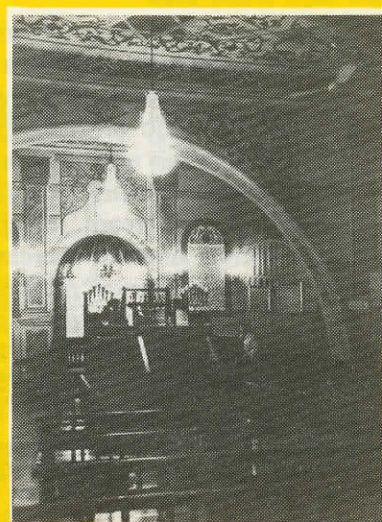


# JEWISH SOCIALIST

No 2 Summer 1985

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

85p



## SOVIET JEWRY - MYTH AND REALITY



**Which way for Anglo-Jewry?**  
**Jews in South Africa**

**Left Wing Antisemitism**  
**Israel, Palestine and Sunderland**



# JEWISH SOCIALIST

BM 3725, LONDON WC1N 3XX

## EDITORIAL

In our first issue we set out to open up areas of discussion and provide a forum for debate on issues important to radical Jews in Britain and elsewhere. We have had an overwhelmingly positive response from Jewish and non-Jewish radicals and members of other ethnic groups. We can already boast subscribers from Brighton to Stirling, not to mention Austria, Luxembourg, Israel and the USA.

We have been particularly glad to receive contributions from new readers. One of these is Stephen Shenfield's article *Soviet Jews — Myth and Reality* on page 5. This is written from a perspective which fits in neither with the image of Jews in the Soviet Union usually presented in the Jewish Press, nor with that commonly portrayed by the Left.

We strongly encourage views unrestrained by rigid orthodoxies. This derives very much from our experience in current Jewish affairs in Britain, where powerful forces are re-asserting orthodoxies in an attempt to silence or beat into submission "uncongenial" views.

Michael Safier's article, *Back to the Ghetto* on page 8, illustrates the variety of new and recent Jewish initiatives, of which the Jewish Socialists' Group is only one, who by their presence and activity are challenging the conservative dominance by the Jewish establishment.

We continue to welcome letters and contributions from readers on topics covered in this issue or on subjects of interest to radical Jews generally. We hope you find the second issue as stimulating as most people seem to have found the first!

### ©Jewish Socialist

The opinions expressed in *Jewish Socialist* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editorial Committee or of the Jewish Socialists' Group.

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Cover pictures: Images of Soviet Jewish life. Photos courtesy of the Contemporary Jewish Library.

### JEWISH DEFENCE: DISCREET OR DORMANT

In the last issue we pointed to the failure of Jewish communal leaders to provide adequate information on the nature and extent of antisemitic attacks in Britain. Without this information we cannot respond effectively. Sadly, that situation still prevails, but it appears that not everybody in the Board of Deputies is aware of the line.

In a *Jewish Chronicle* article (26 April), Dr Gewirtz, employed by the Board's Defence Committee, pleads: "I have never knowingly played down any antisemitic act. It's in our interest to alert the Jewish community to the dangers that beset it". Meanwhile his superior, Board Vice-President Martin Savitt, argues in the same article: "Defence, being such a sensitive issue, cannot be discussed widely in the community." Clearly the left hand doesn't know what the right is doing. Are these safe hands for Jewish defence?

Even more significantly, Savitt continues: "People who call for full disclosure are not only being unrealistic but want to use that information for their own ideological ends." And so he confirms that the hidden information *does* support our analysis. As for our ideological ends, these are no secret: we seek to contribute towards building a vibrant anti-racist and anti-fascist movement capable of confronting an increasingly menacing threat. We believe that is more useful than hiding information from the community.

### THE NAZI CIVIL SERVANT?

During April it came to light that Denis Pirie, who has a long record of fascist activism, was working for the Government Department of Trade and Industry. The Jewish Socialists' Group held a picket of the Department, handing staff and passers-by a leaflet entitled "MAKE WHITEHALL A NAZI-FREE ZONE" which said:

"The Jewish Socialists Group has called this picket to protest the continued employment of Denis Pirie, as a higher executive officer, in the Government Department of Trade and Industry. We call upon trade unionists in the Department to refuse to work with him, and for his removal from public office.

A leading member of the rabidly antisemitic British National Socialist Movement in 1962, Pirie has since been active

## So What's New?

in a range of racist, antisemitic and fascist groups. His fascist record was surely known to his employers, and yet he passed their vetting process. Indeed the Government has admitted knowledge of Pirie's involvement in fascist organisations. Their failure to respond to calls for his removal from public office is intolerable. It is a provocation to Jewish people, Black people, and all who are threatened by racism and fascism.

The Department's lack of an internal policy on racism and fascism is similar to the situation that prevailed at North London Polytechnic with the known fascist organiser Patrick Harrington. The net effect is that while the rights of fascists are protected, those of their victims are seriously undermined. We cannot tolerate known fascists in public office. If we don't challenge Pirie now, then we will not be in a position to challenge further fascist infiltration that the Tory government appears quite willing to tolerate."

Harry Cohen MP joined the picket and, together with the organisers, handed in a letter of protest and pertinent questions to the office of Trade Minister Norman Tebbit. At the time of going to press no reply has been received.

### DEFEAT OF FASCISM?

As preparations were afoot for celebrating the 40th anniversary of the victory over fascism, the fascists of today were reminding us, in their own way, of the threat they continue to pose with a series of terror attacks. In Paris, a bomb exploded at a cinema hosting a Jewish film festival, and in Menton, South Eastern France, a Moroccan youth was murdered. A large anti-racist demonstration followed in Paris with the slogan: "Arabs killed in Menton, Jews killed in Paris — Racists are Assassins".

The Paris bombing was claimed by the Nazi underground movement Column 88 along with the World Union of National Socialists. Column 88 also claimed responsibility for blowing up a shop of an Asian family in Leeds. A Jewish owned shop in Manchester was destroyed by an arson attack, and burnt down again when it re-opened, and a brick with a swastika carved in it was thrown through the window of a Jewish house in Manchester.

In the South, the Jewish section of Weybridge cemetery was defaced with swastika daubings and antisemitic slogans. In

London the GLC Ethnic Minorities Unit suffered a major arson attack as a number of incendiary devices blasted its offices. The perpetrators have not been traced, although the Young National Front paper *Bulldog*, which had not appeared for a while, resurfaced shortly before this incident with the headline "BACK WITH A BANG". Inside it boasted of its "spy at County Hall".

These attacks continue to highlight the need for a new broadly-based anti-racist, anti-fascist initiative.

### TORY CUTS HIT JEWISH ELDERLY

The Jewish Welfare Board has been badly hit by Government cuts. As the largest Jewish social service agency in Britain, the JWB maintains residential homes for elderly people, day centres, group homes and hostels for the mentally ill and mentally handicapped, as well as social work teams with qualified social workers. It also provides domiciliary care and home visits for the housebound elderly and short stay beds for the elderly.

With such wide ranging provisions, the JWB needs £5,500,000 a year just to maintain services at the current level, but their statistics show that the number of new people who require their help has risen by 80% since 1980.

Less than 12% of their funds come from donations from the community so the JWB is largely dependent on local government support. And with general health and social service cuts, more and more people are in need of their assistance.

This year the JWB has announced that it will be forced to close Fenton House, a home for 20 elderly, mentally frail residents, as well as the Stanmore kosher meals service. They are having to reduce the number of staff throughout their homes at a time when the average age of residents on admission is 86 and the increasingly frail home population needs more, not less care. They will also have to reduce their maintenance budget and staffing levels on their social work teams, causing longer waiting lists, fewer visits to families in need and an increase in the number of people at risk.

At the end of the 1985 financial year, the JWB faced a budget deficit of £810,000. In an appeal for donations from the Jewish community, they say "We are in a shortfall situation. A situation which has reached crisis proportions in a very short time." They

add: "Our work is limited by the funds that the community give us. Our shortcomings are the community's." As "The Caring Heart of the Community" which, in 125 years "has never been so desperate", it is clear that their shortcomings are more those of the Government than of the community.

### ISRAEL'S WARS: WERE THEY NECESSARY? *Koteret Rashit* 24.4. 85

Many people argue that all past wars were imposed on Israel, and that they all, right up to the last one, were defensive ones. We had no choice... The feeling that our sacrifices were made in a just cause... makes life just that little bit easier.

"Peace is desirable, but not at all costs," declared David Ben Gurion. He preferred the status quo... and believed that time worked in Israel's favour.

Perhaps the Six Day War could have been prevented. The more time goes by, the more it emerges as the most destructive war of them all. Its outcome still deals a daily blow to Israeli society. At a certain stage, we had the option of exchanging the occupied territories for peace, but Israel again chose the status quo.

If it hadn't been for the Six Day War, the war of attrition might not have happened, and if it hadn't been for the war of attrition, the Yom Kippur War might not have broken out later. It is often said that if it had not been for the Yom Kippur War, there would have been no peace with Egypt, but there is little evidence for this statement.

And so, from war to war, the hostility between Israel and the Palestinians deepens, the quantity of blood that has to be avenged increases and the price of peace soars skywards. Time has not worked in Israel's favour.

*Extracts from the Israeli press are reprinted with kind permission of Israeli Mirror.*

### AN ANTI-NAZI PUBLICATION

The Beyond the Pale Collective are appealing for money to publish a book about attempts by the far Right to whitewash the Holocaust. The book, called *The Holocaust Denial*, has been written by Gill Seidel.

They need £3,500 to publish it and are asking for cheques/money to be sent to the Beyond the Pale Collective at Box 6, 59 Cookridge Street, Leeds 1, Yorkshire.



# Jewish Women's Centre

Since last summer, a group of Jewish women of different ages, backgrounds and sexualities have been meeting together to set up a Jewish Women's Centre in London. We feel the need as Jewish women, in these times of rising antisemitism and woman-hatred, to have a place where we can meet safely for political, cultural, educational, religious and social purposes.

Jewish women need a space to develop Jewish feminism. There is much we need to debate amongst ourselves, and a centre will be a start, with Jewish women from all over London, England, the world (!) coming together to share our experiences, thoughts, work . . .

There is a lot of mutual distrust between Jewish women in the established "community" and Jewish feminists. Many Jewish women feel excluded from feminism

because it often fails to recognise our cultures and freedom to "be" Jewish in mainly non-Jewish settings. Feminism can be threatening to many Jewish women because it questions the status quo, and many don't know what that challenge really means.

Many Jewish feminists are excluded from the establishment which often fails to let us explore ideas, define ourselves on our own terms — not men's — and whose often conservative attitudes are especially oppressive to Jewish lesbians. A Jewish Women's Centre will give us a chance to at least communicate and dissolve suspicions; to find our common ground as Jewish women, and celebrate, not decry, our differences.

A centre can be a base for meetings, producing literature, holding events, developing networks, storing banners, conference papers, archives

as well as a space to reclaim/develop/maintain our cultures as Jewish women, from language classes to lesbian Seders — or even Jewish philosophy classes!

We also need somewhere for Jewish women from outside London, who are more isolated, to come to meet other Jewish women, to gain strength from each other and maintain communication between Jewish feminists nationally and internationally.

The group has organised two major fund-raising events which were successful and enjoyable, and we're planning a "sponsored communicate" (talk/sign) and a book-sale. However, we still have *no women's centre!*

We are trying to find premises that are wheelchair accessible (or can be made so), cheap/free to rent, exclusively for the centre and lockable.

We are prepared, of course, to clear/clean, refurbish/redecorate any premises, and even one room would serve as a temporary base. So if you have or know of any suitable space, *please* let us know about it — no matter how awful a state it's in. . . . .

We also need money. We are unfunded and may have to make alterations so all Jewish women can use the centre. We also need running costs and would ideally like to employ a paid worker or two! Please help us. Even a very small amount is useful. Send your cheques to Box 53, 190 Upper St, London N1. Meanwhile, all Jewish women are welcome to the meetings. Contact us and we'll let you know where and when they are.

Shalom.

**THE JEWISH  
WOMEN'S CENTRE IN  
LONDON GROUP**

## SUPPORT FOR THE SEVEN

As we go to press, the Newham 7 are appearing at the Old Bailey charged with affray and, in one case, conspiracy to cause criminal damage. The seven brave young Asians are being prosecuted by the police for defending their community against vicious racist thugs in Newham last year.

Eustace Pryce was murdered by white racists in Newham last November. As a result, his brother, Gerald, was arrested and charged with affray, together with Eustace's murderer. Although Gerald has now been given bail, it is only on the condition, that he does not enter Newham, so he cannot see his family who have not recovered from Eustace's death.

On 27 April, 4,000 people from a wide range of communities and organisations, including the Jewish Socialists' Group, marched through Newham in solidarity

with the Newham 7 and the Pryce family.

This was followed by a further demonstration on 11 May. Organised by the Newham 7 campaign, both demonstrations provided further proof of different ethnic communities coming together in one common struggle against racist oppression in Britain. What was also apparent, however, was the brutal lengths to which the police are prepared to go to undermine and suppress such mobilisations against racism.

The repressive police offensive against the first demonstration made it necessary to return to the same streets two weeks later to convey the defiance of Britain's minority communities who are increasingly under attack from racist thugs.

At Forest Gate police station, the first demonstration was suddenly attacked by police snatch squads who

arrested several people and kicked and punched others, including children. The demonstrators refused to move on until those who had been arrested were released. An angry picket outside the police station was only dispersed after almost four hours when massive police reinforcements punched, kicked and chased the demonstrators away.

Some 34 people were arrested and all were eventually released, with only four of them charged.

Angered by the police attack, the Newham 7 defence campaign organised another demonstration for 11 May. Despite the short notice, anti-racists returned to Newham to reaffirm their support for the campaigns and to prove that intimidation would not suppress their fight against racism.

This time there were 3,000 people, and though

massive over-policing and several clashes with demonstrators caused a disturbance at the end of the march, Unmesh Desai, secretary of the Newham 7 Defence Campaign described it as "a brilliant success".

About 15 people were arrested and charged with public order offences. A number are alleged to have been beaten up by the police while under arrest. Nevertheless, the demonstrators showed a determination and conviction that their right to demonstrate against racism would be upheld.

Joyoti Rajjapan of the Newham 7 said: "The march was really good, and all the people involved showed that the police cannot intimidate us like they did on 27 April. I would like to thank all those who marched in solidarity with the Newham 7, the Eustace Pryce family and against racism."

**GRAHAM MURRAY**

# SOVIET JEWS - MYTH AND REALITY

Stephen Shenfield looks at the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union

People ask me whether my interest in researching Soviet affairs has anything to do with my family background. It is true, there is a family connection. I first heard Russian spoken as a child: my grandmother would recite vast reams of Pushkin and other classical poets to me. I didn't understand, of course, but the language has always felt familiar as a result. In 1924 she brought my father to England from Kharkov, where he was born in 1919. From her I learned something (too little, and it's now too late) of those terrible times of civil war, famine and banditry (her husband and brother-in-law were shot down in the street by armed men for no known reason). And I treasure the tattered Russian reader with which my father started school just before he left.

When my grandmother died, among her papers we discovered letters from relatives in Moscow of whose existence she had never informed us. We have made contact with a number of them — a varied bunch — and some are now in New York, others still in Moscow or Kharkov.

But in answer to people's question about family motives, I reply that my conscious motives are intellectual and political. When I first started on Soviet Studies, I was concerned mainly with sorting out my confused political views by undertaking a serious comparison of different social and economic systems. More recently, my main motive has been the promotion of East-West understanding for the sake of peace and disarmament.

All the same, my encounter with the USSR has forced me — a person at an advanced stage in the process of assimilation and not especially interested in "Jewish problems" — to reflect on the meaning of "Jewish identity". For here a person of Jewish origin is fairly free to choose whether or not s/he wants to be considered a Jew. Over there "Jew" is a nationality alongside "Russian", "Ukrainian", "Uzbek" etc, as distinct from the Soviet *citizenship* they all share. It's entered on your internal passport and everyone is highly aware of it, though to the outsider the strong consciousness of nationality on the part of most Soviet people seems quite disproportionate to the real differences between one nationality and another. I have always been much more struck by what they all have in common as Soviet people.

A foreign Jew in the USSR is, I think, perceived as a little less alien than a foreign non-Jew (this refers to Ashkenazim). You are somehow

attached to a category which is "ours" ("our Jews"). There may be a flicker of (distasteful) recognition in the eyes of the soldier who inspects your passport at customs as he mutters to his colleague (there are a pair of them sitting there): "Zhid!" (Yid). In other cases, I hasten to add, the recognition is of a more friendly kind.

