

JEWISH SOCIALIST

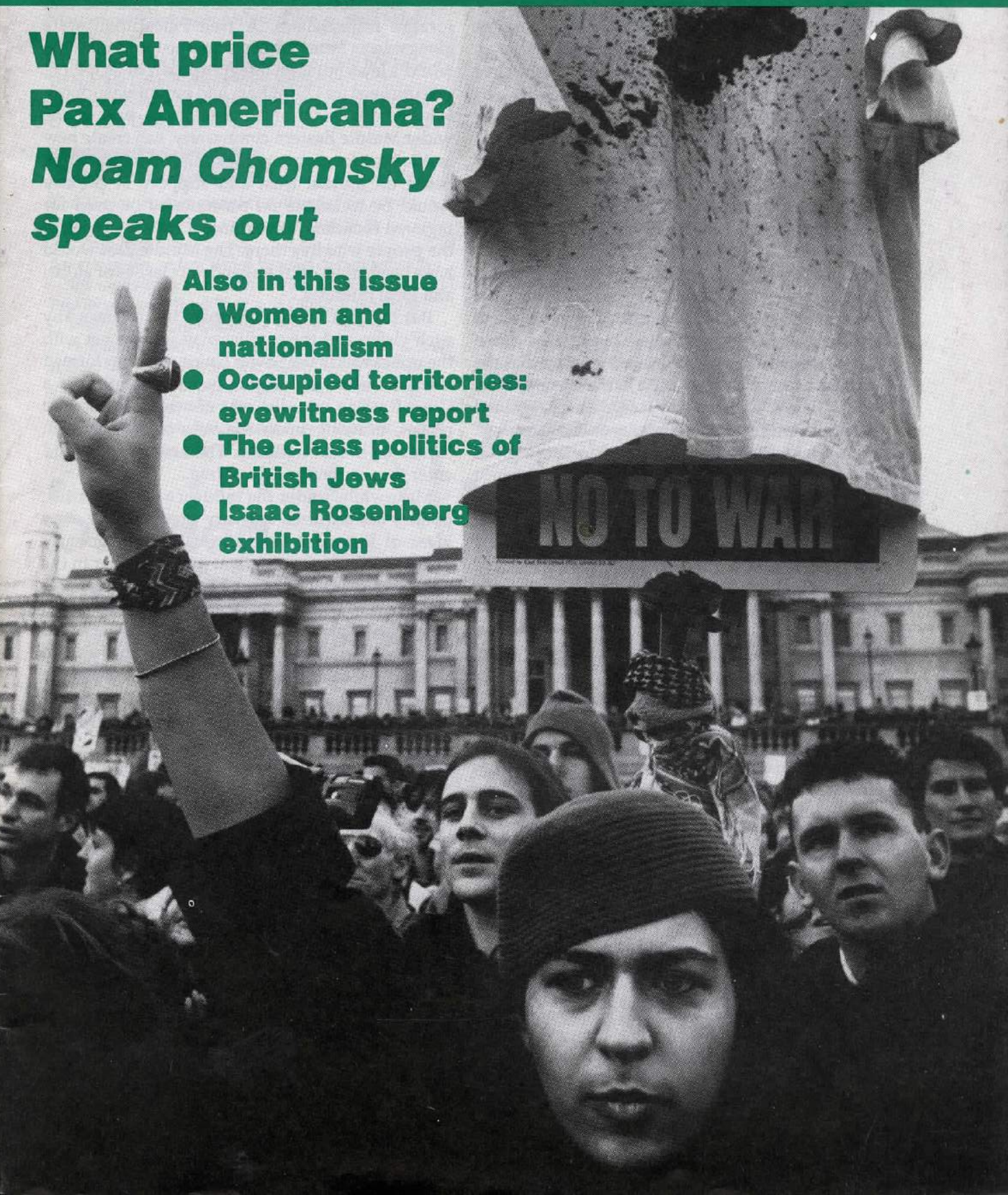
The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 22 March-May 1991 £1.20

What price Pax Americana? Noam Chomsky speaks out

Also in this issue

- Women and nationalism
- Occupied territories: eyewitness report
- The class politics of British Jews
- Isaac Rosenberg exhibition



Editorial

The war against which many, including *Jewish Socialist*, argued has come. Any thought that Israel would remain on the sidelines, whilst America proceeded, like some monstrous *shabbes goy*, to destroy Iraq disappeared with the first missile attacks on Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Jewish socialists must now be feeling a range of emotions, some rational, others seemingly irrational. Most immediately, many Jewish socialists have family and close friends in Israel. As the radio tells of yet another Scud falling to earth, unpatriotically unintercepted in the bland war news location of "Greater Tel Aviv", there will be many, bits of its geography etched firmly in their mind, hoping that it came to earth "somewhere else".

Just as we feel for other Jews in other communities in the world, including that of Israel, as socialists we must extend these same feelings to other peoples. Despite the last minute order of the Israeli Supreme Court, most West Bank Palestinians have yet to receive gas masks. Corralled in dusk-to-dawn curfew, they look up at the skies, hoping that the next Scud doesn't drop short on Ramallah or Nablus, or that Israel will not blow its newly regained reserves of international sympathy on "transferring" them en masse to Jordan. The people of Iraq look on with helpless anguish as the might of the highest tech war machine in the world gradually lays their country flat. Iraqi democrats and socialists are only too aware that it is those very nations which sold Saddam Hussein his weapons and built his reinforced bunkers and strengthened runways which have now gone to war to destroy them.

Jewish Socialist cannot support the war. We are fully aware of the dangers posed by Saddam's Iraq, a classical totalitarian regime, albeit more closely resembling Ceaucescu's Romania than Hitler's Germany. But an overwhelming American military victory at great human cost, followed by the crude imposition of a Pax Americana little different from the prewar situation will do nothing to bring peace to the Middle East.

In the last few days of peace, the Jewish Socialists' Group reproduced, in a letter to the *Guardian*, an appeal which had been published in *Le Monde* a few days earlier. The International Jewish Peace Union, to which the Group is affiliated, was a co-signatory. The appeal called for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and for an international Middle East peace conference which should guarantee the security of both Israel and an independent Palestinian state. It went on to enumerate other conditions necessary for a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement. These included Israeli and Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, self-determination for the Kurdish people,

respect for civil rights in all states of the region and a mechanism for a more equitable distribution of oil revenues.

Why is it so difficult to envisage a Middle East which is not at war? Where people have control of their own destinies, free of local tyrannies and foreign imperialism. A free Palestinian state alongside an Israel which is not the home of *all* the world's Jews but is an integrated part of its region, with no need for US military and economic support. Where both Israel and Palestine, as part of the wider Middle Eastern community, can create new institutions for economic and political co-operation based on mutual trust and support. A priority would be to enable oil revenues to be used for regional economic development for the benefit of the people who live there. The Middle East would have been taken off the agenda of clashes of global and local interests.

But the continuing nightmare undermines any such vision and the conflict may worsen yet with the upheavals in the Soviet Union. An unreformed member of the military-industrial complex or a Great Russian populist may conceivably come to power, drawing upon the vein of antisemitism contained in that tradition. The new regime could enter the war on the side of Iraq...

Meanwhile, under the influence of war, British politics has acquired a dreary predictability. Any ideas of European union vanish as the country resumes its role as compliant junior partner in the one-sided Special Relationship, Oceania's Airstrip One. John Major acts towards George Bush like a submissive small town bank manager. All Gerald Kaufman's mercurial sophistication vanishes into thin air as Corporal Kinnock pulls the bulk of the Labour Party sharply into line behind Sergeant Hurd. The British police and immigration authorities go about their task interning and expelling Iraqi and Palestinian exiles, among them distinguished figures like Abbas Cheblak who have tried to use their influence to bring peace. In 1939 the British police performed its "patriotic" duty by raiding the reading room of Hampstead public library and arresting the German Jewish exiles there as potential fifth columnists. Some things don't change.

Jewish socialists will continue to be part of the anti-war movement. We cannot realistically view the situation with even qualified optimism but at the same time we do not allow ourselves to slip into despair and inertia. We stand by the principles that inspire our struggles for socialism locally, nationally and internationally - for human liberation, not human destruction. □

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Cover photo: Anti-war protest in London, January 1991. Paul Mattson

Divided we stand

Heated controversy surrounded a rash of public meetings by various Jewish organisations, as the debate intensifies in the Jewish community over how best to respond to growing antisemitic attacks.

Four black members of Newham Monitoring Project staged a walk-out during a public meeting organised by the "Jewish Awareness Group" (JAG) in Ilford in October. The four, who were already angered by being singled out for humiliating body searches, were protesting at the exclusion of other members of their project by "security" guards, supplied mainly by the Board of Deputies Community Security Organisation (CSO). Five members of Newham Asian women's group, two local Afro-Caribbeans and two members of the more radical Jewish Action Against Racism Against Fascism were also turned away. While the heavies insisted there was no room, one steward announced to the meeting that people were being turned away because they were "Trotskyite Anti-Zionists". Room was later found for other Jewish people who arrived late - 'nuff said.

Searchlight Magazine, who supplied the speakers and helped promote the meeting, openly claimed responsibility for two of the exclusions on political grounds but denied any role in further exclusions. The CSO were clearly under stricter orders to behave at another JAG public meeting 24 hours later in Edgware; nevertheless, the one black person who attended told the meeting of the extra security he endured at the door.

Searchlight gave over considerable space to JAG to promote themselves in their October issue. They proudly announced the involvement in their group of right wing Zionists. In a departure from a longstanding non-sectarian stance, Searchlight allowed JAG to badmouth the Jewish Socialists' Group, and failed to publish a letter from the JSOG correcting their misinformation.

So who are JAG? Although posing as a grassroots body, they appear to be a front for a faction within the Board of Deputies. Their platform states their opposition both to antisemitism and anti-Zionism. To underline the point, the speakers' tables at the public meetings were draped with Union Jacks and Israeli flags, and the JAG hosts were no doubt delighted by one Searchlight speaker's unprompted justification of the "Temple Mount" massacre.

Some 300 people in total attended these meetings and that showed the community's will to fight antisemitism and racism. However, the behaviour of the organisers and their Human Rottweiler security guards will not have inspired confidence in their capacity to build on that commitment.

Yet JAG's efforts prompted the dominant faction among the Board of Deputies' leaders to hold their first public meetings on antisemitism that any of our members can recall. The meetings, held in Ilford and Hendon, were, in the spirit of post-Thatcher days, addressed by a row of men in grey suits. Audiences were keen to hear precise details of the antisemitic threat and receive some guidance on how to fight it. Instead they were treated to a set of elaborate excuses and apologetics designed to dull any enthusiasm for action and ensure that any initiatives are left safely in the hands of the "experts". They claimed that the media were exaggerating, that physical attacks on Jews in Stamford Hill were not inspired by antisemitism but by petty crime in order to feed drug habits, that attacks on Asians were

worse, that the real threat to Jews came from the left and the Muslim fundamentalists, and that Jews needn't be unduly concerned about the British National Party winning more than 12% in a recent council by-election in the East End since this was a very local result.

