this, together with my work, which is about now oppressing others, is a direct result of the Nazis – of having had no say."

Professor Leslie Brent's story in the film was more restrained. He spent a long time at Dovercourt where he was lonely and unhappy. He appeared in a Movietone news feature and on the wireless at the time. Both the film and the recording were remarkable for their clarity and the sadness of a little boy who had already begun to adopt a stiff upper lip. He believes that if he had not left Germany he probably



Liesl's family

would not have become a scientist at all. Of all the contributors he is the only one who raises the question of the lack of support from the British government, who could have done so much more, and also from the Jewish community itself.

Professor Brent felt very positive about making the film: "It proved to be very good psychotherapy for me. I hadn't talked about my past that much and fully confronted it – not that you can ever do that. I had tended to sweep it under the carpet – making the film helped me to bring it out into the open. It encouraged me to talk to my children. Both my wife and my children were more burdened by my past than I'd realised."

"After making the film my wife

and I went with our son to the town where I was born. Much was still the same. It's now in Poland, near the Baltic. The house in which we lived was completely unchanged; it was quite extraordinary. This was the first time I'd been back and it was very emotional and quite taxing. I'm not sure I'd want to go back again. The visit was a healing experience but it was only through the film that I was able to go back. Also, I've had a lot of feedback from people I don't know at all and some from people I knew 30 years ago and of course much from friends. People were very positive about the film; it touched many lives. I just had to do it – to bear witness – as a duty to my family, although I hated the exposure it gave me.

"Some people have been silent – I suppose they were too embarrassed to talk to me about it, although I know they saw it. My criticisms of the government, then and now, are quite clear. It was important not only to express gratitude, although that is there of course. I often think, 'Why couldn't more people have been saved?' Of course my parents had some responsibility for feeling so safe in Germany but when they did try to get out they couldn't. The American government is to blame too. They insisted everyone had a financial sponsor so of course poor people couldn't come out.

"I also feel that the allies could have done more to prevent the concentration camps from continuing up to the last moment – it was certainly known about in government circles. There were plenty of us who would have been willing to go behind enemy lines. Today, I feel very unhappy about the current goings-on towards refugees which are ungenerous to put it mildly. Look at how the Kurdish refugees are being treated, for example. I suppose as a refugee myself I feel it very strongly."

Sue Davidson, producer of *No Time to Say Goodbye*, describes herself as a Jew and a socialist.

She said that the idea for the film came from Karen Gershon, author of *We Came as Children*, and developed to be broadcast on prime time. Sue and Sally George, the director, had to make complex choices about the content of the programme.

"Certain aspects of the Kindertransport had to be explained and covered, such as people's different geographical origins, the different destinations they went to on arrival, their relative wealth and class backgrounds, their attitudes to Judaism and so on. We also wanted contributors who could talk to camera and who had a clear analysis of the events. This was principally so we wouldn't have to feature 'experts', like child psychiatrists, to examine issues like emotional damage.

"We also wanted to feature a range of feelings such as the bitterness of those whose families didn't survive; the experiences of those who'd been abused by English families; and the opposite extreme of those who did very well and feel extremely grateful to Britain.

"Of course there was the feeling, common to nearly all, of the horror of surviving the Holocaust, of losing family and friends and being left with the guilt. Our contributors were complementary – each one having a strong experience of a different part of the whole story. For instance, Karola Regent has the most vivid account of Kristallnacht, Leslie Brent has the strongest story of arriving at Dovercourt, and Liesl Silverstone has a touching story of her mother's return."

She thought that her own Jewishness helped the contributors tell their stories. "I think it helped them relax and alleviated any fears of antisemitism, especially when so much was to be revealed. I did feel I had a particular responsibility; after all it was a means of ensuring trust which of course could have been easily abused."

Being Jewish had most resonance when she and the crew stumbled upon a neo-Nazi rally in Dusseldorf and she decided

that they had a responsibility to try to film it, a "golden but horrific opportunity". They didn't have a permit to film, but flashed their BBC cards and were allowed in. "Before we could get to the rally we had to go through a series of vast lobbies, a bit like a deserted airport. Echoing down the corridors and through the lobbies was the ghastly ranting voice. I was completely appalled and overwhelmed. We reached the inside of the stadium and saw the hundreds of people and all the insignia – this, coupled with the quality of the sound, was too much; I burst into tears. I knew enough German to put together the gist of what was being said. It was totally racist and nationalistic, aimed mostly at migrant communities and particularly at Turkish people. Hitler's name was used many times, clearly to be exonerated. Amazingly, they let us film them, except for when we tried to go up on to the platform. When we left, we filmed the demonstrators protesting about the rally outside."

Sue Davidson admires the courage of the people who told their stories in the film: "I thought the contributors were very brave, especially those who had never talked about it before. I think it was cathartic for them – the film did a job that they as individuals couldn't do, by telling their family, us and the public who they really are. My most personal moving experience was at the reunion when I witnessed the long overdue memorial service. A thousand people came from all over the world. A great many had never had a chance to have any kind of funeral service and had lost touch with Jewish practices and culture altogether, so for them to participate communally in this service and, for many, to hear and read Hebrew again for the first time since their childhood became very highly charged. The whole process of making the film has reminded me vividly that, no matter how comfortable and integrated one can feel, antisemitism can be just around the corner."

All in the mind?

In the last issue of *Jewish Socialist* Les Levidow analysed Israel's actions as resulting from a collective paranoia. Dave King responds

In the last issue of *Jewish Socialist* Les Levidow described his recent visit to Israel and Palestine, and used his experiences to provide examples of Israeli "paranoia". As everyone knows, states all over the world encourage and exaggerate security fears as a means of ensuring social discipline. There is nothing new in this, and it certainly happens in Israel. What is different in this article is the contention that in Israel this is so extreme as to amount to a collective paranoia, literally, not metaphorically.

What evidence are we offered that Israeli culture is literally paranoid? Firstly, the evidence is exclusively anecdotal. It does not derive from sociological research or in-depth psychological profiles of Israelis. At the beginning of the article it is suggested that we take the term paranoia seriously and all the examples offered are then interpreted in a "psychological light". Thus, when Israeli soldiers engage in random brutality, such as burying terrorist suspects alive, or less randomly firing CS gas into refugee camps, this is taken as evidence of the enactment of fantasised persecutions of Jews. Why? Other examples are extremely weak: a conversation with a wishy-washy (surprise, surprise) Peace Now demonstrator; being told by a border guard to be careful of Arabs looking to hijack cars. It is almost too ironic to note that since Les left Israel just such a hijacking did occur and 15 Israelis were killed.