At first, looking at your face and before noticing your clothes, a Soviet person may even mistake you for "one of ours" (bloody cheek!). It happened that the Russian teacher from the USSR at our university first met me at a gathering being held for some Soviet visitors. "Are you from Voronezh?" he asked me. "No," I replied, "are you from Birmingham?"

Ignoring anti-semitism is much more difficult in the USSR. Minimising your awareness is the best you can do. Any Soviet Jewish loyalist will assure you that the problem has been exaggerated. And this is so, though not to the degree claimed. But it is bad enough to make you feel morally obliged (or is it just a matter of dignity?) to affirm that you are a Jew, where you might not do so here.

In trying to explain the position of Soviet Jews, you are up against two myths: the myth of Soviet propaganda, according to which anti-semitism does not and cannot exist in the USSR and is anyway not of great significance; and the myth of crude Zionist and anti-Soviet propaganda, according to which anti-semitism permeates the whole State and society, something like Nazi Germany before they got round to the final solution. The reality is vastly more complex and fluid.

Last summer, on a language course in Moscow, I met an Australian Jew who had grown up in Minsk. An ex-Communist, he now explores the USSR, and especially the area he came from, with as much objectivity as he can muster. He was in fact the first person I have met who has a strong Jewish identity that is Yiddish-based and anti-Zionist. He was familiar with the situation of Jews in many different places.

The picture I got from him was one of astonishing local variation. The Jews in town X were under severe pressure, while in town Y they were doing very well for themselves (perhaps too well for their own good, he thought) and occupied quite a few important posts. The situation varies from one scientific institute, for example, to another: in one the director is an anti-semitic and has squeezed all Jews out; in another the director actually likes

working with Jews. On the whole I have the impression that discrimination in employment and higher education is now very bad — but at the same time Jews are occasionally appointed to responsible positions.

My main point is not that things are not quite as bad for Soviet Jews as they are painted. They are in truth bad enough. What is more important is that there are forces at work within the Soviet system tending to make things *worse* and forces tending to make things *better*. If this dynamism is not understood, this leads both to defeatism about the chances of improvement and to complacency about the dangers of deterioration.

Of the underlying factors which to some extent protect Soviet Jews, I would single out three:

- (a) the desire of many Soviet managers and officials to make full use of the abilities of Jews in the economy and other fields;
- (b) the human decency of very many Soviet people (I won't venture a proportion), which they are able to express by means of the internationalist component of the official ideology;
- (c) the fear on the part of some not-so-decent officials of the influence of foreign Jews on Western policy (exaggerated in their own minds).

Opposition to wasteful discrimination on national grounds is typical of reformist officials concerned about raising economic efficiency. Their position is now strengthened by the accession to power of Gorbachev. The cutting-off of emigration also helps Jews who want to stay, as the "security" rationale of discrimination is thereby somewhat weakened.

Antisemitism is most closely associated with the more virulent varieties of Russian nationalism. Although Russian nationalism is a strong undercurrent in Soviet life, its full expression is hampered by the fact that the official ideology remains at least semi-internationalist. National prejudices can therefore be attacked from within the official ideology.

Back in Khrushchev's time, Yevgenii Yevtushenko did exactly this in his poem *Babi Yar*. A poet who does the same more recently is Novella Matveeva:

*You posed me the tricky question:*

*How do I relate to the nations?*

*Seriously.*

*Zealously and troubled, I reply:*

*I relate to the International.*

**Strana priboya, 1983**

Similarly, Nazi-type ideas which exist in the USSR about secret Jewish control



of the Western world have been attacked within the context of the anti-Zionist campaign by means of Marxist analysis; the absurdity of the concept of "Jewish capital"; the dominant weight of non-Jewish capitalists in the USA etc. Anti-semitic stereotypes are also combatted by articles about "good Jews" such as the Israeli Communist lawyer Felicia Langer, who defends Palestinians.

In their efforts to moderate Western policy towards the USSR, Soviet propagandists try to cultivate Jewish as well as non-Jewish Westerners, including some influential Jewish figures. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains some contacts with Israelis, sending out signals that if Israeli policy changed the USSR would want to restore normal relations with Israel. Soviet antisemitism is of course a great embarrassment in this work, and something of an embarrassment even in dealing with non-Jewish foreigners.

The historical evidence also suggests that improvements in the situation of Soviet Jews are at least conceivable. Soviet Jewish loyalists are proud of the role played by Jews in the Revolution and in the Soviet State in its early period as well as in the War. (This has its shameful side: Jews used to be prominent in the security police.) Anti-semitism is not one of the evils inherent in the Soviet system as such (there are many other evils which are).

How are we to interpret the current "anti-Zionist campaign" in the USSR, in which quite a few Jews take part? Zionists see it as a transparently camouflaged anti-semitic campaign. The official Soviet line is that Soviet anti-Zionism is in no way anti-semitic. My own research brings me to the conclusion that both these claims are half-truths.

First, horrifying anti-semitic material is published in the USSR in the guise either of attacks on "Zionism" (where the context often makes it impossible to read "Zionist" as anything other than "Jew") or of exposés of the Jewish religion. Anti-Israeli cartoons typically have anti-semitic undertones. Further information on this sort of material is readily available.

What is less well-known is the existence of a quite different type of Soviet anti-Zionist material resembling the critiques of Zionism made by Western socialists. This material not only makes a clear distinction between Zionists and Jews, stressing the role of progressive Jews in the world, but argues that Zionism and antisemitism are linked: The linkage is both theoretical (shared assumptions about the inevitability of national hatreds) and practical (each ideology feeds on and reinforces the other). This type of anti-Zionism is therefore at the same time a protest against antisemitism.

What we have is then not one but two, rival, Soviet "anti-Zionisms". Soviet Jewish loyalists fight anti-semitic anti-



Zionism by elaborating and voicing an anti-Zionism which is not anti-semitic. The Anti-Zionist Committee is one of the vehicles which they use to this end.

The possibility of opposing Soviet anti-semitism is, however, restricted by the pressure exerted on Jews to deny its existence. This leads to contradictions in the public line of official Jews. On the one hand, Soviet antisemitism is supposedly just a Zionist myth. A Jewish mathematics student, say, is required to make a speech repudiating the slander that there is discrimination against Jews entering higher-education mathematics faculties (part of the price, one suspects, for her university admission). At the same meeting another speaker attacks Zionism for, among other sins, exacerbating antisemitism, which cannot therefore be so non-existent.

The anti-Zionist committee is also used by Jewish loyalists to promote Yiddish culture. For example, one of their sessions had as its agenda preparing events to celebrate the Sholom Aleichem anniversary. According to Vergelis (editor of the Yiddish newspaper *Sovietisch Heimland*), the USSR is now the centre of world Jewish culture. If that is so, it says more about the decline of Yiddish culture outside the USSR than about its vitality inside. The Yiddish theatre does exist again: usually a mixture of Yiddish and Russian (in a Jewish accent) is used. I had no trouble getting to see the Freilichs musical-drama troupe last year and greatly enjoyed it even though I didn't follow some of the Yiddish. (People were saying it was almost impossible to get in, but in fact you just had to go to the box office and buy tickets.)

Thus a Jewish participant in the anti-Zionist campaign would probably justify themselves in private along the following lines: "I know I have to lie about and whitewash Soviet life, and those who have an absolute view of integrity despise me for that. But I'm doing something useful. First of all, Zionism is an oppressive force, a danger to world peace, and harmful to Jews

as well. Second, given that our leaders require some sort of anti-Zionist campaign, it's better that Jews should handle it rather than the anti-semites. In fact, the anti-Zionist committee is the nearest thing we've had to an officially recognised Jewish body since Stalin shot the Jewish anti-fascist committee after the war. It can protect the status of Jews and of Jewish culture in the USSR."

I keep up contact with the USSR primarily for the sake of peace, as my contribution to averting the threat of nuclear war. Fortunately Soviet antisemitism is not so powerful as to prevent me from making a contribution to peace between East and West. Maybe being Jewish even helps in some ways. It is easier to make genuine contact with Soviet society if you are of Jewish origin: you probably have relatives there, and even if you don't, Soviet Jews will fairly easily take you into their confidence, irrespective of their political stance (loyal to the regime, dissident, or anything in between).

The work of finding out about the position of Soviet Jews and exerting pressure for improvement should not be left up to the Zionists. Zionists are concerned pretty well exclusively with helping people to emigrate, a process which the Soviet authorities have now decided to stop. Soviet Jews who want to stay generally feel that the would-be emigrants are undermining their position within a very suspicious and "security"-conscious regime. As a result Jewish communities and indeed families in the USSR are bitterly divided between those who want to go and those who want to stay.

Western Jews whose Jewish identity takes a non/anti-Zionist form can do a lot to help Soviet Jews in ways that do not entail direct confrontation with the Soviet authorities. They can exert quiet pressure against Soviet antisemitism while at the same time working for peace between East and West. Perhaps some people would like to try promoting Yiddish as a language of detente and build bridges between the two sides of the Cold War in the process of reviving Yiddish culture jointly with Soviet Jews. The risks involved would be worth taking, and would at any rate be much smaller than the risks involved in promoting Hebrew (identified with Zionism). After all, Yiddish has official recognition as one of the languages of the multinational Soviet Union.

This may sound fantastic, but isn't it worth a try? Who among the readers of *Jewish Socialist* would like to take it on? If you will it (as someone or other said), it is no dream. As Freilichs finished their play singing: Sholom, sholom, sholom.

Stephen Shenfield is a researcher in East European Studies at the University of Birmingham and Co-editor of the new journal *Detente*.

## Secret paths to peace

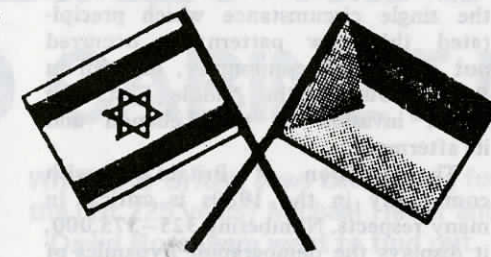
Between the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the Lebanon War of 1982, forward looking Israelis and Palestinians began plotting for peace. Michael Heiser charts their course

A few years ago, I was at a historic public meeting in London. Historic, because for the first time in England an Israeli and a representative from the PLO were sharing a common platform. When the time came for the Palestinian to speak, he was barracked by a small knot of Palestinian students in the audience. "Traitor", they jeered at him. His eyes flashing, beneath steely grey hair, he shot their insult back at them. "It is you who are the traitors". Few who were there could forget that moment. It becomes additionally poignant because six weeks later Issam Sartawi, that Palestinian speaker, lay in a pool of blood, shot dead at a congress of the Socialist International where he had been putting the case for his people.

The story of how Sartawi, and other Palestinians and Israelis came to engage in a process of dialogue is described in *Les Relations Secrètes Israélo-Palestiniennes* by Pierre Bayle. It is also the story of the evolution of the political position of the PLO. The process was begun by Said Hammammi, PLO representative in London, himself assassinated in 1978. In December 1973, barely a month after the end of the Yom Kippur war, he wrote in the *Times*: "We Palestinians have no reason to change our belief that a binational secular state in all of Palestine, where all Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews could live side by side is in the final analysis the only just and durable solution to the conflict. The first step in that direction could be (that) . . . Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs should recognise each other as two peoples . . . The recognition should be followed by the creation of a Palestinian state beside Israel in the West Bank and in Gaza."

This found an echo among figures in Israel grouped around the Israel Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, founded in 1975. Notable amongst these were Matti Peled, a reserve general in the Israeli Army and Uri Avnery, editor of the magazine *Haolam Hazeh* and sometime member of the Knesset. They had come to hold the conviction that Middle East peace required mutual recognition between the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples, and that Israel should talk to the PLO, as the representative of the Palestinian people. The two were helped to come together by those who were neither Israeli nor Palestinian, but who, by winning the confidence of both sides, established an atmosphere of trust. Some of these were based in Paris, such as Maxim Ghilan, editor of the magazine *Israel*

and *Palestine*, and Henri Curiel. Others who became involved at different times were public figures and international statespersons, such as Pierre Mendès-France (ex-French prime minister), Nahum Goldmann (for 40 years the president of the World Jewish Congress) and Bruno Kreisky, the Chancellor of Austria. The first direct contacts took place in Paris in 1976, with a meeting between Peled and Sartawi (designated by the PLO to carry out such contacts). At first stiff and inimical, both were to develop a rapport based on mutual respect. Both had fought and killed for their people, but were now ready to talk peace.



But others were hostile to any contacts, on both sides. On the Palestinian flank there is the shadowy and murderous figure of Abu Nidal, whose organisation was to claim responsibility for the shooting of both Hammammi and Sartawi. For the Israelis, there were those who were hostile to any contact with the PLO. One reason for Israel's beginning co-operation with Phalangist militias in Lebanon in 1976 was to head off any prospect of talking with the PLO, even at arms length. The Israeli politician responsible was the Defence Minister, one Shimon Peres. But despite discouragements and assassinations, the contacts were to continue. At times they were on a symbolic plane, such as Avnery's hoisting of crossed Israeli and Palestinian flags in the Knesset in 1981. At other occasions they looked like producing more tangible results. In 1981, Israel and the PLO were drawn into just such an arms-length relationship as Peres had wanted to avoid, through the ceasefire in Lebanon negotiated through the United States. The PLO wanted to deepen this. In January 1982, in an interview published in *Le Monde*, Sartawi declared himself in favour of dialogue with any Israeli public figure prepared to enter into discussions with the PLO. We now know that, through American channels, the PLO proposed

a non-aggression pact with Israel. At least one Israeli, Labour Knesset Member Yossi Sarid declared himself willing to respond to Sartawi's invitation. The response from the Israeli government came on June 6 1982 with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

However, further encouraging developments were to occur even as Beirut was under siege. In *Le Monde* of 3 July 1982 Goldmann, Mendès-France and Philip Klutznick (a former US Secretary of Commerce and also past president of the World Jewish Congress) wrote: "Our sense of Jewish history . . . leads us to affirm that the time has come for the reciprocal recognition between Israel and the Palestinian people". They called for Israel to lift the siege of Beirut, and to enter into negotiations with the PLO. Yasser Arafat welcomed this "positive initiative towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East".

Shortly after this, in Paris, Sartawi and Peled held a joint press conference and issued a joint declaration, noting that Arafat's response to the declaration of Mendès-France, Goldmann and Klutznick showed the willingness of the PLO to enter into peace negotiations on the basis of mutual recognition.

Regrettably, both Goldmann and Mendès-France died a few months later. But in January 1983 Peled and Avnery met Arafat in Tunis. On his return to Jerusalem, Avnery characterised the meeting as: "for the first time, a meeting between Israelis and Palestinians agreed on common action on how to reach peace".

The contacts have not died since Sartawi's assassination. Peled has become a Knesset member, elected on the joint Jewish-Arab Progressive List for Peace. On 9 February this year he and Mustapha Miari (the other PLP member), and other Jews and Arabs met Arafat in Tunis. Peled described the meeting as "a great political success". (Jerusalem Post International edition 9/3/85). However, Shimon Peres, now of course Israeli Prime Minister, said: "Arafat and his organisation are continuing with their indiscriminate terror against Israel and no Israeli should extend any help to this organisation". (Jerusalem Post International edition 23/2/85). Despite Peres' dismissive words there will be many who consider that such contacts are the only way through which peace can be brought. Bayle's book provides an inspiring review of the ground covered but also of the difficulties that yet lie ahead. It is to be hoped that it will be translated into English, and, for that matter into Hebrew and Arabic. □



# BACK TO THE GHETTO

The circumstances of the 1980s are increasingly polarising the Jewish community. Michael Safier looks at the options we face.

For 30 years after the Second World War, the Jewish community in Britain, taken as a whole, significantly improved its level of income and wealth, advanced its social status, and consolidated its communal organisations. The community existed in a society where liberal and progressive trends were ascendent, and where the level of overt antisemitic attack and discrimination were, with some exceptions, relatively subdued. The community was free to maintain its mainstream religious movements and develop its orientation to, and material support of Zionism and the State of Israel. Immediately after the trauma of the holocaust and the creation of the Jewish state, and in comparison with conditions in pre-war Britain, and with other countries in the same period, Jews in Britain were enjoying a time of progress and security.