A member of the audience described the Board's performance to a reporter from *Jewish Socialist* as "hogwash, eyewash and whitewash".

Meanwhile, the incidents continue, given a boost by the Gulf war which the fascists have received as a gift, providing a cloak for their actions against Jews and Muslims. In the first two weeks of the war, at least two mosques were firebombed, a Jewish cemetery was daubed, a car parked in a synagogue

forecourt was set alight, as was part of a Jewish school in north west London. Fascist leafleters infiltrated anti-war protests in Nottingham, distributing leaflets under the title "Anglo-Palestinian Solidarity Council" which placed the blame for the war on the demands of "multi-millionaire Zionists".

The Jewish Socialists' Group has responded to the general rise in antisemitism and racism by strengthening its links with other threatened communities through a series of open discussion meetings. The second of these on 22 January took place despite an anonymous threat that "if the Jewish meeting goes ahead it will be attacked". In 1991 we can probably anticipate a further escalation which makes a united response even more vital. □

Martyrs without recognition

The year 1991 will mark the 50th anniversary of the murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, the leaders of the Jewish Workers' Bund in Poland between the wars. When the Nazis invaded Poland, the Bund organised an underground resistance, but sent its better-known leaders eastwards to safer locations. These areas soon came under Soviet rule. The Soviet leaders regarded the libertarian socialist Bund as political opponents, and arrested Erlich and Alter. They were held for two years and eventually sentenced to death by military tribunal. At the eleventh hour their sentences were commuted to 10 years' hard labour.

In September 1941 they were released following a more general amnesty for Poles held by the Soviets. On their release, Soviet officials assured them that their imprisonment had been a mistake, and urged them to help form a Jewish Anti-fascist Committee that could maximise western support for the Soviet's anti-Nazi war efforts. They immediately set about this task but were rearrested seven weeks later and put to death on Stalin's orders on fantastic trumped-up charges of "aiding the Nazi enemy". The Soviet Union kept news of the executions secret for 15 months while international labour movement and

socialist leaders sought assurances on their welfare. The eventual disclosure of their fate met with an international protest campaign.

On the 10th anniversary of their death the Bund produced an anthology in Yiddish about the lives of Erlich and Alter, based on the testimonies of survivors who were imprisoned alongside them, and selected writings by the two Bundist leaders on the Moscow trials, Zionism, the Spanish Civil War and other subjects. This anthology is now available to English readers, thanks to the translation work of Dr Samuel Portnoy. The preface to the book points

out that the murders of Erlich and Alter have yet to be acknowledged by the Soviet Union as a criminal act and their reputations have not been rehabilitated. In a period when communist history is being opened up it is more than timely to campaign for their posthumous rehabilitation and for their contribution to the socialist movement to be duly acknowledged.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter: Two Heroes and Martyrs for Jewish Socialism, edited and translated by Dr Samuel Portnoy, is published by Ktav/Jewish Labour Bund, price \$35. Available from the Jewish Labour Bund, 25 East 21st Street, New York, NY 10010, USA.

elected to the legislature for the first time, and of these only eight have been in the house prior to 1985. Eleven of them are women, the largest such group ever in Ontario history. Eight members are teachers; add to it several social workers, a handful of union organisers, some municipal politicians, a small businessman, a couple of lawyers and some community activists and you have the new Executive Council of the wealthiest and largest province of our country. This by itself is indicative of the tremendous change created by the results of this election.

The Premier, Bob Rae, in a speech prior to his election victory, stated: "We must open up government and the way in which it delivers services. Our health and welfare services spend billions of dollars, yet in many cases they are neither accountable nor participatory. Capitalism's ability to 'deliver the goods' economically has been much exaggerated. As a political system, it fails miserably to address the ordinary needs and demands of its citizens. As a moral system, it utterly fails to enlist people's will to a shared freedom, to justice, to equality, to community, or to love."

The people of our province and the rest of the democratic world will watch this development with a great deal of interest and hope. It may be a harbinger for the future.

L LENKINSKI

Red Ontario

When the "unthinkable" happened and the New Democratic Party (NDP) won a majority of seats in the Ontario legislature, the "experts" were baffled. A party with very feeble links with the Jewish community has taken centre stage on the political arena. It will require a major effort of rethinking and a very clear strategy for the Jewish community here to try and regain lost ground.

Our neighbour to the south, the United States of America, is bragging that the tremendous changes in Eastern Europe are a clear indication of a victory of the liberal capitalist good over communist evil. The most enthusiastic proponent of this one-sided assessment is Francis Fukuyama, who claims we are witnessing a complete demise of the regulatory powers of government in favour of a laissez-faire free market society. In spite of this reactionary 19th century reasoning, Ontario, the most populous, the largest, most industrially developed province in Canada went ahead and elected those "misguided" socialists. A vicious anti-socialist campaign scaring the wits out of people with all kinds of gloomy predictions simply did not work.

Twelve of the new 26 ministers in cabinet have been

Rebels without cars



In December last year an intriguing picture appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle*. The Chair of the Board of Deputies, Dr Lionel Kopelowitz, was surrounded by smirking youths and he looked positively threatened. What's up, Doc? Did you wander by mistake into a meeting of fascists? Or worse — an SWP meeting on antisemitism? In fact, the picture was taken outside Edgware station on a Saturday night and these were nice north west London Jewish kids. Or were they?

These Jewish children were "a problem". Hundreds of them hung around the streets of Edgware, Golders Green and Hampstead until the early hours. Other newspaper reports mentioned alcohol, drugs, violence and muggings. Dr Kopelowitz spoke sternly of moral decline and the "disgrace for the Jewish community". One night, *Jewish Socialist* reporters cruised up and down the Northern Line to see what these kids ("don't call them kids to their face whatever you do") were like and to ask them why they did it.

In Hampstead we spoke to a group of girls, some as young as 12. These were

locals and the youngest were expected home by 9.30pm. We asked them what their parents thought about them going out to hang around the streets. Their parents didn't understand them and tried to stop them coming out. (Although some of the girls quietly admitted they understood their parents' fears for their safety.) Yes — there had been one or two muggings. Yes — there had been an occasional confrontation; mostly boys from different schools shouting and swearing at each other until the police moved them on.

Outside MacDonalds in Golders Green, another crowd had gathered. Some came from as far away as Southgate and Radlett because in their own areas "it's boring — there's just nothing to do". The mood against their parents and the newspaper reports was much angrier. Listen to Louise from Radlett.

"Because of all the stuff they've read they think the way out is to stop me going out, but that's wrong because that's running away from the problem. Also a lot of the parents' committees are racist. They're completely against the blacks and that's causing

more trouble. All right, some black kids are bad but so are some Jewish kids. Our parents are keeping us away from our friends because they're black. No one is hearing our point of view."

By now the crowd had grown. Every newcomer stuck their face into our huddled circle and demanded "what's going on? who are you? Jewish what magazine?" There were black kids and white kids. Thirteen year olds and 16 year olds. Jews and non-Jews. They all wore jeans and trainers and passed around a packet of Silk Cut.

One of the main meeting places in Edgware is Dinoz, an all night beigel shop. Crowds begin to drift towards there from 10pm or after the cinemas close. By midnight there are maybe as many as 400 people. Dino, the owner, is remarkably indulgent towards the kids who pile into his shop, most of whom buy nothing.

"I feel good because I supply a meeting point. Otherwise they would have to go somewhere else with no one to watch over them." But frequent complaints from the neighbours about noise may result in the shop having to close after 5pm. Dino has had to apply to the

local authority for a licence to stay open all night. There will be a number of objections and he expects his application to be turned down.

Outside Dinoz the pavement was full of huddled groups. In the freezing temperatures they stood close together or huddled in the doorways. Groups from Golders Green began to arrive. Another crowd to greet, flirt with or gossip about. In a few years' time they'd learn how to drive and go around in smaller groups to discos or parties. By then there will be hundreds more to take their place. But Dinoz beigel shop will probably be closed to them and they will have to find somewhere else to go. At the moment the only people to welcome the kids are the Lubavitch who have a meeting place in Edgware. They hope to lure people in with a snooker table and a dartboard. Rabbi Sudak believes the kids are "prey to anyone on the street". Does this include the Lubavitch? Says Dino: "If the community cared about these kids they'd find a way to live with this or get organised. These are nice youth."

RUTH LUKOM

Desperate times (1)

November 1990

The massacre at Haram al Sharif was on 8 October. I have never before come into such close proximity to death and to mutilation as in these three weeks. When I arrived, people were still in a state of shock – angry and stunned. I realise that most of the time I function by holding the horrible facts at arm's length but every now and then the pain of it hits me and I just start crying. (Not in public; it's not acceptable.)

The Haram is a vast compound, spacious and calm – usually – which you reach through the claustrophobic stone alleyways of the Old City. The Dome of the Rock is in one plaza and you go down steps to reach the plaza in front of Al Aqsa.

Outside, and surrounding the two plazas, are gardens and walkways with beautiful warm-coloured flagstones and olive trees.

On Sunday both of the two plazas were still spattered with blood. They have decided to leave it there and to let the winter rains wash it away. As you walk towards the Dome you have to step over several long trails of blood. A doctor told me that the high velocity bullets used by the soldiers (against the youths) explode on entering the body (if shot at close range, which they mostly were). A nurse was shot while treating someone inside an ambulance. She was hit in the arm and may lose it. She was also shot in the chest and her breasts

are full of shrapnel.

The main door of Al Aqsa is full of bullet holes. Inside, near the door, bloodstained clothes worn by those who died have been laid out on some stone stools in a circle. You have the impression of the vulnerability of poor, ordinary people. All of those garments were cheap and ordinary. Looking at them gave me this sense of despair. If the Israelis will massacre people in the courtyard of a mosque, then what hope is there that they will ever want to make peace?

Teresa

January 1991

I am on a plane bound for London from Cairo. We left Quds (Jerusalem in Arabic) on 10 January. It was a very painful decision. As you know, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories weren't given gas masks. Many Palestinians would not have accepted them, and most people we knew in Jerusalem had refused to collect theirs. But imagine how it would feel when the warning sirens go off...

I tried to get one just before we decided to leave. I am very angry about this: they were refusing to give them to people on regular tourist visas at all, saying: "Your hotel will provide one in an emergency."