It's worth noting in passing

... she was unconscious, she was involved in the historical memory of the SS knock at the Juden's door, as if to displace the IDF knock at the Arab's door. At this time there were regular reports of soldiers snatching 'suspects' from their beds, beating them up, imprisoning them, even summarily executing them. Yet somehow it is the victims who must be better guarantors of the persecutors' security. I wondered whether at least the Now organisation would...

... attacks attributing victimised Other. It would be comforting to believe that only "iron fist" hardliners indulge in such paranoia, seeing Israel as inherently threatened by Palestinians' presence. I would suggest, however, that such paranoia is normal in Israel, even that it defines a national culture. During the two weeks of my recent (and first) trip there, I repeatedly entered examples of this into my right-wing Israeli. There were close ties between actual Israeli Jews and fantasised persecution of Jews – almost as if the Jews had been invited to legitimate East...

that in fact the threats to Israel's security are real. In order to advocate changes in Israeli policies culminating in peace with the Palestinians, it is not necessary to pretend that threats to Israeli security, and to Jewish lives, do not exist. They do exist; they are not mere inventions. Les nowhere acknowledges this. As Reuven Kammer says in his interview (page 11), the threat of a fascist explosion in Israel derives precisely from the fact that the cycle of violence and war in Israel is so closely connected to everyday life. Perhaps it would help to imagine what the situation would be like if Ulster were on the British mainland.

In a similar vein, throughout the article the Holocaust is treated as a mere historical event which becomes distorted into a propaganda weapon to encourage paranoia by Israel's leaders, and a weapon of moral blackmail. It is a commonplace, and an undeniable one, that the Holocaust has been used in this way. But for one so interested in psychology, Les pays little attention to what actual and real effects the Holocaust has had on the psychology of all Jews, not just Israeli Jews.

In fact, one of the major problems with the article is its whole approach to the question of the role of the unconscious in politics. For example, at one point the "collective unconscious" is invoked. This semi-mystical term, deriving from Jung's writings, bears clear marks of his involvement with *Volkisch* ideology. Nowhere are

we referred to the marxist attempts such as those of Fromm, Marcuse, Reich or Adorno to integrate Freud into theories of politics. In fact, notion of mass psychology is seen as entirely unproblematic. Thus, in order to describe the psychology of a whole culture, of a whole nation even, it is only necessary to use the analogy of a well-known individual psychopathology and transpose it by arithmetical multiplication to the nation. But individuals and cultures are fundamentally different entities, and have entirely different histories. Cultures do not grow up in nuclear families. Individuals are not split into classes, parties, etc. The use of the notion of paranoia to describe a culture works as a reasonable analogy as long as we don't try to push it too far. In which case it's hardly news that Israel is obsessed with security. But the whole point of Les Levidow's article is to push the analogy a lot further, and it just doesn't work.

One implication of this description of Israeli culture, which Les draws out, is that, since the culture is in fact suffering from a full blown psychopathology, it is not actually amenable to reasoned argument, to being persuaded that it is in the interests of Israel to make peace with the Palestinians. It is certainly no help to the cause of peace to pretend that Israel is a "mad dog" state. Nor, if we judge by the evidence of Les Levidow's article, is it credible.

Concealed razor blades

In 1919 Liverpool exploded in one of the earliest anti-black riots in the UK. Black people were thrown into the harbour and drowned. The rioters, white men, were reportedly frightened of "losing their wives" to black men arriving on the boats.

There are those that doubt that there is a connection between sexism, racism and fascism. The fascists, however, are in no doubt.

"...we would wish to see a society that respected and cherished the feminine role as principally one of wife, mother and home maker ... there are few greater symptoms of national decadence than the contemporary derision of maternity and domesticity, part of the same rebellion against nature as equalitarianism and other fashionable delusions of liberalism." *Spearhead*

"Dear Queer Commies, When we get elected you just watch out. We are going to sort out you commies and queers. You lot don't stand for anything in this country. We do. All you do is help wogs and queers and lefties. Well this is going to stop. When the National Front get in you lot had better run for it." *Letter to Leeds Gay Centre shortly before it was burnt out*

Dave Landau looks at what underlies these connections and how we can mobilise to defeat fascism.

Effective anti-fascists do not have the luxury of "choosing" their strategic priorities abstractly. One prerogative rules – *defence of communities under attack* from racists and fascists. The majority of such communities are Afro-Caribbean and Asian but they might be Jewish communities, gay communities, women's centres, Irish people – whichever targets most need defence in a particular area.

Provided that we ground our work in the needs of these communities we can't go far wrong. We will avoid the errors of adventurism, such as seeking skirmi-

shes with the local thugs without ensuring that these communities are well protected against retaliatory action, or, on the other hand, engaging in anti-racist propaganda towards whites whilst these communities are being terrorised just around the corner.

But isn't this a reactive approach? Shouldn't we have a positive strategy for defeating racism and fascism? In the present climate in our area at least, anti-fascist work is of necessity reactive. However, the defence of communities and, more particularly, the consequent possibility of building and supporting resistance in these communities, actually forms the basis of a *positive strategy* to defeat fascism – in fact, the only effective positive strategy.

Theory of lies and mistakes

Insofar as it has taken seriously the way in which fascism gets support within oppressed classes, particularly the working class, traditional anti-fascist politics operates on a theory of lies and mistakes. Essentially it argues that in an economic crisis when the living standards of the oppressed classes are severely attacked by inflation, unemployment, cut-backs and so on, the fascists present a series of lies – "the blacks have taken your homes and jobs", or "the Jewish monopoly capitalists have put you out of business and put up the prices"... Given years of mis-education by the lights of bourgeois ideology, people buy these lies – racism among the "masses" is thus essentially about *incorrect ideas*. It follows that the task of anti-fascists is to combat the lies. We do this either by stopping the lies being spread (no platform for fascists) or by propaganda, by explaining that capitalism causes all the problems and is the common enemy which we must unite against. According to which political tendency you belong, these two strategies are mixed in varying proportions.

Although these two approaches to combating fascism are

essential limbs of anti-fascism, they are inadequate as they stand because the theory of consciousness on which they stand is inadequate. This becomes clear as soon as we look at sexual political strands of fascist activity. Take homosexuality. The fascists attack gays, burn down gay centres, write nasty articles. It is clear that they are appealing to prejudices that already exist – queer bashing isn't a fascist prerogative, and yet nobody believes that gays have "come in from the outside, taken away jobs and homes", or put anybody out of business. Gays are not blamed for the capitalist crisis. If the theory is inadequate to account for the anti-gay, anti-women lines in fascist propaganda, perhaps it doesn't properly understand racism either.