This record was mirrored by the leading organisations, internal politics and media of the Jewish community. It was actively celebrated in the images they projected of material comfort, social consolidation and political and ideological consensus. Mainstream communal organisations were overwhelmingly committed to a non-political Zionism and a non-political, low-key defence of community interests through reliance on government and administration at home. The picture presented was one of being in the best of times in the best of places.

## VOICES OF WARNING

And yet, throughout the whole period, there appeared on the margin of community consciousness the shadowy spectre of decline and dissolution. Voices of warning about virtually every aspect of Jewish life in Britain, raised basic questions which never seemed to find convincing answers: about the nature of Jewish identity; the pressure of assimilation; the contradictions of religious affiliation; the state of Jewish education; the lack of cultural centres; the weaknesses of our welfare system; the estrangement of Jewish intellectuals and the petty politicking of committees. The "big" issues concerning the basis, well-being, future, and world view of Jews in post-war Britain remained stubbornly unresolved.

Over this period, more and more Jews became divorced from or unaffiliated with the community at large, and saw their identity in other terms. This was particularly the case with many holding strong political convictions

especially on the Left. The long established unity between Jews and socialist politics began to dissipate alongside the declining involvement of those Jews with the mainstream of their community.

The unease and frustrations formerly on the margins of the community have expanded dramatically in the 1980s, at first disturbing and then shattering the calm, comfort and complacency of many sections of our organised leadership. From the consequent confusion and disintegration, a new pattern of ideas and movements are emerging within the community. A symptom of the malaise that is no longer capable of being kept behind closed doors, was the single circumstance which precipitated this new pattern; it occurred not within the community, or even in Britain, but in the Middle East: the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon and its aftermath.

The position of Britain's Jewish community in the 1980s is critical in many respects. Numbering 325-375,000, it displays the demographic dynamics of a declining group. The rates of assimilation and of intermarriage remain high. The affiliation to all sections of Judaism as measured by religious identification, is less than two-thirds of the lowest estimated total number of Jews. The active and committed numbers of Zionists, even within organised Zionist groups is a tiny fraction of their membership. The economic well-being and social situation of significant numbers of Jews — self-employed, white collar workers, the elderly — are far more precarious and subject to current economic pressures than is generally realised. Resources for Jewish education, welfare and cultural activities are clearly inadequate. Antisemitism is once again a menacing factor in a political climate in which racism is given encouragement by government legislation, in which ultra-right wing ideologies have gained common currency, and in which a forced decline in overall living standards for the poorer stands in stark contrast to the increased incomes and benefits of those already well off. The sense of a clear and vibrant Jewish community or of a positive and deeply felt Jewish identity are massively missing.

Responses to this situation, energised by reactions to events in Israel and by a series of related issues at home, have sharpened the diversity and plurality of new ideas and movements now taking shape. Two broad and very contrasting

directions are discernible. Our understanding of and response to them is crucial to our future as Jews in Britain over the next generation.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

A new range of perspectives beckons us forward. A roll call of new organisations created and regenerated in the last five years can be cited as evidence of this new dynamism. There are initiatives aimed at nurturing a sense of identity through history and consciousness of culture such as the *Jewish East End Project*, the *Manchester Jewish Museum* and the *Leo Baeck College Library*. These, in turn, are closely allied with major educational initiatives through the *Spiro Institute*, and the *Manor House (Sternberg) Centre for Judaism*. Research and documentation, publicity and debate have been promoted by all these organisations and the *Institute of Jewish Affairs*, strengthened by new or renewed publications, particularly *Manna* and *The Jewish Quarterly*. There has been a revival in the strength of religious tolerance through the *Reform* and *Progressive* movements. At a more directly political level, new areas of Zionist debate have been opened up through the *British Friends of Peace Now*, while specifically Jewish political involvement in social affairs in Britain has been enhanced through *Jews Organised for a Nuclear Arms Halt*, the *Jewish Employment Action Group* and the emergence of feminist initiatives in the *Jewish Feminist Group*, *Jewish Lesbians Against Racism* and the new *Shifra* magazine. It is no coincidence that this period has witnessed a powerful revival of the socialist current in the community through the *Jewish Socialists' Group*, *JCARP* and *Jewish Socialist* — a renewal combining political activism with cultural and ethnic assertion.

## NEW ORTHODOXIES

Another response to the present situation, which has gained prominence and force since 1982, points in a contrary direction. It represents a profoundly reactionary retreat into the ghetto through a trenchant reassertion of orthodoxies. The walls of the new ghetto now being erected are being built by our established communal leaders. It is a triple construction made up of the move back to exclusivist religious orthodoxy, to expansionist Zionist nationalism and to conservative political ideology.

Rather than accommodating to the

realities of a diverse community in an increasingly secular society, the Chief Rabbi of Britain publicly states his faith in the ultimate survival and triumph of the religiously committed. Demeaning the aspirations of the broad mass of Anglo-Jewry, he looks to their decline and replacement by a small, religiously committed minority as the only viable basis for future Jewish existence.

An insistence on the centrality of Israel to Jewish life, and the effective subordination of the interests of diaspora Jewish communities to the requirements of the Israeli state, stand as the basis of strict Zionist orthodoxy. Not only does it demand unquestioning support for Israeli government policy, but seeks to place out of court, debate on a range of Jewish concerns here in Britain, unless explicitly confined within the

limits of Zionist analysis. This is most clearly illustrated through Jewish defence policy where ideological arguments about Zionism emanating from the Left are deemed more menacing than the rampant racism of the Right, even when the ideas and policies of the authoritarian Right are clearly in the ascendancy.

The turn to conservative political ideology is illustrated by recent conflicts about the politics of combating racism. Standing distant from radical anti-racist campaigns, and close to the state authorities who themselves are often the legitimate target of such campaigns, even the more progressive establishment figures reject *anti-racism* in favour of *racial harmony*. They operate in a universe of discourse which locates racism as a social issue, capable of resolution through individual initiative. Struc-

tural racism, ideological antisemitism, and the political and economic forces moulding them are outside this framework.

The ever sharpening clash between these divergent perspectives defines the options for our community. The old orthodoxies offer us a profoundly dangerous combination of religious *retreat*, Zionist *evacuation* or *assimilationist abolition*. Emerging in embryonic form against the powerful forces of reaction is the prospect of a *pluralist regeneration* through a new Jewish radical alliance. As Jewish Socialists we share a commitment to contribute, with other like-minded Jews, to the search for a future of wide horizons rather than find ourselves pushed down yet another blind alley in our long history. The choice, and the challenge, is here and now. □

# FROM CABINET MAKERS TO CABINET MINISTERS

What have British Jews been doing for the last 225 years? Michael Heiser and David Rosenberg went to find out.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews is 225 years old and this auspicious occasion calls, it seems, for a festival. The glossy card to advertise it has on its front a tastefully posed portrait of two non-Jews — the Prince and Princess of Wales. Inside, we find a quote from the Prime Minister "The history of the Board is in many ways the history of the Anglo-Jewish community . . . Jews and Christians share a respect for the law, a passion for freedom and an acute sense of the importance of the moral basis for life. These common ideals go far to explain why your Board works against the encouraging background of a successfully integrated community." British Jewry is therefore falling over itself to demonstrate its acceptability to the establishment.

This initial impression is reinforced by a visit to "Achievement British Jewry", a documentary exhibition (on at the Camden Arts Centre from May to June 1985). The poster for the exhibition is in patriotic red, white and blue. Inside, you find a succession of portraits of Jews (overwhelmingly male) who have "made it" over the past two hundred years.

And who are they? In politics a glittering array from Disraeli through

Viscount Samuel to Leon Brittan. In business we see Lord Cohen (Tesco) and Michael Marks. In case the message hasn't come through clearly enough, a newspaper cutting reveals that Margaret Thatcher once worked as a chemist for Jo Lyons! On we go through law, theatre, journalism (Bernard Levin and the *Jewish Chronicle*) to Moses Montefiore and hence back to the Board of Deputies.



So what's missing? There is nothing about the Jewish anti-fascist tradition. There is very little about Jewish working class history or the Jewish East End. Socialism is represented by an obituary notice for Harold Laski (socialism is dead, geddit?) and a critical article on Karl Marx. There is precious little about Yiddish culture or the Yiddish press. The token representation of the Yiddish theatre isn't even placed with the rest of the dazzling theatrical set (Lionel Bart, Peter Shaffer and the Barmitzvah

Boy) as if it is a footnote in history, a mild curiosity.

Some visitors to the exhibition we spoke to seemed to be as censorious as ourselves. "Self-glorification and hero-worship," said one man. Another said it was "ill-conceived and that nothing held it together". Another, sarcastic comment was: "Maybe it's aimed at Nigel Lawson, to make him want to identify as a Jew!"

Well, who is it aimed at? The people visiting the exhibition at the time we were there seemed to be overwhelmingly Jewish. We found that there was very little with which we could identify as Jews or which we would want to celebrate. The Jews who *are* celebrated there have on the whole little to do with the community and its struggles as such. It concentrates on those who have "made it" by the norms of British middle class society. We heard comments of "I didn't know so-and-so was Jewish," not "I didn't know the Jewish community had achieved such-and-such."

The whole exhibition was summed up by a perceptive comment in the visitors' book — "One of the community's faults is the obsession with getting to the top. This exhibition shares that obsession." Quite! □



# SOUTH AFRICAN JEWS

## Which side are they on ?

Attacked as both communists and capitalists, as liberals with a white lifestyle, some South African Jews are now beginning to take a stand — despite what they have to lose — says Viv Walt.

I need to dispel one myth I have myself been trying to shake off most of my life ... that of the *Jewish community*. Having been educated, so to speak, at a Jewish day school, my embryonic political consciousness was governed by such phrases as "a pride to the community" (won a debating contest), "that child is a disgrace to the Jewish community" (was caught making anti-Zionist speeches) and "well loved by the community" (could be anyone who was sick at the time). These words of wisdom led me ultimately, like so many of my Jewish socialist comrades from my home country, to reject "the community". It was a great relief to find, after a battle of several years, that it didn't exist.

My story is personal, and I believe that like all of us, my personal experience has several political lessons to relate.

### GOOD PROSPECTS

Most of us South African Jews come originally from a wave of Eastern European (almost all Lithuanian) refugees at the turn of the century. The choice was, for the most, arbitrary, and often immediate families were fragmented as half the siblings went in the other direction: some of my own family landed up in New York, others still live in Leningrad.

Nevertheless, word was out that South Africa was a good prospect for exile. Gold had recently been discovered and it had only then become evident that the mineral lay deep underground in such abundance that it warranted a costly and disastrous war for both the Boers and the Brits, to gain control of the Witwatersrand, the reef flanking the city of Johannesburg. This was no California gold rush: this was the *real thing* and that had enormous implications for the whole future for Jews in South Africa. After arriving by boat, the Jews quickly spread out over the country, and became, for the most part, middlemen in a booming economy. They made an honest and modest living as traders between small towns, hotel keepers in country villages (the Jewish *dorp* hotel-keeper stereotype still lingers), and so on.

Not all fitted that picture. As one of Britain's greatest historians of the

time, J A Hobson, said in his thesis on the Boer War, Jewish international capital was central to the capitalist battle over the gold mines. Indeed, many of the most strategic industries of the time were Jewish-owned or financed: the greatest mining company (Wernher-Beit), the dynamite industry, liquor monopoly, property syndicates and so on. "A new Jerusalem" is what Hobson called Johannesburg at the time of the Boer War. It was a period of great class formation in the country, the period of integration (or not) of the Jewish population — the period from which (I have found) the British appear to draw most of their misconceptions about South Africa, perhaps because it is taught in schools as being an era of Imperial Glory. The other side of this coin was the rapid population on the Rand of relatively working-class Jews. Mr Currie's Union Castle fleet made an awful lot of money selling tickets to South Africa for Jewish refugees — via London — and it is little coincidence that the same Mr Currie was chairperson of the Refugee Aid and Compensation in the Transvaal under Britain's Lord Milner, who had been dispatched from London to reconstruct the territory after the Boer War.

### A SUBVERSIVE INFLUENCE

These Jews were not quite sure what the British had in mind. Refugees they might be, but they were repeatedly identified with communism as well. Even today they are simultaneously called commies and capitalist pigs in South Africa — a contradiction, it seems, that British Jews have to live with as

well.

When white workers revolted en masse on the Rand in 1922, Smuts (the gentleman now immortalised next to Churchill in Whitehall) was quick to see the Jews as a significantly subversive influence in Johannesburg. Today there are few remains of this community, which was centred around a chaotic district called Doornfontein. There are a few forgotten synagogues, perhaps a bagel bakery. Much like the East End today.

Somewhat ironically, there was another wave of Jewish immigrants to South Africa as refugees from Nazi Germany, although this was much smaller than the Litvak wave. Despite a nominally pro-British government being still in power, the growing Afrikaner Nationalist movement was decidedly pro-German. Several prominent members, including the former South African Prime Minister, John Vorster, were interned during the war for their fascist sentiments — a fact quietly ignored when Vorster paid his respects to the Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem some years later. Jews of fighting age signed up to go to war against the Nazis: for them it was an anti-fascist, not an imperialist, war and they fought it alongside black South Africans, among others.

Explaining the economic development of Jews has always been a tough task for socialist Jews in South Africa, in my experience. Sure, our great-grandparents arrived poor — even our parents began life in very modest comfort. We are usually met with some scepticism when making this point in South Africa — and with good reason. The stereotype of having tremendous financial clout and business acumen is nowhere more embodied than in the South African Jewish population. Today they are company directors, doctors, lawyers, professors and so on.

In trying to understand this, I should say that Jews were traditionally cut off from civil service careers, which absorb a large proportion of whites in South Africa. In entrepreneurial activities, then, they were in a better position than most to make great strides after the war when the manufacturing industry, particularly, experienced enormous growth.

### STARK CONTRASTS

In South Africa, where wealth and poverty bear an equally glaring brashness — more so than in Britain — such affluence has undoubtedly given rise to widespread antisemitism among both right and left, including *self-hatred* and doubt among Jewish leftists. When one lives in South Africa, there is good reason to fall for the Jewish conspiracy line! Of the 100,000 Jews, some 70,000 live in the rolling wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg, where tennis courts and swimming pools hide the tasteful houses from the road. At the same time, however, I do not want to give the impression that *all* Jews live like this.

I also don't want to suggest that Jewish leftists in Britain escape the same embarrassment about their background. But in South Africa, the issues are far more stark and immediate, and the stakes of one's political commitment far higher. Also, when black and white lives are *legislatively* alienated from one another through apartheid, the politics of *life-style* are of crucial importance and are often the main way in which whites can affirm their commitment to political change. When I first became politically involved in 1972, the Black Consciousness Movement was experiencing its first major boost among young people. It was *not* ethnicity itself, therefore that was taboo. We respected blacks for expressing their blackness; it was an oppressed culture, and the Black Consciousness Movement had massive powers of mobilisation. But Jews were appreciated only insofar as they played down their Jewishness to virtual non-existence. With wealth being crudely synonymous to oppression, being Jewish held connotations which none of us seemed able to escape.

Considering the disproportionate number of Jews in leadership positions among the left, in prison, banned and so on, we should, theoretically, have been "proud to be Jewish", as my headmaster always said. But we detested the liberal homes, bursting with literature and African art, and our parents who voted and campaigned for the opposition Progressive Party, against all our insistence that elections were just a bourgeois sideshow. The campus of my university held an annual debate on whether or not Zionism 'equalled' Racism, after a regular blow-up over the issue. For Jewish leftists, there was rarely a choice of which way we would vote — we would have to cast our vote along with blacks, Muslim and Christian. Both sides had the loudest voice among



Jewish students, and one year several Jewish leftists went so far as to join the large, militant Muslim Society, to prove their point — and were silently forgiven their accident of birth

### TRUE COLOURS?

It was even of some delight to us when, after the 1976 riots, several Jewish establishment leaders came out firmly against the rioters, organised vigilante groups to patrol synagogues and Jewish schools, and, I believe, saw that they were well-equipped with pistols, bomb evacuation notices and fire extinguishers. At last they were showing their true colours, we said, and our delight increased when more and more Jews began supporting the ruling Nationalist Party. It was far easier to reject blatant racism than the insidious liberalism we were brought up on. Incidentally, after the local elections in South Africa earlier this year, one Jewish candidate said she had lost her seat because the Jewish vote had gone to the Nats. So much for Jewish community! In addition, the orthodox Lubovitch community campaigned strongly for the government. There is a definite feeling emerging among Jews of sympathy for South Africa's international isolation, somewhat equated with that of Israel, and strengthened by the close ties developing between the two countries.