For the first four or five weeks after the massacre in October there was an atmosphere of depression and despair. People were stunned. The Gulf was a long way from our minds. Meanwhile, the Israelis began to impose very tight restrictions on Palestinians who travel into Israel to work. They set up roadblocks on the

roads out of the West Bank. In Tel Aviv they rounded up Palestinian workers and sent them back to Gaza. Then they greatly increased the number of people who had to carry green identity cards which are given to people when they come out of prison and which bar you from entering Israel and Jerusalem.

By October, one saw very few foreigners on the streets in East Jerusalem.

Very few tourists and fewer "fact finders" than before. Then there was the wave of stabbings in West Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. All were of Israelis, mostly of police and soldiers. However, I knew that I could be mistaken for an Israeli – and anyway, just being a westerner makes one unacceptable to some Palestinians. The Israeli media were whipping up fears of Arab violence (ignoring their own) and using the stereotypes. It's really made me realise what it feels like to stick out in a crowd because of your ethnic background! Another thing that made me realise this was what happened after Kahane's assassination. Arabs were stabbed in the streets by Israelis. I saw on TV a man who had just been stabbed in the stomach for no reason other than being an Arab. He looked so utterly bewildered and shocked; I will never forget the look on his face.

The atmosphere in the streets has been increasingly tense since the massacre. Really, with or without a Gulf war, it has felt as if the situation was on course for a massive explosion.

Teresa

Penned friends

Against the background of the escalating Gulf crisis, the Israeli authorities have clamped down on prominent Palestinian peace activists. In November, Ziad Abu Zayyad, former editor of the English edition of Al Fajr (a leading Palestinian newspaper), was placed under six months' administrative detention without trial.

Jewish Socialist published an extensive interview with Ziad Abu Zayyad in 1986 (issue 5) at an international gathering to promote dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. He spoke then of a future "based on mutual recognition and mutual respect" of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The former, it appears, have yet to get the message.

Another leading advocate of dialogue, Professor Sari Nusseibah of Bir Zeit University was similarly placed in detention on 30 January. He stated: "It seems that the authorities want to benefit from the atmosphere of demonising Iraq to justify my arrest, which is intended to silence the voice of moderation."

Israel's chief military prosecutor recently disclosed that 70,000 people had been arrested in the Occupied Territories since the beginning of the Intifada. Nearly two-thirds of these were tried in military courts, while 14,000 had been administratively detained without trial.

Desperate times (2)

One and three-quarter million Palestinians under Israeli rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank face the possibility of a chemical gas attack without gas masks, sirens, and with insufficient medical supplies and preparation.

Israel began distributing gas masks to its citizens early last autumn. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were not included in the distribution. The army explained that Palestinians in the territories, three years into an uprising against Israeli rule, might use the masks against teargas fired at demonstrators by Israeli forces. In addition, the Israeli authorities said Palestinians would not be in danger from a chemical gas attack.

The issue reached Israel's High Court on 14 January. The Court ordered the Israeli army to distribute gas masks to the Palestinians. It described the failure to do so as "a scandal" and "patent discrimination". The army then revealed that it had only 175,000 masks available. The same week, the authorities distributed masks to the 90,000 Israeli settlers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

On 19 January, the Israeli Civil Administration in the territories announced that it would begin distributing masks the next day to Palestinians over 15 years of age. Nearly 50 per cent of Palestinians in the territories are less than 15 years old. To date, distribution of gas masks has been confirmed in Betunia, a small town in the West Bank. Petitions to the High Court for the ruling to be implemented await action.

In the Gaza Strip, where 750,000 Palestinians live in the most densely populated area in the world, the authorities said they distributed 2,000 masks to

hospitals and clinics in the three days following the court ruling.

As for warning systems, there are no sirens in the territories for Palestinians. Some Palestinians can hear the sirens in Israeli settlements or from police or army buildings. Otherwise, they must stay tuned to the radio. In addition, no civil defence training was carried out with Palestinians of the territories, and there is a shortage of masking tape used to seal doors and windows. Moreover, most refugee camp residents, comprising nearly half of the Palestinian population, live in unsealable makeshift housing.

The 18,000 Palestinian prisoners, most held inside Israel and in detention centres at or near major military targets, are without gas masks or shelters.

Nearly 24 hours before the war started, Israel imposed a curfew on all of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including much of East Jerusalem. The curfew does not permit people to be outside their homes. A 24-year-old woman was shot dead in Nablus on the 19th while hanging the washing on the roof.

Israel's police minister had said that "open-fire" regulations might be changed when war broke out. The existing regulations have come under international criticism for permitting excessive shooting at unarmed civilians.

The strict army enforcement of the curfew has barred medical vehicles from moving about, even in parts of Jerusalem. US citizens and other foreign nationals have been prevented from entering Jerusalem to collect gas masks. In the Gaza Strip, tanks patrol the cities and refugee camps.

On the morning of the 20th, the curfew was lifted for two hours in the West Bank. Over the next three days it was lifted for two hours in the Gaza Strip's refugee camps and neighbourhoods for women and authorised shopkeepers only. Food supplies in the shops are low, and most fruits and vegetables are unavailable.

AYAD RAHIM

A MESSAGE TO ALL SUBSCRIBERS AND REGULAR READERS OF JEWISH SOCIALIST...

If you like the ideas you read about in the magazine you may want to take a step that will enable you to turn these ideas into action. That step is joining the Jewish Socialists' Group. The group has regular meetings and cultural events, and is active in many campaigns on local, national and international issues. If you join now you can become a member in time to register for the JSG's Annual Conference on 16-17 March. This conference, open to all JSG members, will include reports and discussions on topics including

- Jews and socialism in the new Europe
- Religion and nationalism in the Middle East
- Class and politics in Anglo-Jewry

Please send me details of how to join the Jewish Socialists' Group

Name _____

Address _____

Send this form to the Membership Secretary, Jewish Socialists' Group, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX

DYBBUK'S DIARY

Contraband

Soldiers sent to defend the Saudi Way of Life have been advised to hide their St Christophers, Stars of David, crucifixes or rosary beads (couldn't these pass for worry-beads?) in their toilet bags. Long Live Freedom! What about packs of cards? Remember that awful record, I was that soldier?

Same story in reverse: a Dublin fellow I used to see at Habonim camps each summer regularly (I almost said religiously) brought his embroidered blue velvet bag containing his *tallis* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries). I don't remember seeing him *davening* (praying) much, and I don't think he was all that *frum* (religious).

As he told it, the bags were ideal for smuggling back a few gross of contraceptives each time, since the Irish customs officers were reluctant to poke into religious articles, and contraband rubber goods fetched a good price back in Dublin. I've sometimes tried to picture the scene if he had been discovered. "Did I say phylacteries? Oops, prophylactics..."

I wonder what became of my enterprising friend? He's probably somebody famous by now, a pillar of the community. If so, and he's reading this, a suitably generous cheque to *Jewish Socialist* should guarantee my discretion.

Confused?

I've been passed a letter which somehow didn't make the pages of another Jewish publication - I'm sure it was an oversight. Signing himself "Perplexed", the writer asks for guidance:

Mr Reuven Nachson of the Jewish Awareness Group explains that some people were kept out of its public meeting in Ilford "because of security factors on synagogue premises", they having been "recognised as known anti-Zionist agitators" (*Jewish Chronicle*, 16 November 1990).

I've been known as an "anti-Zionist agitator", amongst other things, for many years. During this time, although by no means a regular shul-goer, I have on various occasions - simchas [parties], cultural events, meetings, even services - been known to enter synagogue premises.

It never occurred to me, nor apparently to anyone else, that I was thereby endangering "security". But in view of what's been said, to avoid any future embarrassment, should I ask permission in advance before attempting to visit a synagogue? If so,

in view of the confusion clouding who is responsible for the exclusions, can you advise me whom I should notify: The Jewish Awareness Group? The Board of Deputies? The Community Security Organisation? The Beth Din? Or Shin Beth?

As my favourite *shtarke* security expert, Private Popkess (aka Bernard Bresslaw) used to say, "Well, I only asked..."

The high cost of advertising

Was anyone surprised that Jerusalem's Moslems, and other Palestinians, took the threat of a few score "Temple Mount Faithful" marching on the Haram al-Sharif seriously?

Consider some background history which much of the media preferred to forget:

21 August 1969 Australian Christian Dennis Rohan sets fire to Al Aqsa mosque, saying God has sent him to prepare the way for restoring the Temple

9 May 1980 Army explosives and grenades found on roof of *yeshiva* overlooking the Mount; Meir Kahane detained, believed planning an attack on the mosques

10 April 1982 American Jew, Alan Goodman, opens fire on Moslem worshippers, killing two and wounding a dozen more

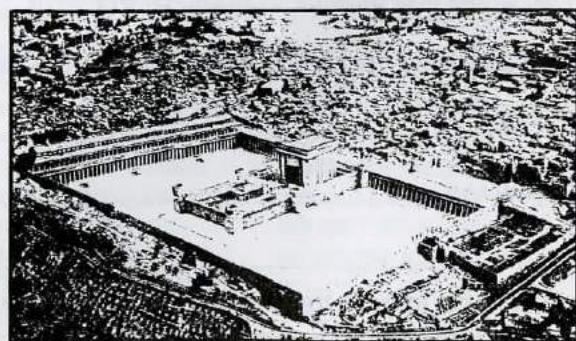
26 January 1984 Moslem guards foil gang attempting break-in at Haram al-Sharif, with explosives... and so on.

Or we could look at El Al's current brochure, thoughtfully placed on the passenger seats of its Cairo-Tel Aviv flights. As part of an advertisement for the National Diamond Centre, it showed an aerial picture of the Temple Mount, altered so that in place of the Haram al-Sharif (with the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa) there stood a model of the Temple.

"This is in bad taste," said a veteran El Al pilot. "It is an evil publication that might cause a disaster." The airline said it couldn't break its advertising contract. Expensive ad.

Now I understand the Israeli joke: "Good morning, everyone, in a few moments we shall be landing at Ben Gurion airport, the weather is hot, and if you'd like to adjust your watches, the time now in Israel is nine-fifty ... BCE."

Temple Mount without the Dome of the Rock: the "amended" El Al picture



Spiked!

What a month last November was! Meir Kahane went down to the assassin's bullet; Margaret Thatcher went out with a little help from the "men in grey suits"; and media commentator Philip Kleinman was swept out of the *Jewish Chronicle* by new-broom editor, Ned Temko.

Who says there's no justice in the world?

Kleinman's troubles reached crisis point after his knee-jerk response to press comments on the killing of 17 Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif in October. Refusing to allow a UN investigating team in, the Israeli government set up its own commission under former Mossad chief Zvi Zamir. His report criticised the police use of uncontrolled live fire into a crowd, but broadly exonerated them, blaming the Palestinians for getting themselves shot.