At best the traditional strategies tear the fascist stickers off the wall, but they ignore the razor blades concealed beneath, the cruel cutting edge buried in unconscious emotional structures which fascists appeal to. We have seen the blade in action repeatedly throughout history. We saw it when waves of witch-hunts ravaged medieval Europe and the puritan states of America, condemning the entire population of women in some towns to a fiery death. It has followed Jews through millennia of pogroms. It was wielded by lynch mobs through the southern United States. It brought fascism to power in Italy and Germany. It is the same power which today tells Murdoch and Maxwell that the way to sell newspapers is to put Myra Hindley on the front page day after day, interspersed with Aids-carrying gays and drug addicts.

People don't do these deeds simply because they have the wrong ideas or even an erroneous system of ideas (ideology). What we see here is people's apparent desire for objects of hatred against which they can be arbitrarily cruel or, at least, give tacit support to such cruelty.

As socialists we constantly chronicle the cruelties of this

world, but we like to ascribe them to the degeneracies of the ruling class. For example, we can comprehend the atrocities of war carried out under the strict authority of officers through a chain of command back to imperialist warlords. The atrocities of the lynch mob carried out willingly, even enthusiastically, by sections of the oppressed classes on each other leave us speechless and hopeless. Bourgeois ideology is hardly a sufficient explanation, yet somehow socialism has to be born of human material.

Partly our despair results from the idea that once we are in the world of the emotions and the "unconscious", immutable "human nature" takes over. Until very recently, at a theoretical level, the terrain of emotionality has been almost entirely occupied by those for whom "human nature" is the common currency, so this is the received wisdom. However, a critical understanding of these areas has been emerging, especially through the work of feminists – another reason for the anti-fascist movement to take sexual politics seriously.

Towards an analysis

We can present at least a thumbnail sketch of an analysis rich enough to transcend the "lies and wrong ideas" theory of reactionary consciousness within oppressed classes, and which can usefully inform important aspects of anti-fascist practice.

Our "razor blade" examples come from very different historical periods and social orders. This might suggest that we are dealing with something that has nothing to do with social organisation. But the key concepts and social structures relevant here apply generally to class societies, despite their dramatic transformations over centuries. In some respects at least, like a river, the surface of society changes rapidly, further down the rate of change decreases.

It is in the nature of class society that the majority of people have little or no control over their lives.

People are the prisoners of circumstances – *powerless*. People do not create what they are; they enter into relationships that mould them, which they are not even aware of, so that their identities are given unconsciously. Identity is *mysterious* even though it might not appear as such.

Class society is characterised not only by a hierarchy of power between classes, but also by a *hierarchy of powerlessness* within and between the oppressed classes. This hierarchy has been determined primarily by the related historical structures – imperialism, patriarchy/fraternity and the Church.

In periods of social peace the unconsciously formed identities of those in the relatively stronger positions within the hierarchy may make them feel they have individual power. We may not be able to dictate the course of great historical events but we seem to be free in our "inner world" and this is what counts.

In a period of social crisis this is no longer true: identities and expectations are thrown into disarray; people are confronted with their powerlessness. The extent to which this happens in the different oppressed classes will depend upon the parameters of the particular crisis. What do people do when confronted with their own powerlessness? They attempt to overcome it and seek ways through which to become controllers of their own destinies. This does not, however, mean that they will organise to overthrow the society which is oppressing them. There are other ways of finding power even if that power turns out to be illusory. Precisely because the identity which appeared to natural and stable in a period of social peace (to those not on the bottom of the pile) was *mysterious*, it is not surprising that the search for its recovery may take a nasty turn.

The hierarchy of powerlessness provides a "solution" to the discovery of powerlessness. People can achieve some kind of power by lording it over those in a weaker

position within the hierarchy – they do that already, only this time it becomes a deliberate wielding of power with the energy of hatred: man against woman, white against black, straight against gay, Gentiles against Jews. This violent turn within these hierarchies manifests itself constantly, even in periods of social peace. The relevance of social crisis is in relation to how it takes on a potentially mass character as the confrontations with powerlessness occur at a mass level. This is precisely what forms the basis of mass mobilisation, whether by the ruling class for fascism in capitalism or by the clergy for a witch-hunt in medieval feudalism!

Confronting hierarchies of powerlessness

An inescapable conclusion from this analysis is that the strong independent organisation of communities under attack is a precondition for the defeat of racism and fascism. Without that central confrontation to the hierarchies of powerlessness, fascists will always have a base within the oppressed classes. Only when it is no longer viable for people to find their identities against those in a position of weakness will fascism wither and die. It is the assertion and resistance of those perceived as "weak" which will bring that day about. Isolated from such resistance, traditional ideological and physical strategies have no effective coherence. Centred on it, these aspects of anti-fascist practice find their rightful place.

Where that resistance is already there, an anti-fascist movement can build solidarity for it. Where it is not, or where it is trying to find itself, our inevitable daily work of defence, support and so forth (this is where we came in, remember) can only serve to foster it.

It might appear that we have forgotten all about the labour movement, "the centrality of the class struggle" and so forth. We haven't. Only a mass movement based on the working class can,

ultimately, put an end to fascism. But it can only achieve that if it has freed itself from racism and sexism, or is, at least, committed to combating racism and sexism. Our discussion of fascist mobilisation is already situated in the context of struggle, *within* the working class. Focusing our atten-

tion away from the most reactionary elements, on to the organised labour movement specifically, history shows clearly that it has been the existence of the independent organisation of women and black people which has made it possible to begin to put these issues on the agenda of the trade

unions and the Labour Party.

Real working class unity, whether against fascism or positively for socialism, will only come about through the dissolution of the hierarchies we have referred to. And the challenge to those hierarchies will be directed by those who suffer under them.

Out of the melting pot into the fire

Multicultural education failed to confront the racist fabric of society. But anti-racist educators have failed to meet the needs of black children and their communities, says Ralph Levinson.

Anti-racism is going through a bad time. The media seized upon the controversial events in Dewsbury and at Highbury Quadrant and Burnage schools for its own cynical purposes to discredit anti-racist educators. The government, in abolishing ILEA, has removed one of the few authorities which encouraged the implementation of anti-racist curricula. The proposals for the history syllabus of the national curriculum omit World War II and make the British empire the centre of the world much to the joy of right wing bodies like the Hillgate group and the journal, *The Salisbury Review*, in which Roger Scruton and Ray Honeyford espouse the view that state racism is a myth. Religious education must now be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character". So much for cultural pluralism. Some of the more "progressive" bodies were not slow to twist the knife. ILEA suspended the anti-racist Highbury Quadrant teachers and the NUT offered no support. One ILEA inspector declared through the columns of the *Times Education Supplement* that she would like to do away with the term anti-racist education because it was about time we stood for something.

The only positive aspect of this macabre compilation is that we know what we are up against. The New Right is releasing its ideology in all its stark horror and the soft Left offers only token resistance. The time is ripe for progressive teachers to regain lost ground. This means formulating a clear and workable strategy and reappraising anti-racist education and where it comes from.