There is no easy, packaged answer to explain all these developments. It is worth noting that the Jewish support for the Progressive Party has traditionally come from the upper-middle class and that, particularly since 1976, there has been a significant emigration to other parts of the world (especially the US, Australia and Canada). But that is only part of the story. I remember, clearly, just before writing our final high-school

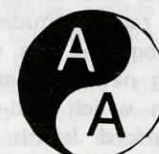
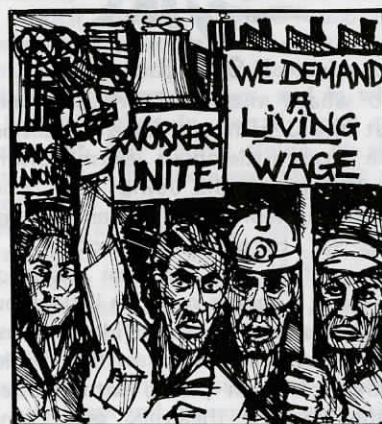
examinations, a teacher asked for a show of hands of pupils who imagined they would still be in South Africa a decade later. Only one or two hands in the class of 25 went up. My own feeling is that with the greatly increased repression and urban warfare since 1976, the reality of the revolution is a lot clearer to us all, including those in their comfortable suburban houses. Such a realisation has gone a long way to polarise the white population sharply, especially the Jews, with their forever contradictory role in the system.

### PERSONAL POLITICS

What now? Well, not all is desperate. I believe there has been a very definite change in attitude among the Left towards our Jewishness, and it is not just because we are no longer kids. It struck me quite forcibly on my last visit to South Africa. The struggle has drawn whites into its core. There are whites in jail in greater numbers than ever before. There is no longer a great need for lifestyle, culture and your bank balance to dictate your credibility as a white leftist. The demise of the Black Consciousness Movement and its concept of the oppressed culture has meant something of a knock for the idea of an oppressor culture. I knew that something had changed when, at a recent party, a group of us leftists began swapping barmitzvah experiences! Our liberal, wealthy parents seem to have been forgiven too. In fact, they have become quite the heroes. They defend their children in court, act as lawyers in political trials, write radical books, do valuable political research, counsel migrant workers . . .

They are heroes because they — well, some of them — have taken that stand despite what they have to lose.

I believe the incorporation of feminist ideas has helped in breaking down the rigidity of the left. When women's movements began emerging in the early to mid-1970s, they suffered the same treatment as they did here, being regarded as a diversion from the class struggle and of being led mainly by middle-class white women. As the women's movement has shown its ability to organise on a grassroots level and incorporate community issues, so feminism and the idea that the "personal is political" became a lot more acceptable. Of course, this did have spin offs for troubled Jewish leftists — it was now up to ourselves, with a particular background, perhaps going beyond the strict class we were born into. □





# CLASS WAR

Many education authorities have introduced anti-racist policies to supplement multicultural education. But how do Jews fare? asks Steve Ogin

With regard to antisemitism, it can be fairly said that anti-racist teaching is not geared to challenging it at all, either in theory or in practice. Illustrative examples are often drawn from the Jewish historical experience but it is rare to find even lip service paid to an awareness of anti-semitism as a current phenomenon and difficult to find any attempt to guide and assist teachers in pinpointing and responding in a pedagogically constructive manner to antisemitism in schools.

There is a widespread misconception that antisemitism does not exist in contemporary Britain. This does not conform to Jewish experience nor tally with research findings. As a rudimentary investigation of antisemitism in schools, I made a brief, informal survey of eight Jewish families with children attending schools in the Cambridgeshire area. Of these, five families (A-E) had children who reported difficulties connected with Jewishness at school.

Family A: The parents had discovered that on a form inquiring about religion, one of their children had replied "Church of England" instead of "Judaism". A second child had got into a fight in response to being called a "rich Jew".

Family B: During a supposedly non-denominational assembly, the children put their hands together while singing a hymn. The child, supported by the parents asked to be exempted from making this gesture. Another little girl became "nasty" about this exemption and it required a meeting of the parents of the two children to calm matters down.

Family C: Reported severe problems "not just name calling". The parents had approached the RE teacher who gave the child's class a telling off, but the problems still remained with the rest of the school.

Family D: A child, born and brought up in England had been made fun of as "the Jew" and told to "go back where you came from". The child felt it was generally a "fault" to be Jewish. The RE teacher was singled out for special criticism in being basically ignorant about Jews and "a pain" as the child was often picked on in class during this teacher's lessons to explain Jewish matters.

Family E: The child refused to use an Israeli first name at school but used an English second name instead.

The children involved here were between the ages of five to fifteen and of both sexes. An important feature was that parents and children sometimes gave contradictory information with parents suggesting that there were no problems at school and the children painting a different picture.

Findings such as these of the difficulties of Jewish children in predominantly Gentile schools are not very surprising, when taken in conjunction with more sophisticated research. In a study of inter-ethnic attitudes and behaviour in British multi-racial schools in 1975, two researchers (Bagley and Verma) found: 'A clear rank order of hostility (to diverse ethnic groups) . . . (with) . . . Jews and Pakistanis the most rejected ethnic group, while West Indians are less so'. 33% of comments from teenagers aged 14-16 produced spontaneous negative stereotypes of Jews such as "mean, selfish, misers, greedy, stingy" while 11% of comments used obscene phrases of the type 'shit bags', "fucking bastards" etc. The authors concluded ". . . our sample still holds the stereotypes of Jews held by the generation before them."

Outside school, in the wider community, antisemitic attacks on Jews and Jewish premises is a continuing problem fanned by the policies and practices of the British neo-Nazi parties. In the GLC report "Racial Harrassment in London" (1983) the Board of Deputies of British Jews revealed to the Inquiry Panel that

there was an average of between 20 and 25 antisemitic incidents each month in London during the last two years. These are reported incidents, the severity ranging from: Jews on their way to the synagogue being almost run down with the driver of the car shouting "Hitler didn't finish you off so I bloody well will"; pig's head left in the doorway of a synagogue with a Ku Klux Klan sticker in its mouth; gravestone damaged in Jewish cemeteries; synagogues and butchers' shops daubed with racist material.

It is against this background of anti-semitic attacks in the community and documented antisemitism amongst schoolchildren that the inadequate response of anti-racist teaching is so surprising. In a book of case studies in ILEA schools published in 1984 - *Education for a Multicultural Society* - an authority

with the greatest concentration of Jews and a high rate of recorded antisemitic incidents - it is difficult to find any reference to combatting antisemitism. The only explicit reference is in an article on 'Anti-racist teaching policies' where the school policy sought to "prevent any racist abuse occurring inside the school whenever we possibly can. For example, if epithets like "coon", "nigger", "wog", 'vid" or "paki" are heard they should not go unchallenged." Sadly, the author reports some confusion amongst the staff about whether or not the reference to Spurs' supporters as "Yids" constituted a breach of the policy.

Another author reveals how tokenistic the treatment of Jewish issues and anti-semitism can be: "Although the major preoccupation was black-white relations, we did try to encourage a broader frame of reference. For example, . . . we considered the issues of integration, assimilation and cultural identity and in doing so, invited a Jewish member of staff and a Rabbi to speak of the Jewish experience."

But worse, in these initiatives which were a direct response to the activity of either the National Front or the British Movement in the school or the local community it is not clear that the importance of antisemitism to neo-Nazi ideology was appreciated.

The whole tone of these case studies suggests that antisemitism is a vanished phenomenon, having existed only pre-1945. And even antisemitism of that period is not always treated in a straightforward and simple way, e.g. "Between the wars, in the East End of London, it was the Jews and working class activists that suffered the worst persecution".

It is clear that anti-racist teaching has so far not produced an adequate response to challenging both conscious and unconscious antisemitism at school from pupils or teachers. The recognition with regard to anti-Black racism that "British society . . . has a historical past steeped in imperialism and colonialism which has contributed to racist attitudes" does not extend to recognising the deep-rooted and continuing nature of antisemitism. The protection which anti-racist strategies should afford Jewish children as targets of racism is dangerously absent.

# Racism Awareness Training

Michael Heiser takes a critical look

Racism creates strong passions and equally strong reactions. So, it seems does racism awareness training. It has attracted some of the aura of a "magic ingredient", an elixir or balm. It is as if to say: "One application of racism awareness training and your racist housing department can become a model of committed anti-racist practice."

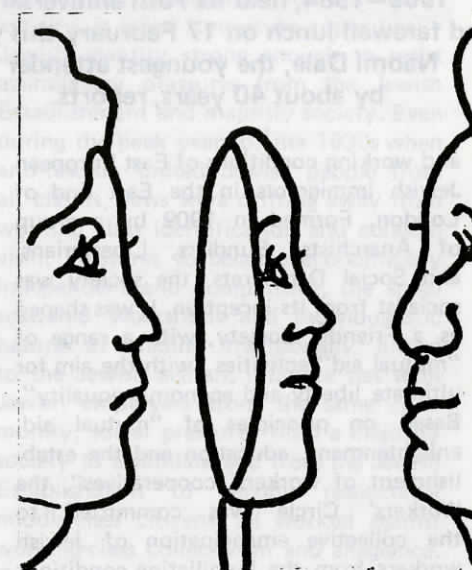
At the same time, there are those who are ready to say that the remedy is a fake and its practitioners quacks. Recent articles in *Searchlight* (January and February 1985) and by A. Sivanandan in *Race and Class* (Spring 1985) have put this point of view forcefully. "Taking class out of race" and "potty training to learn how to excrete racist shit discreetly", are just two of the damning epithets applied. How has this arisen?

## A SIGN OF DISSATISFACTION

The sphere where racism awareness training has had the greatest effect is that of local government, specifically in those local authorities with high Black populations. Some of those who adopted it with most enthusiasm have been the "new left" Labour councils elected in 1981 or 1982; Hackney, Islington, above all the GLC. There are very real grievances felt by Black people that they get the worst jobs, housing and education. At member level at least, there is a wish to tackle this and to be seen to get results fast. At the same time, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the existing tools for eradicating discrimination, either the weak Race Relations Act or the deliberately low key strategy for public education by promotion of "equality of opportunity". "After all", its practitioners were wont to bewail, "you can't change attitudes overnight".

## PREJUDICE PLUS POWER

Racism awareness training seemed to promise that attitudes *could* be changed - if not overnight then at least in three days' intensive self-examination. The model of racism awareness training adopted was one developed in the United States and was identified with Judy Katz, as set out in her book *White Awareness* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1978). According to this, racism is a disease ("the number one mental health problem in America") affecting white people. White people have prejudiced attitudes towards Black people. However, through the institutions of a white-dominated society, they also have the power to affect adversely the lives of Black people, through decisions on employment, education, housing and



so on. Hence the crucial equation of racism awareness training (which according to the critics has acquired the status of a shibboleth or mantra): "racism equals prejudice plus power."

Power is a complex and multi-faceted concept. As socialists, when we talk about "power" in a capitalist society, we are talking about the power of the capitalist class and about the coercive power of the State. This is a general view. But power is also exercised at an individual level, and when racism awareness training talks about the power that white people have over Black people it is this "individual" level that they mean. Critics would say that by concentrating too much on this "micro" view of power, little account is taken of "power" in society as a whole.

This is shown at its starkest when racism awareness training is used by the police or immigration service. In these hands, racism awareness training may become a tool for the avoidance and management of conflict. Racism awareness training in the police force may look at the attitudes of individual police officers, but it is unlikely to consider the place of the police force as a whole in the reproduction of racism.

Similarly, racist immigration policies of successive governments have set the tone for the operation of the immigration service. Individual attitudes of officers are certainly a problem, but cannot be tackled in isolation.

## DOES IT WORK?

There is a more fundamental question, which is: does racism awareness training work? Does it succeed in its aims of making individuals less racist in their

attitudes, of making white people less racist? According to its practitioners, training should be the beginning of planning to introduce anti-racist practice into institutions. It should assist committed anti-racists to reinforce each other in exposing and changing the racism of institutions. The typical situation is where well-meaning white people are too weak to tackle racism, and so connive in its perpetuation. In so far as it gives the anti-racist the confidence to speak up, it may "work". But it is doubtful whether it can actually change those individuals who are consciously or unconsciously racist. Rather, it can teach them to hide behind a new vocabulary. Worse, by making them more conscious of their individual power, it can make them more conscious racists.

## WHERE DO JEWS FIT IN?

Many Jews (especially Black Jews) may well reject one of the principles of Katzian racism awareness training, that they should see themselves as "white" as opposed to "Jewish". In one article this is made quite explicit. "Ask a white person what he or she is racially and you may get the answer 'Italian', 'English', 'Catholic' or 'Jewish'. *White people do see themselves as white* (stress in original). This is one way to deny ownership of perpetuating the racist system and as being part of the problem." (in J. Katz and A. Ivey *White Awareness, the frontier of racism awareness training*, in *Personnel & Guidance Journal* Vol 55 No. 8 (1977))

Compare this to what Paul Boateng said at a Jewish Cultural and Antiracist Project (JCARP) meeting in Stamford Hill last year. "Jews are not white, but they look white and, damn it, they act white." What Boateng meant, I think, is that Jews are not in essence part of a white ruling elite, but that some Jews have assimilated the values of this elite and perpetuate them in their dealings with and attitudes towards Black people. The problem is, how are Jews won over to the anti-racist struggle? Katz, it seems would have Jews identify as white people as opposed to Jews. JCARP's work has been informed by an alternative perspective. This is that by making Jews more conscious of their position as an ethnic minority, and of the radical anti-racist history within the Jewish community, Jews will draw parallels and identify themselves with the struggles of Black people today.

The contrast is stark. To put it at its bluntest, Katz would have Jews

*Continued on page 15*



# History Moves In Circles?

The Jewish Workers' Circle Friendly Society, 1909-1984, held its 75th anniversary and farewell lunch on 17 February this year. Naomi Dale, the youngest attender by about 40 years, reports.

"Ninety-two years old, and been involved for over sixty years," announced the sprightly man, before leaping off to join another group. We stood in the packed foyer of Hackney Town Hall with 130 people, average age 70-80 years. "I'm a socialist too," I confided to his middle-aged daughter. Taken aback, she quickly recounted the familiar liturgy: "Oh I'm against extremism of all kinds - all as bad as each other. Prefer moderation." The other people in the room thought otherwise. They were long-standing supporters of the Workers' Circle, who had journeyed from other parts of London and the provinces on this bleak February morning to show their respect and affection to a society that had never denied its socialist affinity.

The occasion was notably low-key. A modest reception, fried fish and stodgy strudel at a lengthy lunch, presentations of rosettes to members of distinguished service to the Circle, and two speeches by Councillor Sam Cohen (Chair of the Workers' Circle and former Mayor of Hackney and Stoke Newington) and Professor William Fishman (Senior Research Fellow and tutor at Queen Mary College, London University). Councillor Cohen welcomed the oldest member present, 94 year old David Sternberg, who joined in 1915. Both speakers recalled their involvement in the Circle and its formative influence on their love of Yiddish and social concern. The event today represented a "new beginning", Bill Fishman reassured members, and the Workers' Circle influence would live on through the new interest aroused in Yiddish and the Jewish East End to which the society had greatly contributed. People listened to the speeches quietly, the air heavy with pride and sadness. The ceremony ended abruptly after lunch.

But for all the modesty of its last gathering, the Workers' Circle will long be remembered as a remarkable achievement in Anglo-Jewry. One of the longest-living Jewish working class organisations in Britain or America, and an exemplary expression of radical collectivism. The Workers' Circle or *Der Arbeiter Ring* grew up in the midst of crowded living

and working conditions of East European Jewish immigrants in the East End of London. Formed in 1909 by a group of Anarchists, Bundists, Libertarians, and Social Democrats, the society was socialist from its inception. It was shaped as a Friendly Society, with a range of "mutual aid" activities "with the aim for ultimate liberty and economic equality". Based on principles of "mutual aid, enlightenment, education and the establishment of workers' cooperatives", the Workers' Circle was committed to the collective emancipation of Jewish workers from the humiliating conditions of sweatshop labour and exploitation by Jewish and Gentile bosses. Class conscious in its objectives and practice, the Workers' Circle focused on the class struggle between Jewish worker and Jewish employer, offering financial aid to Jewish strikers in labour disputes such as the tailoring workers' strike in 1912.