Some newspapers which are normally friendly to Israel headlined the criticism of the police. Many people felt this was giving the commission, and the Israeli government, credit they didn't deserve. Kleinman, on the contrary, protested that the papers were unfairly slanting their headlines against Israel - as usual. It's a wonder he didn't slam the Zamir commission itself for anti-Israel bias.

The *JC*'s leader on 2 November distanced itself from its columnist, saying Kleinman had missed the point: Israel had to show its western allies it could handle these things without outside, UN "meddling". Meanwhile, editor Ned Temko told Kleinman it was time the *JC* had more variety to its media coverage, instead of his repeated theme that "they are all out to get us".

On 16 November, announcing he'd decided to quit, Kleinman made his parting shot, declaring there was a media war against Israel, and accusing the *JC* of "backing away from the battlefield".

He'll be sadly missed by all who felt reassured that any blemish on Israel must be a media distortion. The *JC* won't be the same - or so we must hope. My only misgiving is wondering what Kleinman will get up to next.

The Tories' chosen people?

Adam Lent challenges the commonly-held view of Britain's Jews

Jews, unlike the Chinese, do not name their years after animals. If they did, 1990 would undoubtedly be the Year of the Rat. These unpleasant little vermin have been happily sharpening their teeth and claws on the gravestones, synagogues and bodies of Britain's Jewish community since last winter. Incidents that possess the unpleasant aura of a prelude.

More fortunately, 1990 was definitely not the Year of the Ass. The Board of Deputies has faced growing derision from its flock over its response to antisemitism and its undemocratic practices. When your own propaganda rag starts blabbing about *glasnost* in the Jewish community, you know things are getting a little rough. Most embarrassing. Our venerated Community Leaders are beginning to discover that their power is built upon the shakiest of bases. Of course, this inevitably means they are going to get even nastier.

But while the Board of Bumbling Opportunists desperately attempts to save itself from criticism, many Jews have been feeling more insecure in the last 12 months than they have in the last 100. The worries reached a high point in the summer with a concentrated spate of cemetery desecrations. Upsetting as this is, the fear has a special profundity because of its sudden international dimensions. The uprisings in eastern Europe were portrayed by the media as a wave of democracy irresistibly sweeping the continent. The consequent concern that the malformed offspring of these uprisings, fascistic groupings, will follow a similar path has spread an uncomfortable sense of *déjà vu* throughout the community.

Many Jews are now asking: "How should we respond?" Now no one expects the community to come up with a faultlessly progressive, socialist solution, but to listen to some people on the left one would think that British Jewry will only ever choose the most reactionary and quietist option. Why? Because, the argument runs, the Jewish community is so deeply sunk in the mire of bourgeois and petty bourgeois life that they could never see the need for cross community links or for any form of militancy. Is this not the community that has given its consistent support, not only to the Deputies, but also to a reactionary and racist state in the Middle East? Leaving aside the historical inaccuracies of this argument, it is quite plainly an absurdly simplistic view of the factors that go into determining the outlook and behaviour of British Jews.

The Jewish community in Britain, like all other ethnic communities, has its own dynamic - one

that is influenced by the class outlooks of gentile society but certainly not determined by it. To accept otherwise is to take on board the crass view that over a period of three or four generations British Jewry have managed to transform themselves from a radical proletarian community into a conservative bourgeois community. Apart from the fact that the majority of Jews now are largely lower middle class/upper working class, this view fails to recognise the specific and unique role Jews have played in the British class system.

In the first half of the century working class Jews played a vital part as a sector of the most politically advanced proletariat. A particularly impoverished community, looking with the oppressed immigrants' disdain upon the Gentiles and the Jews who told them they had reached the freest country on earth, coming not only from a culture of struggle but also from the political radicalism of eastern Europe, these Jews were bound to launch themselves into the socialist fight for freedom and rights. Their role in the working class movement became one of intellectual and strategic leadership. Unable to join the rank and file trade union movement en masse because of their entry into either skilled self-employment, skills they had been forced to adopt in the east, or because of their structural unemployment, the Jewish community began to form the core of the anarchist and radical socialist groups and parties. The Second World War, the cold war and the political dominance of reformism in the labour movement diminished the influence of the British radical left, and consequently also the role of Jews who were central to this radicalism.

The collapse of this side to British Jewry left the way open to the traditions of the older, and much smaller, British Jewish community, centred around the Board of Deputies since the 18th century. The tragedy of the Holocaust and the foundation of the Israeli state in 1948 provided this sector of Jewry with the campaigning, ideological edge it needed to hegemonise a community used to the struggle for freedom. As the skilled Jewish working class were excellently placed to reap the rewards of the post-war boom, it was easy for the Board and its allies to portray the Jewish community as a highly productive, increasingly middle class group. This was central to the Board's long established approach of ingratiation to the dominant classes as a means to gaining security and favour.

Possibly unwittingly, this meant that the more successful Jews played a central role in the

fundamental 20th century dispute between two sectors of the British bourgeoisie. With the success of Labour reformism, the collapse of the empire and a new, more challenging, world structure, the traditional mainstay of the British political establishment, that hybrid of aristocrat and bourgeois that had ruled since the Civil War, finally faced its most serious political challenge from the unlanded, "uncouth", businessmen and women who had been involved in a series of battles and alliances with the "old school" since the middle of the 19th century.

The battleground for this struggle was the Conservative Party. It reached its most explicit and aggressive point with the fight for ascendancy of Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s and early '80s. The enormous success of a minority of Jews as part of this "parvenu bourgeoisie", if a socio-economic group of 150 years' standing could be called "parvenu", meant that these Jews often became symbols for the pioneering, enterprising middle classes that became such a powerful ideological and political, if not economic, force in the 1980s. It was no coincidence that Thatcher included so many Jews in her cabinet, nor that she once identified the Jewish culture as inherently possessing her own spirit of enterprise. A feeling that the Chief Rabbi and the Jewish establishment could never agree with too strongly. Inevitably, this has meant that the whole of British Jewry has become identified with one of its smallest, but most politically important, sectors – the ultra-successful businessperson of the post-war period. This has led to a perception of a community that has, as a bloc, pulled itself out of the pit of immigrant poverty into the light of haute bourgeois success. It is a myth that has little to do with reality but it has performed effectively as part of the dominant ideology of capitalist opportunity. A similar process, on a lesser scale, has happened to the Asian community. This is why it seems to be a commonly held belief amongst Jews that the British Asian community is following in the footsteps of British Jewry, albeit a generation "behind".

However, we have now reached a watershed for the British economy and thus for the bourgeoisie. The political establishment, rather pathetically, has latched on to the notion of classlessness, a notion far closer to the rather quaint ideals of the old school of bourgeois rule. There can be little doubt that this new ideological appeal will have none of the power of the Thatcherite rhetoric but there can now be no return to faith in the panacea of the enterprise bourgeoisie. As the recession bites, companies fail and corruption comes to light, it appears that Wall Street and the City are keen to protect the pillars of their establishment by claiming that criminal dealings were a result of the "get rich quick" attitude of the '80s boys. Boesky, not Rockefeller, and Ronson,

not Hanson, face the walls of a prison cell. Their Jewishness conveniently allows the financial establishment to distance themselves ever more effectively from the crimes. Here is Jew as scapegoat in the most accurate meaning of that term.

It is in this environment that the Jewish establishment, rather unsurprisingly, faces a growing tide of mistrust from the Jews who have most to fear from antisemitism across Europe, the Jews who never were part of that establishment and their wealthy supporters in the City. Just as the collapse of radicalism in the 1940s led to a change in the political structure of British Jewry, so the collapse of Thatcherism and its historical conditions will once again allow other sectors of the community to seriously challenge the power of its leaders. Growing antisemitism only adds extra momentum to this process; it has in fact become the catalyst for change.

In addition to this community-specific dynamic there is a simpler factor to take into account. The coming recession is already hitting the lower middle class and upper working class especially hard. Thatcherism increased the financial responsibilities of these sectors by encouraging home ownership by mortgage, allowing an explosion of credit, and by increasing the take-up of private insurance and pension schemes. It is for this reason that interest rates have been so instrumental in the Tories' decline. The majority of Jews reside in this sector and as such are already experiencing a downturn in their financial welfare. This will also, undoubtedly, contribute to changes in the attitudes of Jews to the community leadership in a more direct fashion.

It seems increasingly likely that the next decade will be one of international political and economic instability of a possibly explosive kind. These periods always prove to be testing times for Jews because they are traditionally periods of political desperation on the part of the state and radicalisation of the populace. Both can have a progressive effect but they can also bring to life the more barbaric elements in modern society. The developments, whatever they are, will help determine which sectors of the Jewish community most seriously challenge the leadership. It is a threat that must terrify the Board and its chums. Unlike the grander victims of a grander *glasnost*, the Board has no Berlin Wall or loyal army to which it can resort, only a waning credibility. The sooner those on the left recognise the genuine energy and imagination locked up inside the diverse Jewish community of Britain, the sooner will the left benefit from it. A non-opportunistic opposition to antisemitism and an unconditional support for the Jewish community is an immediate necessity if we are to take the struggle against all forms of racism (including Israeli oppression of the Palestinians) and antisemitism forward. □

American dreaming

James Baaden is an American who has lived in Britain for 14 years. Here he casts a critical eye over British Jews' perception of Jewish life in America.

Is everything better in America? This may look like a singularly foolish question to ask in a socialist journal. On the other hand, it makes a lot of sense in a Jewish journal. Certainly within the left in the UK, and more generally in Europe, there is a strong tradition of robust criticism of the United States. Its wide-ranging interventions around the globe, its cultural expansionism, the contrast between its proclaimed wealth and its obvious poverty, the embarrassing stupidity of its "leadership" are all regularly subjected to scrutiny. At its best, left-wing European analysis of the United States can be so insightful that it enables not only Europeans but Americans themselves (or those few who bother to listen) to learn much more about their country than they could at home.

America's examination of itself is substantially limited to the shallowness of present-day ephemera: the latest television commercials and the twists of *Twin Peaks* loom large in the everyday consciousness, whilst more searching inspection of America and the world is embodied by *Time* and *Newsweek*, slickly packaged digests of "news". At its worst, critical scrutiny of the USA can turn into a turgid essay

in demonology, with American imperialism identified as a malign colossus, blindly trampling human dignity underfoot throughout the world.