As a philosophy, anti-racist education emerged from a critique of multi-cultural education which was an issue in schools from the late sixties, when it was generally accepted that black children were under-achieving. The Rampton Committee was set up in 1979 to "review ... the educational needs and attainments of children from ethnic minority groups..." and to make recommendations. Many Tories recognised that they had to make inroads to black sections of the population and some Tory authorities like Berkshire made remarkably radical proposals. The Rampton Committee eventually came under the chair of Lord Swann and the whole report was published in 1985.

The recommendations of the Rampton/Swann committee are liberal in intention. They note the socio-economic influences in creating racist sentiments, the insidious racism of institutions like schools and the need for multicultural education in all-white areas. They point out the desirability of general language awareness amongst pupils. The proposals are too long to list here but they are unobjectionable in themselves. The problem is the context. What the committee sought was "not a radically different social structure, but rather an extension of this already existing pluralism..." The implication was that presenting Black/Irish/Jewish culture in a positive light would combat racism.

As a secondary school teacher in Brent, Ealing and ILEA in the late 1970s and '80s, I worked in schools where there was a great emphasis on multicultural education, though it had demonstrably little effect in changing opportunities for black and working class white students. In most cases multiculturalism was symbolic and ahistorical. There were Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Irish evenings with ethnic foods and music. The odd *menorah* appeared at schools where there was a reasonable number of Jewish pupils. The curriculum was extended in its cultural breadth but it tended to exacerbate racism in white children, leaving black children disillusioned. For example, in teaching science I had materials showing the way science was applied by people all over the world, particularly in developing countries. There were booklets on soap making in Ghana, beer brewing in Zambia and hut building in Guatemala. Though well meant, these materials were tainted with a patronising racism which reinforced the stereotype that these were primitive societies. There was no reference to colonialism or the punitive debts incurred from the West.

The Swann Committee had reservations about the efficacy of mother tongue teaching in enhancing the educational performance of ethnic minority children but supported the teaching of languages like Gujarati and Urdu in the modern language curriculum. These reservations were borne out by my own experience since I taught in a school with a majority of Asian students. Unfortunately, the teaching of community languages had little support

from management, and students regarded them as subjects to be avoided.

Black parents had little time for multicultural education. They saw it as a sop that seemed to increase disadvantages. They wanted their children to take their O-levels and A-levels, acquire skills and go on to higher education. Steel bands, Indian food and Irish dancing did not interest them when their children were patently under-achieving. That was the message that came through during parents' evenings and from the black parents that I knew personally. If black people were going to have control over their own lives then they had to have access to the institutions that wielded power, which meant passing exams. The schools that the black community set up to make up for the failures of the comprehensive schools were run in the traditional mould - rote learning, the three Rs, an emphasis on facts, not skills. The diagnosis was correct, the solution was wrong. Academic success does not mean power or control because it does not take into account the central role of racism in society.

The Institute for Race Relations criticised the recommendations of Rampton/Swann in a statement headed *Anti-racist not Multicultural Education*. One of its most important points was echoed by many anti-racists: multiculturalism leaves unaltered the racist fabric of the education system. It is an adjustment process, not a force for changing the values that make that society racist. Giving a positive image of black people will not stop racism which is a result of ignorance of economic and political causes and the means by which power is exerted and controlled.

The issue of class relations is central to the anti-racist critique. Multiculturalism separates race from class, and thus presents no threat to the state because it diverts the attention of ethnic minorities away from the class struggle into problems of race and culture. The central question for the Left is how race operates within the framework of state power and class relations. Multiculturalism ignores the material basis of racism, as Stuart Hall says, particularly that form of racism which deflects the conditions and problems which face white and black working class people into issues of race.

Anti-racist education set itself the aim of recruiting and empowering black teachers and devising a curriculum which sets racism in its historical and class context. The task was to work out a strategy to implement a curriculum that would provide a political analysis of an economic system and the way it interacts with ideology. Cultures would be treated as having their own internal struggles. Thus the *Seder* table is more than a symbol signifying Jews. It represents the story of a people engaged in its own liberation and it would be made clear that "Next year in Jerusalem" is a highly problematic political statement, not a quaint saying from the past.

Whilst I agree with the central thrust of the anti-

racist philosophy I believe it fails on the logic of its own analysis. Schools are the vehicle for state education and, in proposing a strategy that challenges the base upon which the state operates, anti-racist teachers set themselves up for attack and ridicule by the media vis-à-vis the state. There are two basic problems.

First, they threw out the baby with the bath water. Although multiculturalism divorced race from politics in its assumptions, it did achieve something, particularly in primary schools where common issues and a thoughtful curriculum brought communities together. Through its contradictions it raised the consciousness of many teachers who then began to have second thoughts about the nature of a multicultural curriculum.

Secondly, they tried to forge ahead too quickly without taking the parents with them. They did not achieve grassroots support on a scale that would have provided a successful momentum. The message hardly got through to teachers, let alone parents and the public. They lacked organisation despite the dedicated work that was being done.



Photo: Anne Krisman

Though schools are institutions, the agents within schools - students and staff - have the power to transform that institution. But they cannot do it in isolation. Racism must be fought by the schools and community in concert. Paradoxically, just at the time the Tories are launching their offensive, there are encouraging signs of resistance. Community action groups are flowering as a result of Tory policies on housing, the poll tax, the spate of privatisations and the attack on the health service. The time is right to bring schools into closer contact with these groups, to allow them the use of their premises, to encourage discussion between students and local people who are engaged in these struggles.

The most important strategy is the raising of consciousness amongst students themselves, not through an imposed curriculum, but through an engagement with real issues. An example is the book written by Zeynep Hasbudak, a primary school pupil, with teacher Brian Simons, and the video, *Zeynep's Story*, which shows Zeynep's struggle against deportation and the feelings of her friends, teachers and family. Though the immediate struggle was lost, everyone involved learned about the racism of the immigration laws and gained the tools to carry on the struggle and organise again.

M e s h u g a s n

From a milkman in Boyarka to a tailor's son on a Mediterranean island, Steve Ogin explains his *meshugas*!

Look, let's forget politics, Let's talk "*meshugasn*" (*meshugas*: madness, insanity; craze, frenzy. Pl *meshugasn*). The best musical ever recorded, and my all-time favourite at the moment, is the Yiddish version of *Fiddler on the Roof*, starring Shmuel Rudenski as Tevye. There, now that's a *meshugas*. (By the way, if you ask me about this I'll say "Oh, that was last week's *meshugas*!")