The Workers' Circle was unique in Jewish communal institutions in Britain in a number of ways. Although rooted in a Judaic tradition of synagogue-based benefit societies, the society was firmly secular. It provided a pluralistic forum for individuals from a wide range of socialist tendencies, including Libertarians, Social Democrats, Bundists and Socialist Zionists. Its spirit was inflamed by immigrants carrying revolutionary ideas from the Pale, like Social Democrats and Bundists, and those disillusioned by appalling living conditions in the East End. At the same time, socialism and trade union militancy were accelerating rapidly in Britain from the 1880s to the first World War, and this had a profound impact on the consciousness of Jewish immigrant working classes.

Between direct labour struggles, the Workers' Circle engaged in related action. A primary purpose was the provision of benefits, with contributions received for "mutual aid" purposes and a benefit fund providing for sickness, burial and strikers' relief. Education and "socialist propaganda" were given a high priority, and lectures and discussions were often held daily at the society's base, Circle House in Alie Street, E1. Eminent person-

alities and local political activists, like Harry Pollitt, Sam Berks, Sarah Wesker, David Ben-Gurion, Selig Brodetsky, were among the speakers. A wide ranging library provided a focal point of learning for local Jews.

Distinct from other British labour organisations of the time, the society linked celebration and assertion of cultural heritage with the collective unity and aspirations for justice and equality of an oppressed minority. In this, they were strongly influenced by their Bundist and Socialist Zionist members. Meetings were held in Yiddish and English; concerts, Yiddish theatre productions and art exhibitions were staged in Circle House. Emphasis on Yiddish was far more than an expedient way of communicating with first-generation Yiddish speaking immigrants. Consciously defying the Anglo-Jewish Establishment's attempts to quell Yiddish speaking by East European newcomers, the Workers' Circle set up the *Yiddishe Schule* (Yiddish School) to transmit the *mameloshen* (mother tongue) to the next generation. Children converged on Circle House on Sunday afternoons to enjoy Yiddish stories, under the guidance of Izhak Natani.

Membership rose by the hundreds from 1920 onwards, reaching a peak of 4,000 (with 17 branches in London and the provinces) in its heyday of 1934-1939 during the period of anti-fascist activity against Moseley and his supporters. Its cultural and workers' educational impact was far larger than its membership size suggested. On any day, Circle House buzzed with activity; people tucking into Jewish delicacies and Russian tea in the crowded bar, factions fought out in chess, draughts and dominoes, talking and ferocious argument.

In the early 1930s, fundraising led to an extension of "mutual aid" activities and the purchase of a convalescent home, Wilbury House in Littlehampton. Women became more represented with the development of the first Women's Section by Division 3 in 1931 (later followed by other branches). The main political activity was positive political

opposition to fascism and anti-semitism in Britain, Nazism and Franco's invasion of Spain. Many members, against the advice of the British Board of Deputies of British Jews, took to the streets in the 1930s to prevent Moseley's marches through the Jewish East End. It was so overtly political that the Registrar of Friendly Societies in the 1950s insisted on the Circle refraining from political activities. The society also celebrated other Jewish resistances, and from 1943 onwards, annually commemorated the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

But from the 1950s onwards the peak days of the Circle were over. The membership was ageing and declined steeply in number to a present day 400 (with only 6 branches). In 1956, the premises moved from Alie Street to Mare Street, Hackney E8. One reason for its demise was that its function as a friendly society became redundant as the Welfare State took over the provision of welfare, health and pension benefits. Other factors also contributed to its decline. Post-war and with the creation of the State of Israel, the Anglo-Jewish Establishment channelled politically aware and communally conscious young Jews into Zionist youth organisations and *aliya* (emigration to Israel).

An attempt to revive the youth work of the Circle proved fruitless. Moreover, the Communist Party was the most prominent political force in the Workers' Circle in the 1930s; although providing unparalleled leadership in anti-fascist activity, it failed to nurture a specifically Jewish identity strong enough to resist assimilatory pressures from the Jewish Establishment and majority society. Even during the peak years of the 1930s when anti-fascism united Jewish people from all classes, Jews were drifting away from working class identification and collectivism. Pressures to become economically independent and competitive, the small scattered workshops and individualistic nature of trading traditionally linked to the Jewish artisan, intimate ties with Jewish employers from the same community, social pressures from a majority society to assimilate and from the Jewish Establishment to become respectable middle-class citizens, all worked against working-class collectivism and allegiance. Group consciousness was diverted after the war into the vicarious nationalism of Zionism, which masked Jewish class politics in Britain. From 1956 to the present day, the Workers' Circle resorted to fundraising activities for Israel and charities at home and abroad.

With political debate and diversity in Anglo-Jewry actively stifled since the second World War, knowledge of this unique heritage of the Workers' Circle gives present day Jewish radicals an urgently needed inspiration - and legitimacy. An era ended on 17 February 1985, but this Circle still deserves retreading. □

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by David Rosenberg

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The Greater London Council renewed its grant to the Jewish Socialists' Group for its cultural and anti-racist project (JCARP). The grant for 1985-86 is worth £18,476.

Project Co-ordinator, David Rosenberg, stated: "It is a clear vindication of the need for an independent and radical anti-racist body in the Jewish community. It is a recognition of our valuable work in this last year, in particular our success in fostering an open debate on the issues facing Jews in a climate of increasing racism and hostility. It is a reflection of the need and interest within the community for such a project. The grant will provide us with the resources to strengthen and expand our activities in providing a focus for Jewish people in the fight against racism, in developing a forceful campaign against antisemitism, and in positively celebrating Jewish culture and ethnicity in multi-ethnic London. The GLC's anti-racist year is over. It is up to JCARP and similar projects to use these resources to carry on this work effectively, and we urge Jewish people to support us and join with us in this work."

Continued from page 13

become anti-racists by denying their Jewishness; JCARP would be encouraging Jews to become more conscious of their ethnicity.

The experience of Jews on racism awareness courses has been mixed. Some Jews have felt that there is a pressure for them to identify as white, and to deny that being Jewish is important. However, my own experience of a racism awareness course was that I found participants were encouraged to become conscious of and take a pride in their own ethnicity. I found encouragement rather than hostility in identifying myself as Jewish, and in seeing my ethnicity as a resource in fighting racism.

### TIME TO RETHINK

The current criticisms of racism awareness training may act as a salutary antidote to the exaggerated claims that racism awareness training can banish racism overnight. However there is still a need, in the words of the GLC anti-racist charter to "examine, challenge, criticise and change the structures that perpetuate racism in organisations." Groups of Black people and others, including Jews, can make racism an issue in workplaces, schools and society generally. If racism awareness training helps in doing this, it is useful. But perhaps some of its assumptions and methods should be rethought - if so, will it still be racism awareness training?



# PROLTET

טעאטער  
פראלעט

פראלעט

יודישער

The Yiddish-speaking Group of the Workers'  
Theatre Movement  
by Ray Waterman

When I asked Fegal Firestein, a founder member of Proltet, how it began, she said it grew out of a Yiddish Drama Group already in existence in the East End Jewish Workers' Circle. And how did *that* begin? O that, she said, grew out of a literary group there; and *that* was formed by the Progressive Youth Circle within the Jewish Workers' Circle, which began...

It seems that there is never a beginning, strictly speaking. One simply draws an arbitrary line and says, start here.

Fegal Firestein, Alf Holland and my late husband Alec Waterman were among a small group of young Polish-Yiddish immigrants who arrived in London in 1927 or 1928. Fifty years later Mrs Firestein still speaks with a sense of outrage at the cultural desert in which they found the Jewish youth of the East End and, to some extent, their parents also. The older people were members of the mass migrations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; long hours of sweated labour or the demands of one-person businesses hampered or entirely precluded their efforts at self-development and education. They spoke a mixture of Yiddish and English and their children hardly spoke Yiddish at all, and knew little or nothing of the rich cultural heritage created in Eastern Europe. The Whitechapel Theatre gave Yiddish performances but it came to life only when the lively Vilna Theatre came from Poland for a season, or Morris Schwartz or other well-known actors came from America. The Jewish Workers' Circle, then in its heyday, played a great role as a cultural and social venue for the immigrant population. But it did not attract the youth.

It was this situation that these newly-arrived immigrants, with a number of like-minded others, set out to remedy by forming the Progressive Youth Circle inside the Workers' Circle. All were young workers, skilled or semi-skilled tailors and dressmakers, cabinet-makers, hairdressers and shop-assistants. Politically they were a mixed bunch representing Zionist, Labour, Communist or Anarchist views; a few were non-political; but on the whole they were orientated towards the left. Their speeches and activities reflected a passionate desire to improve and eventually to change the existing social order for a more just society.

The cultural development of Jewish youth through the Yiddish language was seen by the Progressive Youth Circle as an essential element of these strivings. Its leaders and membership, while struggling with the new language, were still in love with the mother-tongue and hoped for its revival.

Starting off with lectures and discussions on political and sociological topics such as women's rights, free love, Zionism, Communism etc, the PYC was an immediate success, attracting not only the youth but often their elders to the crowded room they occupied at the top of the Workers' Circle in Gt Alie Street. Among those who came to speak or to take part in discussions were author, Simon Blumenfeld, Professor Hyman Levy, who spoke on the Jewish question, Aron Rollin and Jacob Fine, trade union leaders in the garment industry, who spoke on the history of British trade unions, Moishe Ovid the antique dealer, Sam Alexander, who spoke on the history of the Jewish people, and many others.

With an eye to the future, Alf Holland re-activated a defunct school for Yiddish that had at one time been run in the Workers' Circle. He and Alec Waterman both taught these Sunday morning classes until the need for a more professional teacher brought Dr Natanyi from Poland. The school flourished for about three years in the early 1930s until support fell off.

The Progressive Youth Circle also set up a Literary Section which arranged talks on the work not only of Yiddish writers such as Sholem Aleichem and Peretz, but also on English-language writers and dramatists such as Bernard Shaw, Theodore Dreiser and others. Occasionally scenes from a book were dramatised and the characters put "on trial" as a way of studying the writer in depth. From such beginnings grew the Dramatic Group.

The new Dramatic Group was intended to attract young Jewish people whose knowledge of Yiddish was limited, and to give expression to the ideas motivating the Progressive Youth Circle. They performed scenes from the work of established dramatists and also wrote their own. These performances were given in the Tailor & Garment Workers' Hall in Gt Garden St, Whitechapel, the Workers'

Circle Large Hall, and the Notting Hill Branch of the Circle. The Yiddish Drama Group were lively and inventive, and at a public performance of amateur dramatic groups they attracted the attention of the Workers' Theatre Movement, who invited them to join as a Yiddish-speaking group of the WTM.

And that is how Proltet began.

I hope to be forgiven a digression at this point. I myself was a member of an English-speaking group of the WTM in the East End. We performed sometimes near the London Hospital in Whitechapel in a side street whose two levels offered a convenient platform, and sometimes in London Fields, Hackney, where we were once pelted with over-ripe tomatoes. We retired in disarray to clean up, deciding that the young workers we had hoped to inspire were not yet ready for our message.

To return to Proltet, it was the only WTM group performing exclusively indoors. Although the East End of those days was immigrant Jewry's *shtetl*, only a fraction of a street audience would have understood Yiddish. This distinction apart, Proltet modelled itself entirely on the agit-prop style of the English-speaking groups. Both sexes wore the navy bib-and-brace overalls and white shirt to symbolise their sense of identity and solidarity with the working class, and also the concept of the "Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class". The slogan was adopted for practical reasons, but like other useful and pithy slogans it hardened into a dogmatic principle. Proltet's performances being given indoors, where lighting and furniture were available, touches of naturalism inevitably crept in, and there was heated argument over a sketch, collectively written, where the judge was given a wig, the prisoner a bloodied bandage, and the policeman a helmet. Incidentally, Philip Firestein, Fegal Firestein's husband, who was Proltet's secretary, acted as the policeman. He knew no Yiddish but was a great success, he had only to raise and lower his magnificent George Robey-like eyebrows for the audience to fall about helplessly.

Proltet's first production was *Strike!* by Michael Gold (author of *Jews Without*

Money). One idle Sunday Alf Holland conceived the idea of translating it into Yiddish and it was performed with great verve to enthusiastic audiences. As in the English production of the same play, actors were dispersed among the audience to shout *Strike, strike!* rhythmically to those on stage, and were often indignantly shushed by those not in the know. Mr Holland tells me that *Strike!* in the original English was criticised by someone who saw it in both languages as being a poor translation from the Yiddish... Proltet's production of *Strike* was also performed at one of the monthly performances staged by the London WTM groups, and so impressed Andre van Gysegham, the professional producer, that he offered his services (free of course) to produce Proltet's *Finf-Yor-Plan* (*Five Year Plan*) which they had collectively written for a national competition of all WTM groups. The collaboration bore fruit, Proltet being awarded first prize.

Other sketches were written collectively, among them *Birobijan*, about the Jewish Settlement in the USSR, once intended as a Republic. The writing sessions were often stormy. Politics were simpler then, the issues more clear cut, or perhaps they seemed so to us because we were young, and the young in every period are usually confident in their opinions. In 1854 Tolstoy wrote in *Boyhood*:

*In those days the reformation of mankind, the abolition of all the vices and miseries, seemed possible, and it seemed such a simple, easy matter to improve oneself, acquire easy virtue and be happy. Incidentally, God alone knows whether those lofty aspirations of our youth were actually ridiculous, and whose fault it is that they were not fulfilled...*

We in the Proltet and other WTM groups also had lofty aspirations. We saw ourselves as part of the movement towards socialism, and our responsibility for what was publicly said in its name was keenly felt. Every bit of dialogue, every nuance, was scrutinised for departure from the general line that "the people" embodied all virtue, the capitalists all evil, and that socialism would provide the solution to all problems. But what writer can bear to see their words altered? All fought fiercely to keep them unchanged.

We worked as hard at the preparation and performance of these sketches as any professional, and perhaps even harder because they were intended not as a means to earn a living or for mere self-expression, but for what we saw as a noble cause, and if it so happened that we hugely enjoyed ourselves in the process, that was an unsought bonus.

Proltet functioned for approximately three years from 1932 to 1934, when it

was found impossible to continue. Its members were dispersing, some to other countries; some, through marriage and the setting up of new homes, to distant parts of London; and some, through pressure of other political tasks as fascism grew more threatening. Moreover, the group of immigrants who were its core was too small to compete with or resist the process of absorption into the all-pervasive culture of the host country.

The Progressive Youth Circle continued until the outbreak of war caused the final dispersal. It organised support for various causes including the Botwin Brigade, the Jewish section of the International Brigades to Spain. Alec Waterman was the secretary of this Committee.

I started off by saying that strictly speaking there is no beginning to anything. Nor, strictly speaking, is there any end. The gallant attempt at a Yiddish-speaking revival failed, but the Progressive Youth Circle, by parenting Proltet and other offspring, raised the political and cultural level of its audiences. In those busy years in that crowded room at the top of the Workers' Circle I and many others first had our sensibilities quickened to the changing ills that afflict society and to the unchanging need for struggle to overcome them. □

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# ISRAEL, PALESTINE AND SUNDERLAND

The banning of a Jewish student society at Sunderland Polytechnic has evoked strong reactions. Michelle Carlisle, vice-chair of Essex University Jewish and Israel Society, reports from the NUS Conference, and Charlie Pottins asks: who benefits?

The dilemmas and apparent contradictions of being a non-Zionist Jewish socialist came into the spotlight at the Easter conference of the National Union of Students (NUS), where the main topic of conversation was the banning of a Zionist Jewish society by Sunderland Polytechnic Students' Union (SPSU). The Poly has a policy which equates Zionism with racism and gives no platform to racists, and the issue was kicked around like a political football all week. The NUS Executive, the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) and the mainstream political group supported a suspension of SPSU from NUS with effect from Christmas if no Jewish Society which allowed discussion on Zionism existed by then. The Socialist Workers Student Society (SWSS) and the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) were the main groups in opposition to the ban. At the conference there were amicable talks between UJS and GUPS, and they almost reached an agreement over Sunderland Poly. The suspension motion was carried, but it is hoped that talks will continue.