The European left's hostile view of the United States is strongest where international political issues are under discussion: disarmament, Central America, debt, the Gulf. There are, on the other hand, sectors of progressive or radical thought and action in Britain which display a naive enthusiasm for all things American. It would be easy to conclude that the United States is the fountainhead of feminism. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir may still be a name in the USA, but she is often rubbished for having failed to match the allegedly radical brilliance of Andrea Dworkin or Mary Daly; it is never the other way round. Frequently, themes which surface in the women's movement in the USA end up being imported to Europe in such a way that similar work and achievements on this side of the Atlantic are obscured. The models of action initiated by American feminists are put forward as ground-breaking innovations to be adopted by women everywhere. By this process, a scale of values which is in fact American is presented as universal.

The lesbian and gay movement in Britain and the rest of Europe likewise labours under an overdeveloped sense of indebtedness towards the United States as a source of inspiration. Definitions of freedoms and rights with reference to sexuality are culturally constructed. The American model of a minority demanding respect for its members' individual civil liberties may be useful for gay and lesbian people in other countries to draw on, but it is nonetheless a markedly American concept. In the area of AIDS activism, responses which are peculiarly American, born of a climate of desperation in a country with minimal social welfare and public health

services, may well shift the emphasis dangerously in the direction of individual responsibility and alternative therapy. European activists might be better advised to concentrate on their own, in essence socialist, traditions of tackling public health crises, rather than embracing American approaches.

British Jews have their own

peculiar reasons for being attached to the myth of Wonderland USA. Many of the East European Jewish immigrants who came here 80 or 90 years ago were on their way to North America. Somehow they got stuck here, and bequeathed to future generations the image of the USA as the Promised Land. In fact, the whole pattern of Jewish migration was westward. Britain was more of a stopover along the way than a goal in its own right. Besides this, Jews have always known that the USA is a secular constitutional state, with no established church. This made a great difference to people who were used to antisemitism as an institutionalised phenomenon,

rather than a prejudice held by certain individuals. Jews – at least adult male Jews – enjoyed the full dignity of citizenship from the very beginnings of the United States; no other country could claim the same. And finally there was the question of numbers. There have long been more Jews in the United States than elsewhere, and the notion of "safety in numbers" is an instinct born of historical experience. In many ways it also became the *leitmotif* of Zionism.

The mystique of American superiority affects radical and progressive Jews in the UK as much as any other group. In keeping with their left-wing antecedents, they may be alert to

Washington's geopolitical escapades and misdeeds, but within the confines of their specifically Jewish consciousness they tend to feel that everything is better in America. Socialist and other radical Jewish journalists think that the Jewish press is so much more well-established and stimulating in the USA. One hears much of *Tikkun*, *Moment* and *Lilith*. Jewish

feminists see the USA as a land rich in innovation and action, producing a stream of creative women writers, rabbis, poets, theologians, and musicians. Jewish gay men and lesbians are dazzled by the panoply of mainstream gay/lesbian synagogues playing an increasingly important role in community affairs, especially in the larger cities. Individual Jews concerned about issues such as environmental protection or sanctuary for refugees enviously cite the work of various Jewish organisations in the United States. Jews dedicated to the maintenance and revival of Yiddish language and culture cannot fail to be overwhelmed by the



exciting array of initiatives and events continually unfolding "over in America". Religiously committed Jews in particular see America as full of like-minded people (considered to be so lamentably thin on the ground here) engaged in all sorts of excellent enterprises.

Well, how wonderful is everything over there? Of course, it is more interesting to understand why and how the question is posed. Or, to put it differently, the answer rests in understanding. British Jews' enthusiasm for what they perceive as the superior resources of American Jewish life has its origins in Jewish history. It is important that British Jews, especially if they are radical and progressive, should reflect on their inheritance of dreams and myths, celebrating America as the land where everything is better. It is seen as the country for which their grandparents were perhaps once bound, the place their parents bitterly regretted having missed out on it, the exciting heartland of Jewish radicalism and innovation, full of Reconstructionists, lesbian and gay synagogues, New Jewish Agenda groups, Jewish feminist conferences, synagogues giving sanctuary to refugees and *klezmer* bands on every corner, next to all the kosher vegetarian restaurants. Are young(ish) radical British Jews of 1991 simply constructing for themselves the same land flowing with milk and honey that their ancestors dreamt of a century ago?

In sobering contrast to this body of family and folk memories, I would draw attention to three points. First, the image of America as the land where all the wonderful Jewish things happen can, and does, stifle existing resources and potential on this side of the Atlantic. It is worth considering how far a century (or more) of fantasising about Paradise USA has made British and other European Jews steep themselves in a dismal sensation of inferiority. The American tendency to identify Europe variously as the old country, the home of antisemitism, the site of the Holocaust, and a vast graveyard (all descriptions and metaphors extensively used by contemporary American Jews) has led us to regard Jewish life on this side of the Atlantic as dead or at least moribund. It might be useful to reflect on the ways in which American treatments of the Holocaust also serve the purpose of portraying Europe as stained, miserable, decrepit, drenched in tears and blood.

Secondly, whether everything is more stimulating, diverse and creative in the US or not, it is important to realise that religion is the locus of most of these presumably exciting goings-on. It is synagogues which are giving sanctuary to the refugees; the bulk of feminist

innovation is happening in the realm of spirituality and ritual. Gay and lesbian Jews are organising themselves in synagogue congregations and training to be rabbis; and other initiatives concerning social justice, Israeli/Palestinian dialogue or environmental activism tend to take place in religious settings.

Religion in the USA, rather than being the citadel of reaction and bigotry which European commentators often make it out to be, has often been the starting-point for progressive movements. The civil rights movement of the 1960s, and to some extent opposition to the Vietnam war, both had their basis in the religious sphere. Organised religion has played and still plays a more important role in the US as an initiator and promoter of social justice than political parties, unions or any other comparable secular institution. As a consequence, the whole character of reformist or progressive movements in America, both within the Jewish community and more generally, is quite different from here. It is *not* socialist or indeed left wing. As a rule, a general analysis of society is notably lacking. Issues are considered in isolation from each other, and demands for improvement are couched in rather coarsely individualist, consumerist terms. In its worst manifestations, this brand of American "progressive" politics becomes a shallow, have-a-nice-day liberalism. Rights and liberties are little more than goods which the (affluent) individual demands as his or her due.

Given the British Jews' inheritance of an inferiority complex and the extensive depiction of Europe since 1945 as a bloodstained Jewish wilderness, it is important for socialist and other radical Jews here to note with some satisfaction what they've got and what they've achieved. There is a notable network of groups and projects on the ground – many of which have been launched in recent years. There have been remarkably large and successful gatherings, such as *Ruach* in Leeds in 1988 and the Hackney Jewish Socialist Group's day of Jewish Culture & Resistance in September 1990. Journals like *Jewish Socialist*, *Jewish Quarterly* and *New Moon* suggest that there are quite a few Jews around – other than establishment functionaries – with something interesting to say.

Meanwhile, the ossification of the establishment continues apace. At any rate, the United Synagogue and the Board of Deputies dwindle in significance as growing numbers of Jews commit themselves to expressions of community involvement largely outside these fossilised hierarchies. Meanwhile, we are part of a Europe rich, not only in reminders of mass murder, but in living Jewish communities and cultures. We can look east as well as west. □

Profits of doom

Julia Bard and David Rosenberg speak to Noam Chomsky

JS: Was the split in the Congress and the Senate about whether to go to war political? What do you think are the objectives of the US government now, and what are the implications for the whole of the Middle East?

NC: The split was almost entirely tactical. In the United States there's been very strong mainstream opposition to the war, and that's rather the norm.

In the congressional and senate hearings, virtually everyone was against the war. The only people they could round up to speak for it were old war horses like Kissinger who would be in favour of war no matter where it was. The articulate opinions were overwhelmingly anti-war but on very narrow grounds, that it's just stupid because you can get the same results by sanctions.

Nevertheless the administration prevailed because the opposition sacrificed most of the argument; they accepted the whole rhetorical stance that we are noble and upright, fighting for high principles and pursuing our traditional tasks of defending the poor and oppressed and that whole story. Now, of course, that stance can't withstand a moment's scrutiny; but once you accept that whole story then you're left with tactical judgments.

The business community was pretty silent. I think they added up the numbers and figured it's probably a good idea to go to war. The people against the war were arguing on the grounds that sanctions and diplomacy are going to work. The people who were for the war also knew that sanctions and diplomacy are going to work, but they didn't want them to work. They wanted to achieve a victory through the threat or use of force.

That gets to the war aims. It makes a certain sense to achieve them through force rather than diplomacy. Basically the United States and England want to retain their traditional condominium. It was designed so that they effectively control oil production but also, much more crucially, control the profits from it. Kuwaiti investments were run out of London and Saudi Arabian profits prop up the US economy - they're probably buying up American banks at the moment - and that has to be maintained. The banks, like the whole economy, are in trouble and one of the ways of bailing them out was petrodollars so you want to control it. The United States and England have every reason to want a world controlled by force. They are not economically dominant like they used to be. England by now barely competes with Italy. But militarily Britain is still a significant power and the United States is pre-eminent; there is no other challenger. So the idea that the world is run by force is a good idea; and these countries expect to play a mercenary role, as it's called in the business press, meaning they're enforcers and somebody else pays for it. A mercenary wants to show that force is a useful thing. You want a lot of payment for your services. So [it's] useful to show that the way to solve problems is by force. Getting Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait by diplomacy is no big advantage for the United States.

JS: How successful has the American government been in legitimising the war amongst the American public?

NC: Up until the last day [before the war], not very. About half the public was just against it flat out. I was a bit surprised when I came here. The impression I've had is a rather striking difference between England and the rest of the

world. It's much more jingoist and narrow-minded and much less sceptical about government pronouncements.

JS: Do you think that the US anti-war movement can maintain its momentum now?

NC: No. It's hard because the call for an end to the war is like shouting in the wilderness at this point. There's no way for this thing to be called off once they get it started as a high-tech war.

On the other hand, this anti-war movement is quite different [from] the anti-war movement in the '60s, which was mostly students - visible but pretty isolated.

[Today's anti-war movement] is middle class America, middle America. A lot of it's conservative church groups in the mid-west who are sending witnesses for peace to Nicaragua and so on. When I say conservative, they may be culturally conservative but they could be socially pretty radical. It's a pretty substantial and rather deeply rooted thing and by now it even has an entry into elite circles. Whereas the press during the Vietnam war was just overwhelmingly hawkish, now you get voices even in reasonably important positions. The same is true of the main television channels. It's very different from the '60s, it's discontinuous from it.

JS: There's a close convergence between American foreign policy and Israeli government policy. Critics of Israel often claim that American policy is being dictated by a "Jewish lobby" while apologists for Israel tend to say that Israel is carrying out America's dirty work. How would you understand the relationship?