Fiddler on the Roof was loosely based on the Sholem Aleichem stories about *Tevye der Milkhiger*. I thought this translated as "Tevye the Milkman" – but it doesn't (ha! so much for a state education!). Marie Waife-Goldberg, one of Sholem Aleichem's daughters, explains in her book *My Father – Sholem Aleichem* that the word for a dairyman is "*pakhter*". The Yiddish nickname, *Der Milkhiger*, means "the Milky One" and has a humorous and affectionately mocking connotation.



The cast of "The King of Lampedusa"

Sholem Aleichem's stories were loosely based on the life of the *real* Tevye, a dairyman who used to deliver to the family at their summer dacha in Boyarka, an hour by train from Kiev. When the real Tevye learnt that Sholem Aleichem had published stories about him in the periodicals, he complained. People had started calling him the Milky One and laughing at him. In addition, he protested to the family, "He writes stories about me and my daughters! I never had any daughters!"

Marie Waife-Goldberg says that in time, however, Tevye began to enjoy his fame and added that it was good for business, with new customers eager to tell their friends back home that on holiday they were served by Tevye, the Milky One.

My "*Fiddler*" *meshugas* is part of a bigger, more serious, *meshugas*: a "Yiddish theatre" *meshugas*. This explains why I bought a rather tatty copy of *Theatre Caravans* by Harendorf recently. Harendorf was the author of the most famous of the London Yiddish theatre productions – *The King of Lampedusa*. This show, which ran for six months (nearly 200 performances), revolved around the story of how Sergeant Sid Cohen, a London tailor's son, became known as the "King of Lampedusa". Lampedusa is a small island in the Mediterranean which served as a naval base and was held by the Italians with a garrison of 4,000. Sergeant Cohen, on a reconnaissance flight out of Malta, had to make an emergency landing on the island in June 1943. The Italians, who had survived heavy British bombardment the day before, thought that Sergeant Cohen was the first of an invasion force, and surrendered. With great coolness, Sidney Cohen accepted the surrender and became famous as "The King of Lampedusa". In the Grand Palais production of Harendorf's play, which opened on 31 December 1943, Meier Tzelniker played Chatzkel Kagan (Sam Kagan's, ie Sidney Cohen's) father; Anna Tzelniker played Sam Kagan's fiancée; Yidel Goldberg played the King of Lampedusa; and Phil Bernstein compiled and arranged the music.

OK – so you've had it up to here with culture and your *meshugas* is politics. Here's politics.

The second act of the "*King*" is a dream sequence with Sam, the King, declaring that the constitution of the new state will be based on the Torah, that the Temple will be rebuilt and the Sanhedrin restored. Harendorf introduced two Reform Rabbis into his emotionally charged second act – the premier was only eight months after the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The Rabbis, who appear in the last scene, petition the King not to form a Jewish army as it will increase antisemitism in the Diaspora. Harendorf writes that the Rabbis speeches were met with shouts of "Shut up!" and "Get off!". This wouldn't be surprising since he makes one of the Rabbis say that the Zionists are guilty of stirring up anti-semitism in every generation.

Harendorf refused to change the scene, he says, when he was approached by the Reform leadership who complained that it was doing them a lot of harm. Harendorf believed that this scene was not a misrepresentation of their attitude to the creation of a Jewish Brigade from Palestine, nor of their attitude to Zionism in general. It must be pointed out that this scene is only a tiny part of the play, and may have had much more importance in the author's mind than it did for the audience or actors. When I asked Anna Tzelniker about the scene, she couldn't recall the sort of responses which Harendorf describes.

Sergeant Sidney Cohen never saw the Yiddish version of the play about him. He did, however, see the play performed in Tel Aviv, by the Matate Theatre, in a Hebrew translation. In that 1944 production, the role of the King of Lampedusa was played by – Shmuel Rudenski.

You never know where *meshugasn* will lead!

Masking the majority

Israel: the Oriental Majority

by Shlomo Swirski

translated by Barbara Swirski
(Zed Press, £7.95)

This book is not for anyone who likes their politics to be kept simple: good guys and bad guys. But for those with a serious interest in Middle Eastern politics, Israel, modern Jewish history or even sociology, it's a must. I learned more about the State of Israel, and the state of Israel, from *Israel: the Oriental Majority* than I have from anything else I've read. It showed up the enormous gap most of us have in our knowledge about most of the Israeli population.

Many years ago, I naively asked an Israeli relative what progress was being made to integrate Jewish and Arab children in schools. "You're joking," she said. "They can't even get Ashkenazi and Sephardi kids to sit next to each other." Shlomo Swirski's study of Oriental Israelis repeatedly delivers the same impact as that remark, in a devastating analysis of the creation, maintenance and effects of a racist class structure. The study's faults and omissions can be guessed from the cover photograph, which shows an angry group of Oriental Israelis – who all happen to be men. Yet, although what Swirski misses is no less important than what he sees, there is such a dearth of literature on non-Ashkenazi Jews and Israelis that almost anything is welcome, and this book has a great deal to recommend it.

The first part explains the economic position of Oriental Israelis in comparison with their Ashkenazi counterparts, backed up with much statistical evidence to show that resources,

education, training and investment have been systematically directed towards Ashkenazi people, enterprises, neighbourhoods and organisations. The Oriental Jews who arrived as refugees (even the term has been denied them much of the time, though it is readily granted to other groups) found themselves dispersed, their communities disrupted and their money and possessions usually impounded in their north African and Asian homelands. Refugees from Europe who had reparations money could start their new lives in relative comfort compared with the Oriental refugees, who arrived destitute to be "settled" in camps and development towns or the poorest areas of the cities.

Their welcome was conditional: they were to be the labourers the new country needed, but their Arabic culture was denied and their backgrounds despised by the Ashkenazim who were already in power. They saw and resented what was happening to them but lacked the means to resist, and eventually some even came to accept the official explanation that their "disadvantaged" position in society was the fault of their own alleged backwardness.

While the first section of the book supplies an incisive account of how the Orientals came to be used essentially as a pool of unskilled or semi-skilled labour, the really gripping stuff is in the second part, in which Oriental activists speak about their experiences of discrimination in their own words. Swirski and his co-workers did not simply ask a standard set of interview questions, but set up debates which they became deeply

involved in themselves. The results are remarkable, not only because of the powerful, often moving evidence of the interviewees, but because there's a sense that everyone involved was working things out as they went along, with much passionate argument and flashes of insight along the way. The interviewers' political involvement is a vital element. They didn't just ask for people's stories, but wanted to know how they would analyse what was happening, what could be done to bring about change, and what form of organisation was necessary.

The chapter about their interviewing process represents a radical challenge to other sociological studies of "ethnic" groups. As Swirski argues, ethnicity is not the point: "We should stop viewing members of 'ethnic' groups as 'ethnics' – people who eat differently, dress differently, talk differently, have different life experiences, and for some strange reason, stick to each other. All of these characteristics are obvious – and need no sociological analysis. What is not so obvious is that these people are in fact no different at all; that is, they are human beings like all human beings, who for various historical reasons find the way blocked to full human expression. That is what needs sociological analysis."