## EVERYBODY'S FRIEND

I wanted to be everybody's friend. I told the people from UJS that I was not a Zionist, and they accepted that. This was important to me because I had always feared Zionist Jews seeing me as 'the enemy'. At Essex University I have tried to emphasise that I share a common identity with the Jewish people and do not want to be set against them, but that I believe Zionism is wrong. I understand why Jews are Zionists (I've been to Israel), but I consider Zionism to be an incorrect response to antisemitism. I've explained to Zionist Jews at Essex and at the conference that my anti-Zionism comes from a Jewish perspective and that I also want to preserve Jewish culture and identity, but not at the expense of the rights of the Palestinian people nor of the identity of non-Zionist and diaspora Jews. The UJS representatives accepted this as a legitimate position and they accepted me and comforted me when we all felt intimidated and frightened.

UJS's impotence over the Harrington issue at the Polytechnic of North London last year must be condemned, and its emphasis on Zionism as an essential part of Jewish identity must be challenged, but I am prepared to work alongside UJS, fighting antisemitism wherever it rears its

ugly head, and to reach an understanding with Palestinian representatives.

## DISTORTING THE ISSUE

However, in the atmosphere of the conference it was difficult for the groups to come together. I wanted to be a friend to everyone, but SWSS and others drove me into the arms of UJS, making me feel scared and unwelcome as a Jew unless I defined myself on their terms. They distorted the issue until it became Jewish autonomy versus Palestinian rights, as if the two are mutually exclusive. When Brian Plainer, chair of the banned Jewish society at Sunderland, spoke as a guest speaker, the "right of reply" was demanded. However, the speaker from GUPS (a group not completely innocent of polarising the debate) who spoke in reply, while making many valid points, did not address the issue of Jewish autonomy on which Brian spoke, but merely denounced Israel and Zionism. In the gallery, SWSS members made a point of standing behind the UJS group, whilst loudly cheering the GUPS speaker. We were all near to tears, and they didn't understand why.

## SO-CALLED SOCIALISTS AND JEWISH IDENTITY

In fact, they, and many other so-called socialists, don't understand anything about Jewish identity. "Why do Jews want to preserve their identity anyway?" asked one SWSS member, his attitude typical of many on the left. They wish that Jews, and especially Jewish socialists (we're an embarrassment) would assimilate - disappear. Unless we are "token Jews" who won't make demands on the left, deflect allegations of antisemitism and 'add weight' to the Palestinian cause. They try to tell us how to define our identity; they place conditions on Jewish autonomy and Jewish participation in politics in general and they negate Jewish experience of persecution and fear by telling non-Zionist Jews like myself that we are neither socialist nor anti-Zionist because we will not condemn Zionism as racism and will work with or in Zionist Jewish organisations. This attitude directed towards women, Black people or gay people would not be tolerated, but Jewish people are still fighting for recognition as an oppressed group. Jewish socialists must be visible as Jews and must challenge the antisemitism of the Left. We have to be accepted as Jews and not despite our Jewishness.

## CONSPIRACY THEORY

None of those people in favour of banning the Sunderland Jewish society at that conference would entertain any suggestion that they were antisemitic, claiming that the issue of Sunderland has "nothing to do with antisemitism and everything to do with anti-Zionism." These people should look at themselves very carefully, because they are joining the ranks of the antisemites. For example, the conspiracy theory was a sinister and pervading theme on leaflets: "The UJS had failed to plant a Zionist Jewish Society," said one, and Sussex University/Brighton Polytechnic Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) claimed that NUS Executive's activities around SPSU "are serving as a red light for Tory Joseph, the Israeli-funded UJS and other assorted reactionaries in the Federation of Conservative Students and elsewhere to launch an attack on the political autonomy of Students' Unions."

Similarly, at Essex University, the selection of a Jewish and Israel Society member as the Labour Club candidate for Students' Union President last year was seen by some left wingers as "part of the Zionist plot". Jewish students supporting the Labour Club candidate were accused of "hiding behind antisemitism" and other Labour Club members were denounced as "Zionists and Tories". This conspiracy theory, describing an alleged Jewish/Zionist takeover, which was used as a justification for the Russian pogroms and the Nazi gas chambers, pervades antisemitism. The idea of Zionist/Nazi links was also taken up at the conference, with another Sussex University/Brighton Poly PSC production outlining how Zionists and antisemites have a common interest in antisemitism because it encourages Jews to go to Israel. There seems to be an allegation of connection between UJS and the National Front, as an explanation of UJS's behaviour over the Harrington issue: "We hear a lot about antisemitism in the USSR, but not one word about what happened under the Argentinian Junta when 10% of those killed were Jews. But then Israel had good military relations with the Junta. Just as UJS do nothing about the NF but are agitated about antisemitism at Sunderland."

## POLITICAL AGENDA

At Essex, the Jewish and Israel Society has made some progress. After it joined with many other groups to condemn a Ba'athist attack on some Iraqi students, a

leaflet was produced outlining so-called "Zionist infiltration into the Students' Union". The response to this leaflet was excellent, with the Union and many left wing and Arab groups condemning it as antisemitic. Antisemitism is now on the political agenda - people are beginning to remember that racism and fascism affect Jews. We are not naive enough to suggest that we have eradicated left wing antisemitism at Essex, but like sexism, racism and homophobia, it is now more difficult to get away with. For many Jewish

students, the NUS conference brought to light the issues that some of us have been dealing with at Essex University for the past two years. And for non-Zionists who were considering their Jewish identity for the first time, in a hostile and intimidating environment, the conference will have far-reaching consequences.

My message to those Jewish students is do not assimilate or let anyone tell you how to be Jewish. Not being a Zionist does not make you any less of a Jew and your criticisms of Zionism must

come from a Jewish socialist perspective. Do not pander to the Left; do not let anyone use you to justify their own antisemitism and don't let them turn you against other Jews, because we will always have a common identity and a shared experience. Fight equally against antisemitism and for Palestinian rights and do not allow either position to be compromised. Take your anti-Zionism to Jews and your Jewishness to pro-Palestinians. Until both sides accept you, they will never accept each other. □

# ...and who benefits?

The right-wing Jewish establishment has been determined to make the most out of events at Sunderland Polytechnic. With increasing numbers of Jews questioning the 'wisdom' of their leaders, on Israel, on British politics, on religious orthodoxy and much else, what could be better than a siege-atmosphere to whip the doubters back into line? "This is no time for the Wars of the Jews", declared the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC) as though the Sunderland students were the Romans at the Gate. Reform Rabbis are regarded as dangerous subversives, ourselves presumably as unspeakable fifth columnists.

The "organ of British Jewry" also took the opportunity to claim that Zionism was an essential part of Jewish identity and Judaism; thereby excluding from the fold such diverse Jews as the JSG, the Satmarer Hassidim, and in retrospect, the majority of pre-war Polish Jews (who voted for the Bund) and the entire pre-1939 leadership of Anglo-Jewry. What's more, the JC is trying to saddle the entire Jewish people with collective responsibility for what most Arabs and many other non-Jews mean today by "Zionism" - what Israel is doing in Southern Lebanon and the West Bank.

When the banning of a Jewish student society can be used in this way to strengthen organised Zionism's hold on Jewish people, the very least we must ask those on the Left and among our Palestinian friends who may support this measure is - how does this assist the Palestinian people? Can it be justified? Not by generalised slogans of "no platform", or debating points on how to categorise Zionism ideologically, but as a concrete measure judged by results?

The policy of "no platform for racists and fascists" gained support in the late 1960s and '70s as a response to Powellism, the emergence of the National Front, and attempts by certain academics to make racism "respectable" again. As part of a strategy for confronting the racist and fascist threat in Britain, it made some sense.

The 1974 UN resolution describing Zionism as a form of racialism was also part of a strategy, by which Black Africa, Black people in the West, and anti-racist

progressive world opinion was to be won to the Arab side against Israel. Although it could point to features of Zionist ideology, the force of the argument came from Palestinian experience of Zionist practice, from Israel's growing links with South Africa, and analogies made, particularly since 1967. It had little to do with what Zionism meant in the minds of diaspora Jews. Many of the newer UN members with little or no experience of Jews, have neither the legacy of anti-semitism nor accompanying guilt-complex that have affected the white Christian West's attitude. Just as our people are inclined to theorise in terms of the anti-semitism they know; so those whose moulding experience has been colonialism try to fit Israel into that.

In seeking international recognition for their struggle in this way, and from such allies, the Palestinians were looking at their own place in the world in a different way. It was a move beyond the old blood-feud revanchism and narrow nationalism, towards seeing their struggle as part of an international struggle against racialism, imperialism and oppression. The extent to which this change is genuine has varied. But for some, it has led to a realisation that racialists - including antisemites - can only be their enemies, whereas some Jews could be their friends. The turn to an ideological struggle against Zionism in 1974 may have assisted the process whereby, today, leading figures in the PLO are willing to pursue dialogue with diaspora Jews and Israelis, and are less interested in labels than in learning what forces are at work in Jewish life, and with whom they can usefully speak.

Unfortunately, the news takes time to reach Sunderland, it seems! Or maybe, certain of the elements involved in Middle East activity in this country are not all that keen on dialogue, still less on PLO peace initiatives, and determined to create barriers. It's certainly strange that with everything happening in the Middle East - in Lebanon or the West Bank - instead of a campaign to mobilise the widest number of students on these issues, there is a diversion staged, back to talking about an 11 year old UN resol-

ution on Zionism. Does this help the Palestinians?

Not that the contribution of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) has been all that useful or defensible. From being loyal supporters of the State of Israel, suddenly under fire, they remember that once, Jewish students passed a resolution favouring, however vaguely, "self determination for both peoples and mutual recognition". Only it must have fallen behind their filing cabinet to gather dust, because they have never campaigned on such a policy. Instead Jewish student societies opposed Arafat as rector (at Glasgow), opposed twinning with Bir Zeit, and often tried to get pro-Palestinian or anti-Zionist speakers banned. In one burst of energy, the UJS officers went all the way to Dundee to protest the council's twinning with Nablus. If that's what the UJS leadership interprets by "mutual recognition", no wonder Arab students tell them where to stuff it!

What all this points to is not the advisability of banning Jewish societies, nor of attempting by ultimatums and administrative decrees from outside to reform them, but for Jewish students themselves to revolt against such misleadership. This can only come about by open argument in conditions where people learn to trust each other, and listen to what's being said. Where this happens, where Jewish students are encouraged to come out of the "campus war" trenches and fraternise with "the enemy", there's progress. It is not so easy to encourage dissent and critical examination of ideas among people who feel threatened, and under siege conditions where calls for change might be misrepresented as surrender to outside pressure.

Jewish students join a society for many reasons - from religious or Zionist upbringing which they've never previously had to question, from vague feelings that they should identify as Jews; or simply the taste for a "bit of home" in a Friday night meal. There can be few who join out of racist motives against Arabs. Whether or not one considers Zionism



to be racism, it is not like white racialism in Britain or South African because it arose not from the oppression of Palestinians by Jews but as a reaction to the oppression and persecution of Jews by others.

Whatever sense was made of the "no platform for racists" policy, or by the UN vote that Zionism is racism, putting the two together in a silly syllogism: "We've voted to ban racists, Zionists are racists, therefore . . ." is dangerous nonsense. Even if one considered all Zionists on campus to be really racists — which in any meaningful sense they're not — they are hardly the threat against which the no-platform policy was designed to guard. For white British students to turn from fighting their own brand of racist, to finding "racism" among Jews or any other minority, is a

diversion, if not something worse. Are conditions applied to every student society before it is approved? How about the Conservative Club for a start?

To those Jewish students who want to defend their rights, but are prepared to support too the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, we say — it is time to break with those careerists and chauvinists whose only principle is support for "Israel right or wrong", and looking after their subsidies from the Board of Deputies and Jewish Agency, (before they graduate to become "Jewish leaders" themselves). We in the JSG are with you.

To the Palestinians and Lebanese fighting for their people's freedom we say — we are ready to help you, but you must help us to be able to. Let's talk now.

To those on the Left who think the Sunderland decision was right, that it helps the causes they support, we say — you are sadly wrong. Think again. This

is a diversion from what should be done on Middle East issues, and it does not only help reactionaries and racists in the Zionist establishment but in British society at large. It will be used by the racists to discredit and undermine the whole "no platform" policy and also to confuse, divert and divide anti-racist students.

The National Front will be only too happy to say "look the Jews are the real racists themselves", while their friends in the Tory Party and the media will be equally happy to pose as defenders of Jewish rights against the "antisemitic" Left and Third World students. On the side they'll observe that, "of course the Jews are racists — see, it's not such a bad thing after all!" And while the anti-racists and the Left are still confused, and the "no platform" policy falls in the confusion, Pat Harrington and his chums will be laughing all the way to college. □

## LETTERS...

### THE WARMTH OF BELONGING

I read the first issue of *Jewish Socialist* from cover to cover. I felt the warmth of belonging. My sense of isolation, guilt and being "non-Kosher" inflicted by the Anglo-Jewish establishment and its mouthpiece the *Jewish Chronicle* is starting to dissipate. It is reassuring to know that there are many Jews in this country who have the same feelings.

I wholly approve of your emphasis on Jewish minority culture in a socialist context. Our socialism should be broad rather than narrow, attracting many shades of Jewish individuals of different political, cultural and religious orientation, always keeping clear of the extremism of the Right and of the Left, as well as expansionist Zionism.

I do not identify myself with the Yiddish culture. My oriental Jewish culture, of which I am so proud, has been destroyed since we left Iraq, and unfortunately the nationalist Zionist establishment does not encourage its expression in Israel (in fact my relatives in Israel, especially the new generation, are made to feel ashamed and guilty of their mother language and culture).

The Jewish Socialists' Group should attract many individuals, perhaps dispersed, depressed and lost in this country, who still preserve a strong sense of identification. Above all, the JSG should welcome individuals on their own merits, even if they are not associated with specific political movements.

Dr Victor S. Nehama  
Manchester

### MISUNDERSTOOD OF HENDON

In "Confronting racism — a role for Jews" (*Jewish Socialist* March 1985), it was alleged that at a recent meeting of the Jewish East End Project a 'Prominent member of the community who sits on the Defence Committee of the Board of Deputies . . . said that writing for an Asian magazine was like writing for the National Front.'

Since I was the only one present at that public meeting who is both a Deputy and a member of the Defence Committee of the Board of Deputies, I can only assume that these remarks are attributed to me, even if I was not identified by name.

Since I did not make the remarks contained in the article, and since I have been the Board's representative at the Barnet Community Relations Council, I object to this misrepresentation of what I said.

Raymond Kalman  
Hendon NW4

In view of Mr Kalman's assurances, we are forced to conclude that all the people who claim to have heard this remark must have been mistaken. The statement, if it had been made, would have been outrageous and we can appreciate his embarrassment — the Editorial Committee.

### A MORE OBJECTIVE VIEW

I was very pleased to find your journal in The First of May bookshop in Edinburgh. As a gay man who has, for some years, been concerned with the fight of the Palestinians for their rights, I was on the point of despair with the Jewish people as

a whole. The Israeli leadership's cynical identification of Israel with all Jewish people has caused confusion on the British Left.

I was particularly interested that you took an active role in the miners' strike. This strike afforded many groups in Britain the opportunity to make contacts with organised workers and dispel a great deal of myth and bigotry. The Gay community has made many valuable links of solidarity with workers.

May I end by congratulating you on the first issue of *Jewish Socialist* and thanking you for giving me a better and more objective view of the relationship between Jews and the Israeli State. I look forward to the day when Jews can live together with Palestinians in freedom and peace.

Brian Dempsey  
Edinburgh

### WHO IS LEFT?

I feel *Jewish Socialist* must fill a great need in Anglo-Jewry. The criticism that the Jews in the UK have moved politically to the right is all too true.

Best wishes for your success.

David J. Bailey

Kemp Town, Brighton

### WHERE SHOULD WE STAND?

I have recently come across your journal *Jewish Socialist* and have taken out a subscription. I am very relieved that there is a place for my views as a Jew and a socialist and I would be most interested to have details of the Jewish

Continued on page 23

## THE PRINCESS, THE PRESIDENT AND THE CIVIL SERVANT

Julia Bard looks at fascism's spring collection

The row over Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg cemetery was consistently reported in the British press as an "unfortunate muddle". It was bad luck, according to Jim Prior, speaking on BBC radio's *Any Questions*, that there was snow on the ground when the advance party went to survey the cemetery and they didn't notice the SS graves. Many spokespersons and commentators regretted the "insensitivity" of the decision to honour the 49 SS men buried at Bitburg and acknowledged that Reagan had compounded his "error" when he said these young men were also victims of the Nazis.