NC: I agree with the apologists. Israel is carrying out America's dirty work. I don't think it's the Jewish lobby, I think that's already a mistake. It's a pro-Israel lobby which includes Jews. For example, it includes right wing Christian fundamentalists who are violent antisemites. Right wing Christian fundamentalism is not a trivial thing and they are very supportive of Israel even though they probably want all the Jews to be killed! That's one segment of it. The labour unions' bureaucracy is old fashioned Jewish labour leaders and they're very pro-Israel. But the main place where the Jewish lobby fits in is with the liberal intellectuals. Jews in the United States are an educated, upper middle class community, mostly liberal. Their natural home is the liberal educated community which is influential [so] you get the impression that this is a Jewish lobby but it isn't. A lot of the most outspoken of them became big Zionists after the victory in 1967 [which] won Israel a lot of points among liberal intellectuals in the United States. This was the time when the United States was failing to defeat the Viet Cong. There was also a domestic challenge to authority [from] the students. The feminist movement was beginning and raising questions, the Black Panthers were around and the ethnic minorities were starting to move. All of a sudden there's this sense of Cubans and Maoists and PLO and Viet Cong, and finally somebody came along and showed how you handle them. There was a lot of public support for Israel after the victory and it was possible to exploit that as a weapon against the American domestic activists. Of course, the organised Jewish community is a lobby. A lot of Israelis [who are] not even doves are very bitter about it because when they come to the United States they get smashed. An Israeli general like Matti Peled will come to the United States and be condemned as a traitor to Israel - a guy who was on the Israeli General Staff during the Six Day War is not patriotic enough for these guys. Danny Rubenstein, a mainstream [Israeli] journalist, went to Washington to speak at the Council of Presidents of American Jewish Representation - all the big mucky machers

- about the situation in Israel. He said Israel's not under any military threat but there really are problems: internal problems, economic problems, cultural problems and the occupation's a problem... but the audience was extremely angry. They told him [that] in the United States he should say Israel's under military threat [because] "the only way we can raise money from the Jewish community is for Israel to be under threat; half of that money goes to Israel but half of it stays here to support our own institutions."

JS: In Britain, radical critics of Jewish establishment policy or Israeli government policy are pilloried and marginalised. Some people respond by abandoning the struggle within Jewish communities. Others, like the Jewish Socialists' Group, consciously seek to create an opposition inside the community that challenges the establishment's right to speak and act on behalf of the Jewish people. How does America compare?

NC: Israelis call the organised Jewish community Stalinist - and that's quite right. There's reflexive support for state power no matter what; they switch their position, we switch our position. Israel has an effective system for this - the *hasbarah* system, propaganda - they bring Americans over [for] a tour on the Golan Heights, they ride in a tank and that kind of stuff. It sells. They even run fake military exercises.

The United States is an assimilating society, there's not much holding Jewish life together, there's very little in the way of cultural guidance. The exception is religious fundamentalism. The synagogues are like Protestant churches. The one thing that holds them together is loyalty to, what's called support for Israel. And you want to make sure there aren't any mavericks around to question this. The whole Jewish culture there is very Israel-centred to the extent that it stays alive.

The other sector that I mentioned, this religious fundamentalism, is very serious and it's growing. It's different from the other kinds of American religious fundamentalism. In the United States maybe 40 per cent of the adult population says they've undergone a born again Christian experience. [Generally] as a country becomes more industrialised all the indices of religious fanaticism tend to reduce. But the United States is just off the chart. Whatever the reason may be, it's a fact. But the Jewish fundamentalism which rose mostly after '67 is quite different in character. It's partly Lubavitch, partly Satmar. The Lubavitch are pro-Zionist; the Satmar and the rest are anti-Zionist and they have big street fights. What makes it so strikingly different is that they are really going back to the 17th century. If you go to the Christian fundamentalist area the people look like everybody else and they act like everybody else; it's only when you get into these belief systems that you find Armageddon is coming or something but these guys are trying to go back to looking like their image of the *shtetl* and it's a whole life too. You get arranged marriages, the whole business. It's even more extreme than the Moonies.

JS: One of the things that makes it different from Christian fundamentalism, but perhaps not Islamic fundamentalism, is that it's got radical trappings. The Lubavitch seem to be targeting young left wing Jews in this country anyway and there are parallels in other parts of the world. In this country they are also integrating themselves into the mainstream synagogues and institutions. Is this their strategy in the States?

NC: From what I can see they're basically trying to build their alternative system. They're a missionary group, they're around recruiting in the streets and colleges and so on. There's areas of New York State which they've taken over.

They bring you in slowly, you go to like a halfway house and you get integrated, and then you get this friendly rabbi who's your guide, and a support system, and friends and community. It's a lot like left wing sects; the Larouche sect was like that, gradually manipulating these kids (till) it takes up your whole life, you've gone a little bit out of the mainstream, it's hard to get back in. That's the way Lubavitch and the Moonies and the rest work it too and it's extremely effective. For people who are looking for something, I'm not even sure it's important they're very Zionist; Lubavitch offers something. What is there? Just buying goods? The kind of general vacuity of life under capitalism atomises people and eliminates every human emotion except greed and any human association except competition. It offers a sense of community which you don't have anywhere else.

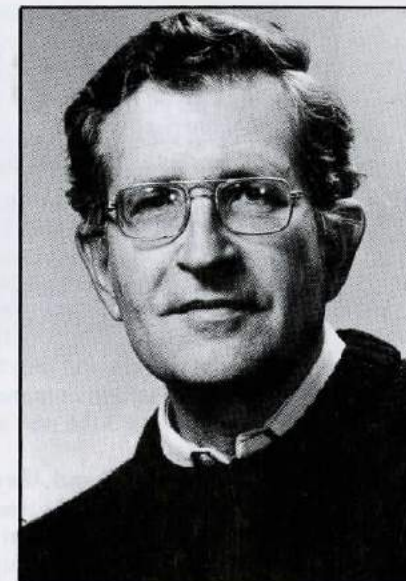
It's probably connected also with a lack in the labour movement. I remember when I was a kid my relatives, Jewish, working class, were all in the Communist Party. And that offered this to them. You shouted some slogans about Russia but basically the Communist Party was picnics and family. It was more a way of life which had authentic values like labour organising and doing hard civil rights work and so on. And this has something of the same flavour to it but without the social content. Very typical of these movements [is that] you want an authoritarian figure [so you can] think it's all taken care of. I should say the people are very happy. My Moonie relatives are as happy as clams.

JS: To what extent do you think that the gains of the Hamas movement together with a rise in Pan-Arab nationalism was purely and simply a response to the lack of any gains that they have made during the course of the Intifada or is it due to different, more complex political changes?

NC: First of all it's worth noting that Israel very strongly encouraged it. Now they feel it's gotten out of hand. They did the same in southern Lebanon. Israel has always been mainly opposed to secular nationalism; the reason they're opposed to the PLO is that it's a secular nationalist group and secular nationalism has always been regarded as the real enemy; religious fundamentalism they figure is quite a good thing; [it] diverts people into craziness. In southern Lebanon they ended up being tigers that they couldn't control. My impression a couple of years ago was that they're doing the same thing in the West Bank. It's worth bearing in mind the stupidity of intelligence organisations. They're always wrong about everything. They're good at killing people but when it comes to trying to deal with anything political or social, they fall flat on their faces. So it's been encouraged by Israel but it's growing out of indigenous roots.

It's not just Hamas. All over the Islamic world, secular options have failed. Partly because of western power but partly by their own internal corruption.

JS: The PLO faced a conflict between a huge grassroots support for Saddam in the Occupied Territories, and the



Noam Chomsky
Photo: John Cook

PLO leadership's commitment to an international peace conference and direct negotiations with Israelis. They have taken what they consider to be a mediating role in the Gulf but the West has perceived that as being pro-Saddam.

NC: The West here means US and Britain which are off the spectrum of world opinion on this stuff. I've been very critical of the PLO for many years but in this case I think their reaction was more or less appropriate - at least their public reaction. The public reaction which is called here "embracing Saddam Hussein" was, as far as I know, proposing diplomatic settlements and that makes sense. The same as Jordan. [According to] the public information they came out straight for Iraqi withdrawal, but they wanted it tied to other things, negotiated settlements and so on, and there's nothing wrong with that. That's the way all issues are resolved and this one should be too.

On the other hand, they're responding to strong popular support for Saddam Hussein which is not just in the occupied territories. If you look at the Arab world, it's very much divided. The division roughly corresponds to the degree of freedom and openness in the society. By and large the more open the society is, the more opposition there is to the US and British position. They don't like Saddam Hussein: "he's a gangster, but at least somebody's standing up to the West". After all, in the Third World the enemy is the United States and England. Take Tunisia, for example: pro-western, bourgeois, open enough to run public opinion polls. Back in August the polls were running about 90 per cent against the US and British. Countries which have these nascent democratic movements tend to be out of the US alignment; the ones who are firmly in it are the family dictatorships.

JS: What are the implications for the Palestinians' fight for self determination?

NC: Well, I don't think it's going to harm them that much. The United States was committed to their destruction already, 100 per cent, and you can't go beyond 100 per cent. Now they have better excuses. But the US position has been since 1948 that the Palestinians don't matter because they lost. There's nothing that they can contribute to US power so why do we need them? In December 1988 the United States was so isolated diplomatically it was becoming untenable, insisting that the Palestinians "repeat the very words I say", cancelling the UN session. The United States was becoming an international laughing stock so they made the obvious move: when you're caught in a trap you pretend that your opponent has accepted your terms, then count on your power over the ideological system to make it stick. The PLO went along with this because for them politics is conniving in the back rooms with the elite and they thought they were doing that. Yitzhak Rabin said these negotiations between the PLO and the United States were a good idea and he was glad they were going on - its purpose basically is to give us time to crush the Intifada by force while [the world is] looking the other way, he says. It worked exactly that way. The US position is kept carefully under wraps. It's never published in the United States. The US position is that Jordan is the Palestinian state and there cannot be an additional Palestinian state; that nothing happens with regard to the Golan Heights [or] East Jerusalem. With regard to Judea, Samaria and Gaza, we think settlement has to be only in terms of the basic guidelines of the government of Israel. And [there are to be] no discussions with the PLO. That's the Shamir plan; that's the official US position. And there'll be free elections - with the Palestinian leadership rotting in jail and the whole country under military control. If any other country proposed that we wouldn't even laugh. And Labour goes along with [it]. □

A poet not mastered by war

Isaac Rosenberg Poet and Painter 1890-1918 - The half used life. Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum 22 November 1990 to 2 April 1991

Isaac Rosenberg was born in Bristol in November 1890 to a Jewish, immigrant, Yiddish-speaking family. His mother, Hacha, took in laundry; his father, Barnett, was an itinerant pedlar. When he was seven, the family came to London to live in Cable Street, Stepney. By the time of his death as a private on the Arras-St Quentin front in 1918 he had become one of the most outstanding, though little recognised, English-language poets of his generation.