The interviewees are mostly of Moroccan, Iraqi and Yemenite origin across a range of occupations and neighbourhoods: factory employees from a development town, workers from an impoverished *moshav* (co-operative village), boys from street gangs in Haifa and Tiberias, social workers,

'Refugees from Europe who had reparations money could start their new lives in relative comfort...'

teachers, a few artists and writers, a lone Member of the Knesset, and a woman domestic. What they have suffered in common is not only racism, shutting them out of jobs and education and all the traditionally powerful institutions of the state, but often a sense of utter loss.

One activist, a Moroccan playwright named Haim, expresses it as a painful uprooting which contrasts with the experience of the Ashkenazi immigrants who, no matter what they had suffered during the Holocaust, were eventually able to "carry on their lives in this country with the same norms". For Haim, Israel has been constructed as an Ashkenazi country with Ashkenazi norms, western norms: "Those who came here knowing Yiddish were able to get along very well with Yiddish. I haven't used my mother tongue, Magreb Moroccan, for 30 years. I haven't had anyone to communicate with in that language, and when I say language, I'm not just talking about vocabulary but about a whole culture: song and poetry and dance and customs and holidays and festivities and gestures and a certain smile..."

There is some resistance to the assumption that Israel is part of the West. One Oriental man on a Black Panther demonstration in Jerusalem was told: "Go back where you came from. Go away!" He answered: "Why should I go away. You go away! This is my country. I am an Asian, this whole country is Asian..."

The so-called backwardness of the Orientals was ascribed by the Ashkenazim to their "primitive" culture and traditional family structure, particularly their tendency to have large families. In dealing with this last point the overwhelmingly male perspective of the book becomes

a serious liability since neither Swirski nor anyone else seems able to get beyond a simply defensive position. But it isn't enough to confront racist contempt by asserting the value of a traditionally patriarchal culture, or insisting that families with large numbers of children deserve as much respect and support as any others. The last point is well made, but there are more difficult questions to confront about the status of women in more traditionally patriarchal communities from which Swirski just shies away. For example, women are completely missing from the evidence he cites of the educational standards of Oriental Jews in their countries of origin, which he uses to prove that educational disadvantage was imposed on them rather than brought with them. His evidence is presented as general but does not apply at all to women, who had very low literacy rates – a fact which Swirski either overlooks or finds insignificant. His discussion of the rates of intermarriage between Orientals and Ashkenazim as opposed to marriages between Orientals from the same or different countries of origin is also frustratingly uninformative. As Swirski's field of interest tends to be narrowly economic, he disregards questions about the incidence of arranged marriages which would be highly relevant to his data and would also raise questions about the extent to which women can be included in his general analysis.

The same partial view distorts the impression given of Ashkenazim as universally dominant, when actually Swirski's references are to Ashkenazi men rather than to the entire community – notwithstanding the clear evidence for class differences between women of the two communities. The interview with a cleaning woman born in

Iraq is presented without comment or analysis, but speaks for itself. She describes how she and her employer collude to deceive her real boss, the employer's husband who actually controls her pay and whom they both have to please. Any analysis which takes in class and race but leaves out sex won't do to describe this complex situation.

The other area somewhat glossed over is the question of Oriental-Israeli and Palestinian Arab relations. Swirski's reaction to the labelling of Orientals as more hostile towards the Arab "enemy" is understandable, and he does a good demolition job on the myth that Ashkenazim are more peace-loving, liberal- and radical-voting than the Orientals. But he also protests too much and can almost be read as adopting the line about the high status and general contentment of Jews in Arab countries which Conor Cruise O'Brien so effectively disposes of in *The Siege*. It's just a pity that because the Left is so reluctant to analyse the real situation for those Jews, it is left to right wingers like O'Brien.

This is not a simple book, though, and its achievement is that it provides a dynamic account of a community victimised not by one single group or philosophy but by a combination of historical forces and vested interests. Racism and a capitalist class system, Zionism, the Holocaust and the anti-Jewish actions of Arab governments have all played roles in the specific history of the Oriental community in Israel. The next time you see a selection of English-speaking, western-accented Israelis paraded on your television screen as representatives of Israeli points of view, remember them, and this book.

DENA ATTAR

Whose life is it anyway?

Jewish life seems to be constricted, enclosed and monitored by lights. Our culture sets great store by the lighting of lamps: Friday night, *Hanukah* (festival of lights), *Yomtovim* (festivals), *yortsayt likht* (memorial lights). We celebrate and we mourn through the medium of the lights. As an observer and a member of the community, it often feels as if lights themselves fashion our perspective. It is as if the community is enclosed in a spotlight which lands on certain people and excludes others. Members of the community are difficult to define except as a group. Vague patterns can be discerned, but individual entities emerge only slowly; first one, then recognisably another. In the shadows and at the outskirts are people who have no outline, the people not truly welcomed into the centre.

This book sets out to lighten those dark places. Instead of a spotlight coming from above, it allows the people themselves to lighten their own darkness, to fashion their own history and make sense of the confusion and chaos that is so much a part of all of our lives.

Jewish life this century has been one of turmoil and upheaval. Like many people, Jews have been subject to forces far greater than they could control. Yet they tried to overcome them. Some emigrated. They crossed boundaries. They tried to establish new communities. Negative intellectual forces ran riot, particularly across the European stage. Racism, whose seeds were present in the last century and which flowered with such terrible finality this century, was a particular curse in Jewish lives. These times are well documented by academic historians.

By contrast, this is a book of

oral history. Eight Ashkenazi Jewish women have been encouraged to come forward and to talk about how they have been affected by events. They speak about the choices they have had to make, or were constrained from making. They show how they have shaped their lives and how, with courage, they have faced the world and by their very tenacity have conquered it. Each woman has a story of profound significance to tell. The reader is left almost breathless by their courage and steadfastness. Each life was governed as if by the roll of a dice. Thus marginalised, they perceived themselves as outsiders. None of them allowed that experience to destroy them. Instead, each has used her life to contribute to other lives.

Some of the women were born in Britain, some in Europe. All were touched by the convulsions of this century; some so painfully and tragically that the exposure inflames the pages. This is the experience of poverty, immigration, of an influential culture often despised, antisemitism, war, politics and struggle. The book places individuals within the greater tapestry and shows their lives through their childhood, their education, growing sexuality, relationships and work. It looks at the choices we all make and the balance sheets we draw up in our twilight to make sense of our histories. It provides a model for us all of the human capacity to triumph over adversity.