If the decision makers or their apologists had any more than a sentimental, technicolour memory of the events that ended in May 1945, the public were not informed of it. And any claims that the Second World War was a fight against fascism and the massive destruction wreaked on Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, socialists, communists and anyone who might have been associated with them, must have been finally dispelled by the Ronald Reagan in Europe Show.

The bitter criticism from the American and German Jewish communities was referred to by Prior in the same programme as "the pressure of the Jewish vote" and the airwaves were filled with pleas to forgive and forget. Even Shimon Peres, Prime Minister of Israel, said, "A friend is a friend and a mistake is a mistake, and a friend remains one, even when he errs."

For Jews and antifascists, several events over the past few months have created a threatening atmosphere. The news that an active and articulate fascist with a frightening history of extreme right wing political involvement was employed by the Department of Trade and Industry was immediately overshadowed by the revelation that Princess Michael's father had been a member of the SS. The headlines screamed for "the truth", documents were flown from Australia to England to prove that he was "only" an "honorary" member of the SS and that Princess Michael had known nothing of his past. While the issue became a question of whether the children should inherit the sins of the fathers, reasonable-sounding Members of Parliament were

at pains to introduce a hitherto unthought of distinction between "good" and "bad" SS members. Leading figures appeared on television filled with concern about the poor Princess' feelings, praising her for her dignified response, and the whole affair culminated in a rather less dignified row when one TV channel was accused of pinching another channel's film of an exclusive interview with the royal at the centre of it all.

Meanwhile, Denis Pirie at the Department of Trade was given the Government's all clear. Yes, they did know his history, but didn't see it as an impediment to employment in the Civil Service. Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and Pirie's employer, said in answer to a question in the House of Commons, "I find the views of extremist socialists, whether they are national socialists or any other kind, extremely displeasing."

There is a common thread running through the debate on all these events. Most antifascists are familiar with the claims of the extreme right wing revisionists that the Holocaust never happened. The National Front understands perfectly well that memories of Nazi Germany are a serious impediment to their gaining credibility and they have taken enormous pains (and had vicious political rows and splits) over their bid for respectability. The events surrounding the VE Day commemorations, official reactions to the discovery of Princess Michael's SS father and the Government's support of Denis Pirie have done them — and incipient fascists the world over — a great favour.

Regardless of Princess Michael's, the Queen's or anyone else's feelings on the matter, we were told over and over again that Baron von Reibnitz was "only an honorary member of the SS", that he "had nothing to do with the concentration camps" and "had not been accused of war crimes". Denis Pirie, despite having, in Norman Tebbit's own words, "attended a meeting at a London hotel earlier this year regarding the formation of a new right wing organisation" (with Martin Webster), has merely expressed an "unpopular view".

Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg was, according to a *Guardian* editorial, an "act of tactlessness". "This is an issue,

sure enough," runs the text, "but of the sugar frosted variety. It excites a measure of real emotion from some extremely articulate people. But it isn't for a second serious in the sense that twelve months hence — ninety nine people out of a hundred will even be able to remember what it was about." So Ronald Reagan's even handedness to the murdered and the murderers, his untruthful and despicable assertion that SS soliders were, like Jews, merely victims of the Nazis is "an issue of the sugar frosted variety".

The revision of history that is going on here is both more subtle and more widely and skilfully publicised than that of the fascist "theorists" who simply deny the Holocaust. But a little straightforward information did creep in among all the talk of "letting bygones be bygones". A description of the Bitburg cemetery in the *Guardian* said the SS graves were "almost covered with small potted plants and bunches of flowers. One wreath . . . is decorated with ribbons of the Third Reich, it says, in old Gothic letters: 'The Waffen SS, born as Germans, lived as fighters, died as heroes.'"

The report attempts to offset this chilling image with details of how young and low in rank those dead soldiers were. Their age and rank is irrelevant. If it was simply a matter of graves and bodies long since rotted away, perhaps it might be appropriate to forgive, if not forget. But unfortunately their heirs live on to glorify their memory and keep their spirit alive. Fully fledged fascists are marching unopposed throughout Europe, winning votes in elections, acquiring respectability and offering, once again, a spurious national pride to those suffering the ravages of unemployment and economic depression. And not only have governments failed to oppose this new growth of racist, anti-semitic, far right movements, but only 40 years after their military defeat they are deliberately obscuring the reality of the Nazis coming to power.

Today, with emotion in their Hollywood-trained voices, they exhort us to forgive, forget and put the past behind us. We must answer, as committed antifascists: When it is in the past, we might consider it. □



# SIX MILLION AND ONE

The life and death of Szmul Zygielbojm  
by Barry Smerin



During the night of 11-12 May 1943 Szmul Zygielbojm, the representative of the Jewish Socialist Bund on the London-based Polish National Council in exile, took his own life in a final desperate attempt to shatter the indifference of the Allied governments to the fate of Polish Jewry.

Zygielbojm was 48 years old, a distinguished Jewish socialist with an international reputation. Alone among Jewish leaders safe in Allied territory, he performed the ultimate act of solidarity with the Jews of Eastern Europe. Today, at a time of growing apathy and self-interest, when Jewish activism is often pursued for the most cynical of motives, it is both chastening and instructive to ask ourselves what manner of person could have been capable of a political act of such supreme sacrifice.

Szmul Mordechaj Zygielbojm was born in 1895 in the village of Borowica in the province of Lublin, Poland, one of eleven children of desperately poor parents. Forced to leave *cheder* (Hebrew classes) at the age of ten, and with no prospects of further education, Zygielbojm soon set out alone for Warsaw where he managed to become apprenticed to a glovemaking. It was in the Polish capital that he first came into contact with socialist activists, taking part in a number of strikes, including the mass protest strike organised by the Bund against the infamous trial of Mendel Beilis for alleged ritual murder in 1913.

Two years later Zygielbojm rejoined his family, who had moved to Chelm after their village was devastated in a battle between Russian and Austrian troops. He soon became active in the local Jewish labour movement. A natural leader and talented organiser, Zygielbojm was Chelm's delegate to the 1917 national conference of the Bund at the age of 22.

As the Bund fought to develop its organisation in the new conditions of Polish independence, the young Zygielbojm's talents and energy attracted increasing attention. In 1924 he was elected to the central committee of the party. A popular figure among both Jewish and Polish workers, widely known under his party pseudonym "Artur", Zygielbojm rose to prominence as the leader of the leatherworkers' union, one of the few trade unions in interwar Poland to cater for both Jews and Poles. Eventually the self-educated boy from Borowica came to occupy the highest office in the Jewish labour movement as secretary of the national council of Jewish, class-based trade unions in Poland, a Bund-dominated alliance with close on 100,000 members.

From 1937 Zygielbojm lived in Lodz, having been elected to the city council in the landslide victory of the Bund-Polish Socialist coalition. He did not return to Warsaw until 1939, a few days before the start of the German siege. When the Nazi troops entered the capital, Szmul Zygielbojm was thus one of the few

*I cannot be silent. I cannot live while the remnants of the Jewish population of Poland, of whom I am a representative, are perishing. My comrades in the Warsaw ghetto died guns in hand in the last heroic battle. It was not my destiny to die as they did, together with them. But I belong to them and in their mass graves.*

*By my death I wish to make the strongest possible protest against the passivity with which the world is looking on and permitting the extermination of the Jewish people.*

*I know how little human life is worth today, but as I was unable to do anything during my life, perhaps by my death I shall help to break down the indifference of those who have the possibility now, perhaps at the last moment, to save those Polish Jews still alive... I bid farewell to everyone and everything that was dear to me and that I have loved.*

Bundist leaders who might have escaped immediate arrest, since he was not registered with the local police. Nevertheless, when the Gestapo demanded a representative of the Jewish workers among twelve civilian hostages, Zygielbojm volunteered. Shortly afterwards he was named by the Bund as its delegate to the Warsaw Judenrat (Jewish Council).

From the outset Zygielbojm urged resistance to the Nazis. In October 1939 the Gestapo instructed the Judenrat to order all Warsaw Jews into a closed ghetto. Zygielbojm, having failed to persuade the Judenrat to refuse to co-operate, announced its intention of resigning and giving himself up to the Gestapo. Knowing the inevitable consequences, the Judenrat was shocked into hesitation. Zygielbojm seized the opportunity to publicly address the thousands of Jews besieging the Judenrat headquarters, and called upon them to refuse to obey the German orders.

Following Zygielbojm's open defiance of the Nazis, the Bund decided to smuggle him out of Poland. After a dramatic flight across Germany, he reached Belgium in January 1940 and made his way to the United States, where he joined with the Bund organisation in America in campaigning for support for Polish Jewry.

In early 1942 the Polish Socialist Party proposed that since the Bund had polled a clear majority of Jewish votes

in the last free elections in Poland, the National Council in London should allow it one delegate. The Bund nominated Zygielbojm, who had been its representative at socialist meetings throughout the United States since his escape from Warsaw.

While carrying on a determined struggle against the nationalist and fascist parties in the National Council, Zygielbojm devoted more and more of his time to compiling information and statistics on the plight of Polish Jewry. It was during 1942 that the unbelievable news of the Final Solution began to filter through to Western Europe. With the help of the Bund and Polish socialist underground, Zygielbojm assembled a dossier on the deportations, shootings and extermination camps. He gave himself over entirely to addressing public

meetings, lobbying politicians, embassies and diplomats, assailing an unco-operative press, sending telegrams, desperately striving to persuade the Allied governments to take exceptional measures to save the Polish Jews.

All Zygielbojm's pleadings were in vain. The Allies were not even willing to drop leaflets on Germany threatening retribution for the barbarous crimes of the Nazis. Nor would any government declare its readiness to take in Jews if the Germans agreed to release them.

In a message to the Jewish leaders in the West, brought to Zygielbojm by Jan Karski, a Polish underground courier, the surviving Jewish leaders in Poland made their final desperate plea:

*Let them go to all the important English and American offices and agencies. Tell them not to leave until*

*they have obtained guarantees that a way has been decided upon to save the Jews. Let them accept no food or drink, let them die a slow death while the world looks on. Let them die. This may strike the conscience of the world.*

For a whole year, Zygielbojm had employed every means at his disposal. Finally he resolved to try the new "means" demanded by the desperate leaders of the murdered Jews of Poland — the only Jewish leader in the free world to heed their call. His death had an enormous public impact. Newspapers throughout the world carried reports. But the Allied governments continued to turn a deaf ear.

Szmul Mordechaj Zygielbojm, Comrade "Artur", died, as he had lived, in the struggle for socialism and together with his people. He shall never be forgotten. □

Continued from page 20

Socialists' Group.

I am being asked to participate in writing to a refusenik in Moscow but am unsure of the political ambience of this. Are you intending to do an article on the background to the refuseniks and where we should stand as socialists? What is the Soviet reasoning for refusing exit visas?

Rita Craft

London SE12

*You're in luck — we have just the thing on page 5 of this issue! — the Editorial Committee.*

## IT'S GOOD TO BE A JEW

I found *Jewish Socialist* very fine indeed. I also like the description of JCARP — so many Jews on the Left focus *only* on racism and fail to remember that anti-semitism is, unfortunately, still alive and well.

Do you know my book, *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*? It has been quite effective in catalysing political

consciousness in the Women's Movement at large and even among some non-activist Jews.

It's good to know the work is continuing in other countries and that we have a network of like-minded people. It makes me feel good to be a Jew, especially now when so many American Jews are Republicans and neo-conservative about *all* kinds of issues.

Evelyn Torton Beck

Washington DC, USA

## TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE

In his review of Noam Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle* (*Jewish Socialist*, March 1985) Ralph Salkie writes: "Books like this which shatter myths, expose lies and destroy illusions don't get us any further. The vast majority of Jews won't read it, and most of those who do will not listen to it." Instead, he urges Chomsky to "seek out mainstream Jews, listen to their concerns, and work out ways to convince them that the sources of their fears can

be eliminated by the socialist movement." He concludes that this is "much harder than writing books denouncing Israel. But it might work."

Mr Salkie does not offer any reasons for believing that "it might work." His review therefore amounts to telling Chomsky, one of the few Jews who have had the courage to criticize Israel openly, to stop shattering myths, exposing lies, and destroying illusions. Is not that precisely what the Zionist establishment would like best? It is — to put it mildly — rather curious to read this advice in the first issue of a journal that expects to oppose "the ideology, currently dominating world Jewry, which subordinates the needs and interests of Diaspora Jews to those of the Israeli state." It hardly needs to be said that the myths, lies and illusions are the mainstays of this ideology. Not to challenge them is to give up the fight even before it has begun.

Morris Halle

Paris France

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# The Naming

A short story by Frances Bruce

"How did you get your name?" I said one day to Mr Tanzenjude.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, "blame it on Tzar Alexander."

In the town of Czernitska, in that part of Russia where Jews were permitted to live, a line forms in front of the offices of the Town Clerk. One Samuel, son of Ezra the Illustrious, stands within it. It is the winter of 1816 and a bitter wind wraps the long garments of the Jews around their shins and puts red in their cheeks and mauve on their lips. Samuel clasps and unclasps his hands.

Inside the offices sits the Town Clerk, tall and stiff in his serge Tzarist uniform, and by his side the Assistant Town Clerk, pen and paper at the ready. It is midday. Since seven o'clock that morning, Clerk and Assistant have been occupied in carrying out an order of the Tzar to civilize the Jews — in this instance that means giving them family names to complete their first, non-Christian ones.

The Town Clerk is bored. He began the day in a good enough mood, having breakfasted in the French manner on sweet white bread with a dab of strawberry jam. The sweetness finds its way into his personality and tempers it. To his post-breakfast Jews he is almost courteous, assigning them agreeable, sensible names.

"Where d'ya live?"

"Near Kolakow, Sir, on the edge of Czernitska."

"Right, Solomon Kolakowski. Next! Where d'ya live?"

"Pomeritz, Town Clerk."

"OK, Jacob Pomeritzski. Next!"

And so on. Samuel, who is at the back of the queue, is greeted in turn by a smiling David Manivitzski, Isaac Panienko, Sal Panitzski, until all the geography of Czernitska is accounted for in the names of its inhabitants who pass him.

But time moves on. It is 10 o'clock and by this hour the sweet bread and jam has travelled down the digestive tract of our Town Clerk and he is feeling a little peckish and rather less sweet-tempered. He has, in any case, run out of place names. For these reasons, if you were a Jew in line between 10 and 11 your name was sure to be less commonplace, less agreeable to the ear.

"Where d'ya live?"

"Kolakow, Town Clerk."

"Hmm, we've already got 76 Kolakowskis. Let's see . . . what d'ya do for a living?"

"Well, I work a little in stones, er, emeralds."

"Emeralds, eh? Right, we'll call you Greenstein. Next!"

Greensteins, Goldsteins, Silversteins, Fleshmen, Waxmen, Breadmen — the trades and traders of a small town in the Pale of Russia pass by Samuel-the-as-yet-unnamed who is now anxiously awaiting his own fate.

As well he might. It is 12 o'clock and not a trace of sugar remains in the Town Clerk's body. Out of the building comes David Appletree, Saul Flowering Mountain, Jacob Longneck, Simon Bigthing,

he seized it with both his manicured hands.

"So you can dance, huh?"

"Well, err . . ."

"Come on, then, dance!" he commanded the Jew before him.

"Yes, yes, dance!" echoed his sidekick gleefully.

"Mmm, mmm, mmm, dance?" queried Samuel, his heart already in motion.

"Yes, dance!"

Samuel danced, first slowly then more quickly as the Town Clerk alternately waved his baton in the air and prodded



Samuel in the ribs with it.

"Faster, faster!"

Samuel flew round and round, and his hair, long and red, flew round after him. From his eyes, which were as black as the bread in his pocket, as dark as the history of Czernitska, and almost as dark as its future, tears spurted and formed a liquid band of distress around his head.

"Dance!" said the Clerk. "Dance!" said the Assistant. "Dance, dance!" said the occupants of the room next door, who on hearing the commotion, had lain down their quills and come rushing to see the dancing Jew.

So he danced. He danced as fast as his stunted frame would allow, until the mauve of breathlessness coloured his features and was lost in the purple hue of shame. He danced until the Town Clerk was sated, until the laughing ceased, and the official Tzarist naming form was flung at him.

When he got outside the building, Samuel looked at the form and found that he had become one Samuel Dancingjew. □

Aaron Oneball. After 11 and you and your descendants were damned to carry with you, like an undeserved and incongruous cross, a name of such oddity that all who heard it would rock with laughter.