The huge power and beauty of his poetry light up the century since his birth. To celebrate this centenary the Imperial War Museum has mounted an exhibition of his poetry, paintings, drawings and letters.

Rosenberg left school at 14 and was apprenticed as an engraver. He hated it, his creative energy "deadened by the fiendish persistence of the coil of circumstance". He snatched what time he could for drawing and writing. He read poetry at the Whitechapel Library and walked the streets until the early hours of the morning with his friends, Samuel Weinstein, Joseph Leftwich and John Rodker, who were active in the Whitechapel and Stepney branch of the Young Socialist League. This time is recalled by Joseph Leftwich:

*Down Hannibal road, Jamaica street,
then back again with untiring feet,
we talked of our hopes and our fears.*

Rosenberg was first and foremost a poet. He had a strong class consciousness but was not an atheist. He developed an idea of God in his poetry as malign, a bully, moreover one with waning powers, a rotting God, to be faced and overcome through fearless opposition. The struggle to change the terms of one's existence is a central theme in his poetry.

In March 1911 at the age of 21 he packed in his job: "Congratulate me, I have cleared out of the bloody shop, free to do anything - hang myself, anything except work." Freed from work he spent his time painting, drawing and writing, but in desperate straits for money. He attended the Slade School of Art along with fellow East End Jews David Bomberg and Mark

Gertler. With Dora Carrington, Stanley Spencer and others they were part of a group shaking the foundations of the backward English art world of the time. In the exhibition at the Imperial War Museum his series of self-portraits and paintings of his friends (he could not afford professional models) are particularly strong. But it was through his poetry rather than painting that he would find a real and unique voice.

Leaving the Slade, he sought a patron and was introduced to Edward Marsh, a member of the English literary establishment who, for all his generosity, never appreciated the force and originality of Rosenberg's poetry. Marsh, with his criticism and encouragement, tried to mould Rosenberg to his own limited view. He patronisingly referred to him as "poor little Rosenberg". He was to reply to Marsh from the trenches in 1916, striving to explain his poetic process in the conditions under which he lived: "You know how earnestly one must wait on ideas (you cannot coax real ones to you) and let as it were a skin grow naturally round and through them. If you are not free, you can only, when the ideas come hot, seize them with the skin in tatters raw, crude, in some parts beautiful, in others monstrous."

In 1915 he enlisted secretly. He wrote from Suffolk: "I could not get work so I joined this Bantam Regiment (as I was too short for any other)." He loathed the army and was victimised by its officers. He was awkward, absent-minded, of individual mind and a Jew: "I am looking forward to having a thoroughly bad time altogether... I never joined the army from patriotic reasons... I thought if I'd join there would be a separation allowance for my mother." At the army base in Suffolk he asserted his identity as a Jew in the face of antisemitism.

"The army is the most detestable invention on earth, and nobody but a private in the army knows what it is to be a slave." He was writing a free verse play, *Moses*. This work is riven with the experience of being a Jewish private in an English army camp. In this short play, Moses symbolises "the fierce desire for original action in contrast to slavery of the most abject kind". It begins with a messenger from Pharaoh handing Moses, who is supervising pyramid construction, an edict. Because of famine in Egypt "the two hind molars, those two staunchest/busy labourers in the belly's service" are to be extracted from the mouths of Egypt's Jewish slaves. They would soon lose the habit of eating.

Moses experiences deep conflict between his adopted status as an Egyptian prince and his origin as a Jew. A plan of rebellion forms, "still molten in conception". He realises the need to "tear up the roots of some dead universe, soak himself in the awareness of his own awakening", contribute to the liberation of the slaves rather than be a part of privileged Egyptian society, "well peruked and oiled".



Self Portrait 1915

In *Moses'* opening speech, in his awakening, in his anger, in his realisation of the need for fundamental change, in the language that gives clarity to the idea. Isaac Rosenberg truly finds his voice as a poet in the hostile, hungry, life of a private preparing to be sent to the western front.

*Fine! Fine!
See in my brain
what madmen have rushed through,
And like a tornado
Torn up the tight roots
Of some dead universe
The old clay is broken
For a power to soak in and knit
It all into tougher tissues
To hold life...*

*Startlingly,
As a mountainside
Wakes aware of its other side,
When from a cave a leopard comes,
On its heel the same red sand,
Springing with acquainted air,
Sprang an intelligence
Coloured as a whim of mine,
Showed to my dull outer eyes
The living eyes underneath.*

The Imperial War Museum has published a facsimile of *Moses* along with manuscripts and typescripts showing the development of the work, handwritten, rewritten or typed by his sister Annie. This new edition is a lovingly produced and significant publication to coincide with the exhibition.

Isaac Rosenberg was sent to the front a committed poet, determined that "the war with all its powers of devastation shall not master my poeting". He started sending poems back from the trenches. In *Break of Day in the Trenches* a rat commutes freely between the two enemy trenches:

*Droll rat they would shoot you if they knew
your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German –
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes
Less chanced than you for life...*

Poems full of power and clarity, letters and drawings full of a tender humour, sent back on scraps of paper, written a line or two at a time whenever he got a bit of rest, had a pencil and light from a fire or candle. To Jon Silkin, the poet who has championed Rosenberg "in his poetry, anger and compassion are merged with extreme intelligence into an active desire for change".

As a private he saw almost constant active service in the harshest conditions. His experience was different from those of the officer poets, Owen, Sassoon, Graves and others. They could not write about life the way he did. He was less shocked than they; the conditions of war were an intensification of those he already knew. His work has an alertness, a tenderness rather than horror, pity or moral indignation. He brings an intense, new, interpretative language to bear. In *Dead Man's Dump* his narrative moves over the battlefield:

*Earth! have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,
And flung on your hard back
Is their souls sack,
Emptied of God-ancestral essences.
Who hurled them out? Who hurled?*

The words of a Jewish working class poet burn across the century. By the time his last poem, *Through these Pale Cold Days*, dated 28 March 1918, reached England, he was dead.

After his death the army showed their continued antipathy to a Jewish private and his family. In a letter on show in the exhibition from the Imperial War Graves Commission dated 24 March 1927 to his sister, Annie (who after

determined questioning had finally found out where he died and was buried), we read: "I am to express that the Commission are unable to accede to your request to engrave the words 'Artist and Poet' after the name of Private I Rosenberg in the military inscription on the headstone that is to be erected over his grave. I am however to say they could be engraved at the foot of the stone as the personal inscription at your own expense. The cost of this inscription would be 3/3d. I am also to ask you to be good enough to let me know whether you desire the Cross, or the Star of David to be engraved as the emblem of religious faith."

Their bureaucratic contempt cannot silence the voice that speaks for all the youth killed in that imperialist war.

*None saw their spirits shadow shake the grass,
or stood aside for the half used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
When the swift iron burning bee
drained the wild honey of their youth.*

from *Dead Man's Dump* 1917

SIMON LYNN

MOSES: A PLAY by Isaac Rosenberg

Arts and Literature Series Number Two

A facsimile reprint of Isaac Rosenberg's last publication in his lifetime, originally published by the Paragon Printing Works in 1916. The reprint features essays by Jon Silkin, Martin Taylor and Philip Reed on this neglected masterpiece and includes a selection of manuscripts, typescripts and proofs showing the development of the work from initial drafts to publication. The reprint is intended to commemorate the Isaac Rosenberg Centenary. Copies are available from the Department of Printed Books, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ, at £27.50 including post and packing. Also available at £11.50 is *Arts and Literature Series Number One, Poems by Wilfred Owen*, a facsimile reprint of the first edition of Wilfred Owen's poems, originally published by Chatto and Windus in 1920 with an introduction by Siegfried Sassoon.

Spectred isle

Julia Pascal's play, *Theresa*, tells the story of Theresa Steiner, a Jew deported from Guernsey to Auschwitz in 1942. She outlines the background to the play and the opposition she encountered.

and some detailed research, revealed that he was part of a much larger pattern of conspiracy. Guernsey is a pretty island famous for its tomato crop and tourism. It is also a tax haven enjoyed by the British rich and

multinationals. The tourist brochures don't show photos of the German fortifications which still encircle the beach. Nor do they mention the slave workers who built them. They may occasionally allude to the war.

British collaboration with the Nazis? It sounded far-fetched. But once I'd read about it, I couldn't forget its implications. Summer 1985 was the 40th anniversary of the Channel Islands' liberation from the Nazis. Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney and Sark were the only British territories to be occupied by Hitler's armies. An article in *The Observer* by Colin Smith described the fate of Theresa Steiner, a Viennese Jew who had escaped after Kristallnacht, November 1938, to find work in London as a nanny. When war was declared, the family moved to the Channel Islands. Once it became evident, after the invasion of France, that the islands were next on the list, they decided to go back to the mainland. Theresa was forbidden to leave by the Chief of Police, Inspector William Sculpher before the Germans invaded. He had no reason to keep her on Guernsey and no one knows why he did. As one of the several Jewish European women who were domestics on the island, this meant she was a target for the Nazis. The *Observer* article placed the blame on Sculpher. A visit to Guernsey,



Monique Burg in *Theresa*

but nobody talks of the Jewish women sent from Guernsey to Auschwitz.

My research on Guernsey was full of surprises. A nurse mentioned in the original article, the "friend" who "had seen her off at the dock" and been given her sheet music as a farewell present (Theresa Steiner was an accomplished pianist) was oddly reticent about Theresa herself. When Sculpher had stopped Theresa in June 1940, she had been made to work in the local hospital until the Gestapo arrested her in April 1942. This nurse's avoidance of anything specific about Theresa alarmed me. Finally I asked, "Well what did she look like?" "She was very pretty, except for her big Jewish nose," she told me.

Apart from antisemitism there was an element of class hostility. Theresa was obviously an educated, middle class, cultured Viennese and her attitude may have appeared "superior" to the petty-mindedness of an inbred island mentality like Guernsey's. Channel Islanders consider themselves "the true British", being the original descendants of the Normans, and their constitution is quite different from the mainland. It is ruled by a few families, most of whom are associated with the masons. It is a very secret society, still deeply attached to its feudal roots. An atmosphere of fear and obedience permeates every aspect of daily life. Even today its anti-immigration laws are draconian. Nobody can buy a house unless they are Guernsey-born. The Channel Islanders don't even like the English living among them.