On the other hand, it is striking that while many of the photographs show the women as parents or grandparents the text mentions little of motherhood and relationships with children. This is a most important aspect of women's lives and, although in one or two instances the intensity

surfaces, motherhood is more often dealt with through the medium of childcare arrangements. This may be a pointer more to the bias of the interviewers than to the feelings of the participants.

I was left feeling almost breathless admiration. The people here have chosen to set their star and follow it. When they recognised that the directions were wrong, they varied their course. Although they faced hardship, distress and sorrow, they also showed triumph and endurance.

On the other hand, it is possible to recognise that the structures of communal life are seductive. To stay within those structures you must not step beyond the bounds of that tight discipline, so it may be asking too much of people to expose themselves when they recognise that the outcome might be excommunication. Nevertheless, I was sorry that Jewish women who have never questioned or challenged the precepts they were given, who live their lives in a cocoon of self denial and whose personal growth was restricted, could not also have been given a chance to talk – though it might have taken a long time for them to have developed anything expansive to say!

Though it would have been more complete with a representative of the Sephardi/Mizrachi community, I was enthralled by this book and identified with the women. The authors and participants have not only shed light into dark corners, but they have also provided illumination for our own journeys. The book will be a valuable asset not only to Jewish libraries but also to the libraries of feminists who want to explore the twentieth century experience.

DIANA NESLEN

Generations of Memories: Voices of Jewish Women
in London
Group
Women's Press
£6.95

'It looks at the choices we all make and the balance sheets we draw up in our twilight to make sense of our histories.'

'I haven't used my mother tongue ... for 30 years.'

Grandmother's footsteps

Ewa – my grandmother's story
by Harriet Wistrich
(Video, 53 mins)

When the Second World War broke out, Harriet Wistrich's Polish grandmother, Ewa (pronounced Ava) was on holiday in France with her daughter Renée and son George who, with his brother Ernest, was studying in England. Ewa's instinct was that she and Renée should go to England with George but her husband insisted that the safest thing for them to do was to return home to Krakow. She reluctantly put George on the train for London and it was only because of an extraordinary series of events that she ever saw him again.

Harriet Wistrich's video is constructed around a series of conversations between Harriet and her grandmother which were recorded when Ewa was in her late 80s. These provide much of the soundtrack. The visual images are from family photographs, footage of modern Poland from a visit Harriet made in 1986, and some black and white archive film from the Second World War. Towards the end we see Ewa at home in London with the two generations of her family, and Renée as she is now. The images and conversation do not always correspond, creating an intriguing sense of how the film maker has had to piece together her grandmother's history from various sources. The shots of modern Poland, even of the countryside, evoke a strong sense of how much time has passed since the events this old woman is telling us about.

The video starts with Ewa

talking about her life as a young woman from a bourgeois Polish Jewish family. We see photographs of her many admirers and learn about the marriage arranged for her, to a man she never really grew to love. It is a good beginning which conveys a feeling for Ewa as an ordinary woman of her time, before moving to the engrossing story of her survival through the war years. An intimate mood is established, with the young voice of the curious grand-daughter asking questions, and the crackly voice of the old woman slowly reminiscing.

The story of the war years unfolds, but there are gaps and loose ends, so afterwards it is difficult to piece it all neatly together. Such, however, is the nature of an old person's memory.

Soon after Ewa returned to Krakow from her holiday in France, her husband went into the army, leaving her alone with Renée. They were relatively safe for a time, holding false Costa Rican papers while Poland remained under Russian occupation, but their plan to leave Poland did not come off, and eventually Ewa received a visitor sent by a friend in Berlin. He was a "sympathetic" member of the Gestapo, and he advised them to conceal their Jewish identity.

Ewa did not act on this advice immediately. She and Renée left Krakow for Lvov and were there when the Germans invaded Poland. Yanek, Ewa's young nephew, was ordered to go to the offices of the Gestapo. But, despite having a chance to escape, he obediently waited to

be "interviewed" and never returned home. Following this tragic incident, Ewa and Renée travelled back to Krakow where they obtained new papers as Polish Catholics. Ewa did not "look Jewish", so she could pass as a Pole, but they had to go to a town where nobody knew them and to move on before they made any more than superficial acquaintances. They spent the rest of the war in Czeszochowa, then in the small spa town of Iwonicz.

The strain of keeping up the pretence of being a Catholic is powerfully evoked in a story Ewa tells of a mistake she made when going to church for confession. Instead of going into the confession box, she went and knelt down in front of the priest. She was of course terrified that she would be suspected. Ewa describes her experiences during this time in a dispassionate, matter-of-fact manner which I found almost uncomfortable. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like for a Jewish mother and daughter to live in the Catholic part of a Polish town, knowing that in the Jewish ghetto people were being assembled for transportation to the camps.

The film ends with a poem marked "Lvov 1940" found amongst Ewa's papers after she died, and which it is thought she wrote herself. For me, the poem provides an answer to a question which the film left hovering uneasily in my mind. What did this brave woman suffer during her years of silent, clandestine existence, and where did she find the strength to survive? This is the beginning of the poem:

*Amongst all the anguish and troubles,
And a long, intense yearning
There lived in us a world of dreams and marvels,
And a togetherness, real and living.
Sometimes anxieties oppressed us
But in the heart there flickered hopes –
Faith and strength within us
That fate would change the course of life,
That inner peace of Spirit
Would return with times once known...*

TERESA THORNHILL

Ewa – my grandmother's story (53 minutes) is available for hire from Circles, 113 Roman Road, London E2 0HU. Tel 01-981 6828



Ewa

Waiting for Lefty

The Story of Unity Theatre
by Colin Chambers
Lawrence & Wishart, £19.95

When I was a member of Broadside Mobile Workers' Theatre in the 1970s we were eager to find a tradition to which we could relate our work. Our plays were short, political, and aimed at the labour movement, and we were trying to use the theatre to make a direct intervention in political action. We knew about Brecht and Piscator, and the revolutionary theatre of Germany in the '20s and '30s, and much of what we did was modelled on those examples. Some research into similar developments in Britain revealed that such an agitational theatre had existed here, though on a much smaller scale. We seized on the British Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) as providing a precedent for theatrical agitprop which nothing from the "established" British theatre could match. The WTM, closely aligned to the Communist Party, had been

aggressively and uncompromisingly revolutionary, and had taken its message to meetings and campaigns, as well as performing on street corners in working class areas – particularly in London's East End.