It was Samuel, son of Ezra the Illustrious' misfortune, to be an after-11 Jew. It was his double misfortune to trip whilst approaching the Clerk's desk, and it was his third misfortune to break his fall in such a graceful manner that the whole act resembled some complex dance step — a *pas de deux* or a *plié* perhaps.

The Town Clerk saw in this an opportunity that was too good to pass over and

## The Epsteins and the Frankensteins (an everyday story of jewish family life)

Mother see me bleed  
Mother see me crawl  
Mother I don't need to fly El Al  
to read the writing on the wailing wall  
Fascism, zionism, the jewish family  
— the triple polarities of jewish sadness  
Fascism, zionism, the jewish family  
— the triple polarities of jewish madness

As a messiah  
jesus sure was a high flier;  
Took off from Calvary  
and became quite an allegory  
Well we've all got our cross to bare  
And i've gotten more than my share  
Cos they say i was the one who nailed him  
They say i was the hit man  
— well that's shit man  
Like the last supper was kosher  
Like his father was jewish  
Like it was a long time ago  
Like i'm in the ghetto

We've been framed by a two thousand year history  
We've been persecuted by a two thousand year obituary  
Expelled—exiled  
Repelled—reviled  
Chased—erased  
Spurned—burned  
Anti semites seek absolution  
in our final solution  
Leaving us always tuned into  
the third pogrom

Talk about out of the frying pan into the fire  
— thinking to defend ourselves  
we just send ourselves  
to another funeral pyre  
Knowing you wanna kill us and gas us  
and harass us  
out of your golf clubs  
we cut off  
to avoid being cut up  
Knowing that jewish blood letting  
provides wine for christian "civilisation"  
we seek to survive through the process of jewish ghettoisation  
With each new massacre we rebuild the wall around our bodies  
and our minds

And at the heart of the ghetto  
is the only yiddish equivalent to a course of electric  
shock treatment  
— something more deadly than the christian nuclear bomb  
— the jewish nuclear family  
Designed to protect us against slaughter  
It drives us mad instead

Jewish nuclear families are unique  
— they are interlinked military cells  
— each a miniature zionist state  
— each existing to protect us from our collective fate  
— each reducing us to our private hells

See that jewish woman  
apparently upright  
and all powerful at home  
Actually she crawls around outasight  
— the worlds most oppressed beast of burden  
— a jewish guard dog  
Labouring in her never ending role  
to keep our house safe and secure  
from the ravages of christian gun law

Hear that jewish father  
King of the ghetto  
Endlessly chanting the family motto  
"be independent of christians"  
"be independent of christians"  
"keep in front of the pack or else the pack will kill you"  
— so we chase a crazy mirage  
— try to make every day independence day  
apply to join the united relations  
and aim to be best at everything  
cos second best leaves us dependent;  
that's why we wanna be the best doctors, best lawyers, best

teachers, best businessmen, best artists, best lawyers, best doctors

— and the best revolutionaries  
ever wonder why so many jews join the revolutionary party?  
it's cos the party is the nearest thing to joining  
an extended family  
without actually having to break from the nuclear family  
"mother i feel warm in your confessional  
cos just like a businessman or a lawyer  
a Leninist is a real professional  
— i'm successful"

"father i've fulfilled your mission  
i've got a good position  
— middle cadre  
— it's got upward mobility  
— and sure fire social stability  
— and good news  
— sfull of jews  
You always did tell me to go to cadre"

brothers and sisters  
all this psychosis is mine  
— it's the jewish family Frankenstein  
— a cinematic spectacular  
— a family horror show  
— starring a jewish dracula

mum and dad you understand the problem  
— they wanna kill us —

but your answer is insane;  
you can't be independent of the antisemites  
you just gotta fight;  
mum and dad at the moment it is you who is killing me;  
you're engaged in international genocide against your  
own children

we can't fulfill your fucking crazy independence fantasies  
they drive us wild  
mother, father — let your people go  
mother, father, rabbis all

— i wanna be free  
— i wanna blow a cool electric horn on the day of atonement  
i wanna appear in drag at some local barmitzvah  
shout out "thirteens an unlucky number  
but hows this for a funky tune"  
— then blast out Hava Negila  
on a moog synthesizer

i wanna form the all time jewish rock group  
— crosby stills young abraham isaac and jacob;  
god no wonder i'm so temperamental  
— i'm totally surrounded by jews and genitals

some of us  
still hoping that there's life before death  
have hit on a new solution  
— the semi final solution —  
we sing the golan height blues  
shout out we are the dead sea jews  
kick out the arabs anyway we choose  
send Amerika postcards of the views

Palestine versus Frankenstein:-

Israel — a land flowing with milk and Amerikan money  
Israel — where they keep nine commandments but murder arabs  
(still that's nine out of ten)  
Israel — where jewish men are turned on by the gaza strip  
Israel — where we turn out the Beduin but turn onto chopped heroin

Israel — where the priests are Cohens but the combat jackets  
are Levis  
Israel — the zions den

but everyone out there —  
all you christians —  
you christian communists, christian trotskyists, christian  
stalinists —  
you who analyse everything but feel nothing —  
you just gotta know one thing —  
we didn't go voluntary into the ghetto —  
and we went cryin into zion —  
and we didn't see many of you 'revolutionaries' doing  
much about antisemitism —  
sure we made many mistakes —  
many of them murderous —  
but we were on our own —  
and that's your fault.

Steve Cohen



# ANTISEMITISM ON THE LEFT?

*That's Funny, You Don't Look Anti-Semitic*

by Steve Cohen (Beyond the Pale Collective, £2)

Perhaps the major issue confronting *Jewish Socialist* is the relative lack of support among Jews currently for socialism. Many factors have played their part: the historical failure of the Left to defeat antisemitism, class changes in the Jewish community, the ideological dominance of Zionism today, and the general failure of socialism to provide an attractive alternative. People will only support socialism if it addresses their needs, concerns, interests and aspirations positively.

For Steve Cohen — a committed socialist and anti-racist — the fundamental cause of substantial Jewish alienation from the Left is that the Left, in its varied forms, fails abysmally towards Jews on these counts. It fails, he argues, because it has imbibed the antisemitism of general society and reflects this in ideological arguments and political practices. He alludes patchily to other material factors alienating Jews from socialism, but centres on "Left antisemitism". If this results in a lack of integrated analysis, and an over reliance on idealist arguments, it

nevertheless focuses bravely on a crucial and thorny area of Jewish/Left relations.

From thinly veiled antisemitic letters by fascists posing as anti-Zionists, in Left newspapers, to accusations by socialists of "Jewish money power", drawing on traditional antisemitic stereotypes, Cohen illustrates many grotesque antisemitic incidents on the Left. He argues that they are not unrelated or accidental but form a pattern based on a consistent methodology.

He believes that Left antisemitism in Britain has gone through two distinct phases: firstly, at the end of the 19th century when Jews were identified by antisemites with finance capital; and secondly, in the post-holocaust world where Jews are identified by antisemites with immense power through Zionism. Cohen is not a Zionist, and has little time for crude equations of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. He claims, however, that the anti-Zionism current within the Left is concerned not with Palestinian rights, nor with what Israel is doing but with attributing world power to Zionism.

Cohen locates the methodology of Left antisemitism in its allegedly unique characteristic — its ideology — the "Jewish conspiracy" derived historically from

Christianity's demonising of Jews. Thus he distinguishes antisemitism from racism and sexism. If this appears a strange distinction given that many forms of sexism and racism are firmly rooted in ideology, he qualifies it by stating that uniquely with antisemitism, its ideology operates *on the surface*. Its generality and uniqueness in this respect is surely open to question, as is the belief that Left antisemitism and Right antisemitism both derive from the "Jewish conspiracy". If the purpose of the book is to foster debate among socialists, it will not be achieved by accusing them of subscribing to an ideology that was, and remains, the cornerstone of Nazism.

Although furnishing many examples illustrating notions of Jewish/"Zionist" conspiracy within the Left, Cohen recognises a host of further examples apparently unrelated to conspiracy theories, the classic case being Lenin's polemics with the Bund. He draws them together under the category of the Left's cultural chauvinism and consequent assimilationism which, he argues, runs parallel with and is ultimately related to conspiratorial antisemitism. And also, he claims, it closely mirrors the assimilationism of the right-wing Jewish communal leadership. In making the quip that the Board of Deputies are Leninists (lehavdil!), he obscures the fact that while Left assimilationists seek the disappearance of distinctive Jewish culture and identity in the name of "universal" socialist culture, our communal leaders wish to maintain a specifically Jewish communal cohesiveness based on a barely visible but politically united community. Ordinary Jews, they believe, should deal principally with parochial concerns, leaving our leaders to make external political interventions. That is not assimilationism but class domination.

Ultimately Cohen sees Left assimilationism collapsing into conspiracy: "It becomes ideology at the point at which conspiracy theories are used to justify it." Such a rigid, catch-all analysis which leaps freely between diverse historical contexts remains unconvincing and frustrating. It is frustrating because Cohen unearths important material which should be read, and isn't, but his restrictive analytical framework fails to demonstrate its significance and implications.

In his analysis of late 19th century Jewish immigration to Britain, and the agitation — particularly in the labour movement — towards the Aliens Act of 1905 restricting entry of poor Jews, Cohen asks whether this was anti-alienism or antisemitism. He lambasts "bourgeois historians" who see it as the former. But

# JEWISH IMMIGRANT DAUGHTER

*Bread Givers* by Anzia Yezierska The Women's Press, £3.95

*Bread Givers* is a largely autobiographical work by Anzia Yezierska, who was born in Russian Poland in 1885 and emigrated to Manhattan's Lower East Side with her family in 1890. It tells the story of the Smolinsky family, through the eyes of the youngest daughter Sarah, showing how she, unlike her sisters, manages to break through the stifling restrictions imposed on her by her pious but selfish and misogynistic father, in order to train as a teacher and find a husband of her own choosing.

Through its pages, we are transported to New York at the turn of the century, with all its tastes, sights, sounds and smells, as well as its appalling levels of poverty and suffering. Not only the street life, but also Sarah's family home, are depicted with a vividness, detail and humour that evoke the atmosphere of an era which, constitutes, for many of us, an important part of our history.

One of the most striking aspects of *Bread Givers*, contributing in no small way to this authenticity, is its language. The story is written in the English of an immigrant, so although the words themselves are English, the sentence structure and many of the descriptive phrases have a strong Yiddish flavour. While it takes

some getting used to, this style creates a lively, exciting mood, particularly appropriate for portraying life through the eyes of an impressionable child.

Although light and almost effortless to read, *Bread Givers* presents us with very real emotional conflicts and problems, some of them no less relevant to the modern reader than to Sarah and her family. While applauding the heroine for managing to break away from her father's tyranny, and from the restrictions that a strict adherence to the Jewish religion entails for women, we cannot but feel compassion for Reb Smolinsky on the odd occasions when his vulnerability is exposed. And while it is clear that Yezierska has no time for his hypocritical application of Judaism to everyday life, she obviously dearly loves the gentler, more spiritual aspects of the religion and the warmth of the culture that he and his wife sometimes manage to present.

Yezierska's depiction of non-Jewish American society also manifests mixed feelings towards this more modern culture. Sarah is desperate to escape from the crowded, noisy East Side, and delights in the peace that reigns in her college town. But if the sophistication and calmness of her fellow students — children of the "New World" — impress her, she is disappointed at their coldness.

it is a false dichotomy. The agitation closely parallels that for immigration control in Britain in recent times. Similar material conflicts were articulated through racism. That racism will invariably draw on pre-existing social relations and prejudices and give it its distinct identity — antisemitic anti-alienism, anti-Black anti-alienism or other. Of course we must recognise their specificity, but we also need an analysis which locates their inter-relations. Thus Cohen's useful insights on the legitimization of racism within the labour movement become straight-jacketed into an analysis of Jewish conspiracy theory. Such theories have surfaced at different times within specific material circumstances, and with devastating effect. But they cannot be treated as ahistorical constants. Also, one is tempted to ask when is a conspiracy a Jewish conspiracy? Some of Cohen's examples derive from Leftists who frame their general political analyses in conspiracy theories and who tend to see their nearest rivals on the Left as CIA agents!

In explaining socialist attitudes and practices towards Jews, Cohen's arguments about cultural chauvinism/assimilationism are far more convincing. He shows how conventional Marxist theory

has explained Jewish continuity primarily through a stereotypical view of Jews' economic role, and has seen assimilation as a positive and inevitable process. In the post-war period many socialists have increasingly reduced the totality of Jewish experience to Zionism. In fighting antisemitism, says Cohen, this has led them to abstractly defend the physical existence of Jews, but not their concrete Jewish existence. In some cases socialists have backtracked on the fight against antisemitism for fear of diluting their struggle against Zionism.

Behind these reactionary positions lies a deterministic conception of Jews as religious and/or Zionist and irretrievably right-wing, and characterised as obscurantist, racist and unsympathetic to Left positions respectively. But where does assimilationism come from? In his efforts to tie it to the conspiracy theory as junior partner in Left antisemitism, Cohen's explanation is weak. It again reveals his failure to draw the theoretical and practical links with sexism and racism. Cultural chauvinism, he argues, is the nationalist product of imperialism. If socialists have challenged the value system inherent in bourgeois economics, why haven't they challenged imperialism's value system of nationality, culture, minority identification and interests?

America may provide her with the long sought-after opportunity to become "a person", but she is no more able to be a part of this new world than she is to totally reject her background.

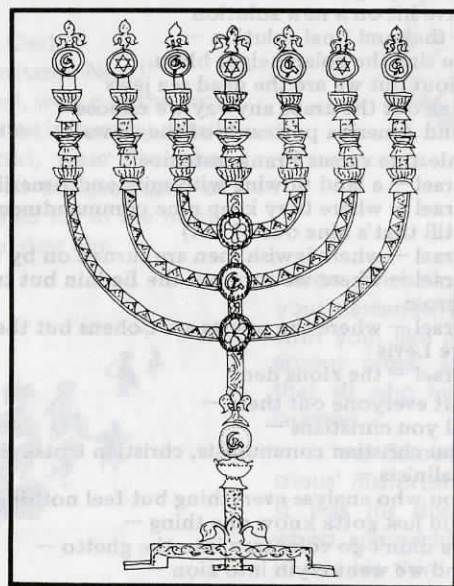
Some readers might take offence at the manner in which the Jewish religion is portrayed in the book. Reb Smolinsky's quotation from the Torah are certainly selected with a view to presenting the female role in the worst possible light, and should Yezierska have wished, she could no doubt have gone some way towards redressing the balance.

This is not to deny that women are traditionally treated as inferior in every aspect of Jewish life, but Reb Smolinsky does exhibit an unusually extreme disgust for everything female. Those who demand an objective analysis of Judaism will be dissatisfied, and there is a danger of readers unfamiliar with the Jewish religion and way of life accepting all of the Rabbi's statements on this and other matters as indisputable and universal elements of Judaism.

But the novelist's task is not to produce a dry, academic study, but an artistic, albeit, perhaps, incomplete interpretation of a theme. Anzia Yezierska has portrayed the conflicts of a Jewish woman's life sensitively and graphically.

Carla Bloom

## That's Funny, You Don't Look Anti-Semitic



by Steve Cohen

Feminists have provided clear materialist analyses of why sexism has, until recently, remained relatively unchallenged within the Left, and anti-racists have similarly pointed to the material benefits of racism enjoyed by white workers. Socialists have challenged nationalism while upholding majoritarianism. In Britain today many Leftists, perhaps unconsciously, still use white, male, Christian, heterosexual, manual workers as their yardstick. They don't hold conspiracy theories about those outside these categories, but neither do they support their interests. It is in the general weaknesses of socialist theory, and ignorant unchallenged conceptions of Jews that antisemitic cultural chauvinism is rooted.

There is no doubt that the actual experience of any of the examples of Left antisemitism that Cohen quotes can be personally devastating. I know that from bitter personal experience but fight it we must — for our own good and for the good of the socialist movement as a whole. If we are to do that effectively we must understand the diverse roots of antisemitism, its specific characteristics, and most importantly its relation to other oppressions that many socialists continue to practice.

David Rosenberg



# WHERE WE STAND

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

In Britain in 1985 our Jewish establishment actively oppose progressive causes; many Jews have enjoyed considerable social and economic mobility; and the general image held of the Jewish community, apparently confirmed by its institutions, is one of relative comfort and security.

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

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

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

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

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