But the Workers' Theatre Movement began to decline in the mid-thirties, and its place was taken by a new force – Unity Theatre. Unity grew out of the WTM, but its politics, like the politics of the Communist Party, switched from an appeal for direct confrontation with the ruling class ("class against class") to a recognition of the need to build a more broadly-based anti-fascist movement ("popular front"). It was partly because of this apparently less revolutionary emphasis, and partly because of our knowledge of the artistically moribund Unity of the 1960s and 1970s, that we in Broadside paid scant attention to the work that Unity had done. We associated Unity with a degree of compromise in politics and, more crucially, with compromise in

theatrical forms. Whereas the WTM had developed a Brechtian vision of how theatre could show the underlying forces in society, Unity was wedded to the more naturalistic acting techniques developed by Stanislavsky. And whereas the WTM had seen its primary role as going out to where the workers were to be found, Unity had an expensive building to run and maintain; this was to be the central focus of its attention, even though it sent out mobile troupes to other, non-theatre, venues.

This analysis was, in fact, a caricature and an oversimplification, and Colin Chambers' *The Story of Unity Theatre* is invaluable in setting the record straight. In reality there was more continuity between the WTM and Unity than we in Broadside had liked to see, and the achievements of Unity were considerable, including not only the many performances of the American Clifford Odets' stirring revolutionary play *Waiting for Lefty*,

which became part of the repertoire of workers' theatre groups all over the world, but also many original British plays. What becomes very clear from the narrative of this book is that Unity shows succeeded best where they drew on popular forms and formats, like the political pantomimes and revues by Geoffrey Parsons and Berkeley Fase, which had people queueing round the block for tickets, and often caused considerable unease to those in power. Chamberlain was furious at being portrayed as the Wicked Uncle in Unity's anti-



appeasement pantomime *Babes in the Woods*, and wanted the show stopped, and Unity had several run-ins with censors and licensing authorities which tried to silence its radical voice. But the theatre managed to reach out to a very large, if not a mass, audience, and through block bookings (especially for the pantomimes) it brought political theatre to many in the labour movement.

Even so, the theatre had its blind spots and its weaknesses. Some of these were the weaknesses of the left itself, and particularly those of the Communist Party. The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact threw Unity into ideological disarray, though it managed to continue performing throughout most of the war, both in the theatre and also in tube stations which were used (illegally at first) as underground shelters. That other watershed for Communist Party members, the

1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, was also reflected in the theatre. For the first time, Unity directly challenged the Soviet line with a production that compared Hungary with Suez. This split the Communist Party leadership of the theatre irreparably.

Unity's devotion to the acting techniques of Stanislavsky gave its actors a "scientific" method lacking in the dilettantism of West End productions, and the production techniques of professionals who worked with Unity, like Andre Van Gysegheem, Herbert Marshall and John Allen, were

innovative for the time. But the Stanislavsky system was never questioned, although other techniques of acting would have been more appropriate to the popular theatre forms which Unity was trying to exploit. Perhaps the most surprising gap, for a left-wing, internationalist theatre, was the work of Bertolt Brecht, though this receives little discussion in Colin Chambers' book. Unity's actors knew little or nothing of Brecht's theatrical theories. True, Unity had the distinction of having staged Britain's first Brecht production, but Colin Chambers doesn't make clear that this was more by accident than design. In 1938 they found the short, untypical play *Señora Carrar's Rifles* in a left wing magazine, and decided to use it to fill out an evening's double bill. They didn't return to Brecht until 1956, when they performed the short play *The Exception and the Rule*, again as part of a

double bill. Production of any of Brecht's major plays wasn't attempted until 1958, by which time Brecht had already been "discovered" by the more enlightened end of the commercial theatre.

Although Unity's attempt to set up a professional company ended in failure, as the theatre gained in prestige it became a stepping-stone for working class actors and writers who wanted to get into the "mainstream" of theatre and television. Alfie Bass, Bill Owen, Warren Mitchell, Michael Gambon, Lionel Bart and Ted (later Lord) Willis all got their first start at Unity, and a full list of those who worked in the theatre would read like a fairly comprehensive guide to the British stage (though, as you may have noticed, women didn't feature as prominently as men—especially when it came to positions of power within the theatre's structure). Positive though this was in some ways, it inevitably led to a dilution of the theatre's political purpose. By 1959 its leaders estimated that 75% of members wanted to act, 20% had joined because they were lonely, and only 5% were interested in the politics. This was a long way from the situation of the thirties. But then again, the rest of society had moved a long way as well.

In a society where mainstream theatre had been separated from politics, and the worker excluded from the theatre except as a comic figure, Unity achieved much. Even those of us who still prefer the jarring music of Eisler (which inspired the WTM) to the slick Broadway-style tunes heard at Unity must acknowledge that *The Story of Unity Theatre* is well-researched and thorough—despite one or two minor mistakes about the WTM, which can no doubt be corrected for a second edition. The book is a welcome addition to our understanding of how political culture has developed in Britain, and fills an inexcusable gap in most histories of the British theatre.

IAN SAVILLE

FIFTH COLUMN

The Autumn issue of *Jewish Quarterly*, published by an independent editorial collective, includes Walter Schwarz on the rise of the Greens; David Herman on Noam Chomsky as an American Dissident; Ritchie Robertson on Kafka's Milena; Eric Homberger on Philip Roth; David Rosenberg on the decade of Thatcherism; and Bryan Cheyette on the Rushdie Affair. Not to mention a reconsideration of the Holocaust, the Home Front and East European Jewry by Anthony Lerman, Tony Kushner and Zygmunt Bauman. Plus Julia Bard responds to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and lots of original fiction and poetry. What more could you want? Just £2.95 this issue or £10 for an annual subscription from *Jewish Quarterly*, POB 1148, London NW5 2AZ, or ring (01) 485 4062. Don't leave home without one!

Brighton Jewish Feminist Group is open to new members. Small group meeting every few weeks to discuss those aspects of Jewish culture, heritage and politics which are most relevant to us. We also arrange open get-togethers at festivals. Leave a message on 0273-600526 and we'll contact you.

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Friends of Yiddish cultural group meets every Saturday at 3pm at Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street, Whitechapel, London E1

East Midlands Jewish Group meets regularly. Contact Myra 0602 603355 or Joy 0780 720194.

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The next "Red Ruach" weekend is planned for the end of January 1990. Ring Pauline 01-444 6256 for details.

Do you have a sense of history? Special historical Red Ruach planned for February 1990. For further details contact Dave on 0742 550957.

JEWALS ... from isolation to celebration... New Jewish Lesbian Support Group. All Jewish lesbians are welcome, however you identify as a Jew; whatever your lesbian experience. Contact: JEWALS, c/o BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

Friends of Yesh Gvul organises support for Israeli soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories. Details from FOYGL, BM 6174, London WC1N 3XX.

Israel and Palestine Political Report. Monthly English language digest of news and articles. Subscription details from Magelan, 5 rue Cardinal Mercier, 75009 Paris, France.

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Israeli Mirror—a monthly digest of news translated from the mainstream Hebrew press. Information from 21 Collingham Rd, London SW5.

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