What about their attitudes to Jews? Those I spoke to hardly knew any and the nurse/friend thought of them "as people from Palestine". They seemed to perceive Jews as a Biblical group but, as many were observant Christians, they still carried the feeling that Jews were to blame for the crucifixion and, therefore,

well outside their individual areas of responsibility. When I asked this nurse why nobody had thought to hide Theresa, she was surprised. It had obviously never even crossed her mind. Theresa and two other Jewish women, Auguste Spitz and Marianne Grunfeld, were picked up at the same time. All their names appear on Serge Klarsfeld's list of Jews deported through France to Auschwitz. Steiner, Spitz and Grunfeld were deported from Guernsey in April 1942. In September of that year their names are on the Auschwitz convoy. There is talk of more Jews having been similarly deported.

And then there is always Jersey. What happened there? And how many of us know that there were SS camps on Alderney? I read of the thousands of slave workers employed there and heard stories of men being thrown alive into concrete. Today, most Channel Islanders have no knowledge of these concentration camps, and children play merrily at holiday camps built over the underground tunnels produced by half-dead slaves.

This then was the background to my play, *Theresa*. I knew little of her personal life nor even the definitive story of her arrest. The nurse/friend claimed to have seen her off at the docks early in the morning, whereas another nurse told me of the Gestapo coming in to the dormitory in the middle of the night to take Theresa from her bed. Theresa Steiner was 26 when she died. I chose to use an older woman, Ruth Posner, for the role. Ruth was a Warsaw Ghetto survivor who had spent her childhood pretending to be a Catholic. All her family were gassed in Treblinka. I particularly wanted to use an actor who would bring her own life to the work.

This decision had unforeseen circumstances. After some publicity in the *Jewish Chronicle*, a man contacted me claiming to be her nephew by marriage. As

the production progressed to its opening in London, he began to demand that I change the name of the production. Theresa Steiner in my play is a widow with a son who chooses to stay behind in 1938. In 1942 he decides to commit suicide rather than be taken to Dachau. I wanted to write a resisting Jew. Theresa's distant relative didn't like my dramatic licence and threatened to commit suicide if I didn't change the name. There were letters of appeal from rabbis and Jewish welfare organisations. I explained that Theresa Steiner's story was mentioned in research and that her name was already in the public domain. To change her name would be to dent the truth of her situation. I had changed her age and given her a son, but her life as we know it on Guernsey is faithfully recorded within the play. There is a long scene which exposes the names of those who betrayed the Jews and names the many Jews given away. The nephew did not, I am happy to say, commit suicide, and the play went on.

After the spring showings *Theresa* was performed in West Hampstead, London, in November. It was here that many immigrant Jews began to see the work and their response to it was most gratifying. For many, the play represented elements of their own story. Arrival in a hostile Britain; antisemitism; fear of internment; alienation. After the performance many would confess that they were the sole survivors in a family. Others related to the multi-lingual aspect of the production.

Meanwhile, over in Guernsey, dissidents and critics of the system pressed to have the production shown there. Most notable is the veterinary surgeon, Maurice Kirk, who, when he arrived in Guernsey as a child during the days of liberation, saw several bonfires burning the official documents of the war years.



Ruth Posner as Theresa

Theresa has been banned on Guernsey. The official reason is that "it contains foul language" but this is nonsense. The language that offends is the name of the Chief Official of the island, Victor G Carey, the Bailiff whose letters to the Gestapo are effusive and subservient as he willingly betrays the names of every Jew on the island. His grandson holds a similar position of power on the island and no doubt wishes to keep his family's name safely protected. But two other grandsons of the Bailiff arrived to see *Theresa* on its last night in London. They felt the play should be seen in Guernsey and were ashamed of their grandfather's role. As one of them said: "After the war the British government didn't know whether to shoot him or knight him. In the end they decided that knighting him would be best." After all, in 1945 most of the cabinet wanted to concentrate on rebuilding society rather than revealing the extent of collaboration in British territory. On Guernsey one old man told me that "after the war three men should have been arrested for war crimes". He refused to tell me their names out of fear, but when I mentioned Sculpher and Carey he agreed that these were two of the three. But collaboration was not just concentrated at the upper levels; it was rife throughout the general population with a few honour-

able exceptions. They betrayed one another to the Nazis, settling old scores and vendettas. The post office workers interviewed in Channel 4's recent documentary, *Swastika Over Britain*, talk of mailbags filled every day from locals to the Gestapo offering names of "enemies".

While travelling in France in 1990 to secure bookings for the play there, I was impressed by a feature in *Le Nouvel Observateur* which revealed the names of two French collaborators who had later enjoyed thriving careers in De Gaulle's and Giscard d'Estaing's police administration. It questioned the morality of prosecuting Klaus Barbie while allowing French collaborators responsible for the murder of even more Jews than requested by the Nazis to enjoy a restful, wealthy old age. Yes, France had experienced Carpentras but, at least amongst the left, the questions about French collaboration were still being asked. This is in strong contrast to the British situation. Documents revealing the extent of Channel Island collaboration are kept secret. I have seen some of the papers but I am sure that there are many more locked away to protect the guilty.

The life of the play continues into 1991. We go to the Brighton Festival in May and to Maubeuge in France in March. Paris is planned for October and there is an invitation to present it near

Kassel in Germany on the site of a former concentration camp. Since we started work Ruth Posner found out that the final train she was on in Germany was bound for Auschwitz before it was bombed by the British. And the Auschwitz death roll with Theresa Steiner's name on it had another shock for me. My family came out of Romania at the beginning of this century. I thought we had escaped the Holocaust. But, on the same convoy transporting Theresa Steiner, Auguste Spitz and Marianne Grunfeld to Auschwitz, I saw the name Goldenberg from Bucharest. This was my grandmother's name - so I can presume that these were my relatives. Theresa Steiner's story could well have been my own. □

Gipsies At Birkenau

Is that hissing
The rustle of
The silver birches
Or the sound of gas
Escaping?

Is that the smoke
Of woodfires burning
Or from another
Campfire drifting
On the breeze?

Is that the noise
Of feet dancing
And running with the
Horses? No, it is
The sound of heels
Drumming against
Narrow planks of wood.

In the cafes
Will the tinkle of
Tea spoons
Cover the silence
Now the gipsies
Are playing at
Birkenau?

BERTA FREISTADT

Home is where the heart is

We may not like it but we can't ignore it. Madge Dresser takes a personal voyage over the contours of nationalism

In the old days Marxist Jews knew what to think about nationalism. It was a bad thing, epitomised by Nuremberg rallies and McCarthyite *mishegas* (madness). Zionism was another, if less comfortable, case in point. It, too, was ultimately unsound, and if one did catch oneself occasionally thrilling to the strains of the *Hatikva*, that just showed what an insidiously irrational force nationalism was.

But by the 1960s it was beginning to become apparent that such clean cut judgments posed messy problems. Who, for example, put the "national" into national self-determination? How significant was it that left-wing movements in Vietnam, Palestine and elsewhere characterised their movements as those of *national* liberation, or that in the USA Blacks, proclaiming that Black was beautiful, renamed themselves Afro-Americans? And wasn't it odd as well as ironic that many young American Jews were first inspired to embrace Zionism as much by the example of Black nationalism as by the successful machismo of the Israeli army?

Clearly, certain struggles, even if they weren't strictly reducible to class, deserved attention. The Old Left, always uneasy about wandering too far off the rationalist track of class analysis, warned of the dangers of diversion from the true quest. The New Left, being of a somewhat more romantic disposition, began gingerly to explore the fascinatingly unfamiliar territories of race, ethnicity and nation. Some trenchant connections were made in the 1970s between industrial capitalism and nationalist aspirations.

The more hopeful implied that nationalism, would fade once capitalism gave way to a new, more equitable order. In its more quixotic guise, western nationalism was seen as but the misguided creed of Celts, Basques and other dispossessed dreamers marooned in the political hinterland of the developed world. In its demonic aspect, it was shown up as intrinsically racist and reactionary, the stuff of sociobiologists and Tory tribalists.

Back on the streets, where by this time the right-on were rocking against racism rather than analysing it, nationalism (of the western world at least) was simply and frankly equated with fascism.

But, frustratingly for the Left, nationalism still retained its crowd-pulling capacity. In Britain, a threat to the "nation" seemed to be able to mobilise public opinion faster than an Exocet missile. By the early 1980s, the number of people wandering the streets of London murmuring "Gotcha" led one distinguished Marxist "of Jewish origin", to suggest that patriotism (explicitly, if not entirely convincingly, distinguished from nationalism) ought to be re-requisitioned for the Left.

It was at this point that my own interest in nationalism began in earnest. A Bundist rather than a Zionist at heart, I felt the stirrings of ethnic if not nationalist identification early on in my youth but guiltily suppressed it in the interests of ideological integrity. But, after the debacle of 1983, I could see the wisdom of Hobsbawm's suggestion. There was something irresistible about patriotism. Could we not purge it of its racist tendencies and reclaim it for the good guys?

On the other hand, my feminist suspicions were aroused. Could there ever really be a politically acceptable version of patriotism with all its implications of ethnic solidarity? The examples of radical English patriotism espoused in the 18th and early 19th centuries were not reassuring. Wilkes was also a pornographer, Cobbett had less salacious but equally restrictive views on women and unabashedly nasty ones about Jews and blacks. Were such links mere coincidence?

Of course, it is not only what a given set of politicians and writers *say* about women's proper sphere, or even the revealing asides in, for instance, immigration legislation that shape gender relations within a nationalist framework. Gender relations are implicit in the symbolic language of nationalist sentiment; so much of the emotional power of patriotism and nationalism lay in its symbolism. My preliminary investigation of Britannia as a national symbol revealed a complex and sometimes contradictory constellation of meanings. Even leaving aside the explicitly misogynist imagery which abounds in nationalist rhetoric and caricature, the symbolism of man's love of his particular *land* is one couched in gendered language, with the land which is being extolled, protected or raped almost invariably represented as female.

This led me to consider a related feature of nationalist imagery in the European tradition – how threats to national order are so often characterised as sexual. A demon/witch or hydra-headed emblem, standard fare in western imagery, were frequently "customised" in the interests of topicality. So the hydra-headed monster at times takes on a Jewish aspect, the demon becomes a proletarian or a castrating hag. Racial and sexual exclusivity are bound up in the metaphorical representations of the nation. The sense of belonging to "the imagined

community" is compellingly attractive to alienated moderns. But, at the symbolic level at least, it is often accompanied by an insidious tendency to demonise those who, by virtue of their sexual or ethnic attributes or their political beliefs, find themselves cast out from the garden.

In two stimulating and provocative studies of ethnicity and nationalism, *The Ethnic Revival* and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Anthony D Smith acknowledges the racist potential of ethnic nationalism and rejects the notion that it is somehow "natural" to prefer one's "own kind". He recognises the importance of economic factors in producing nationalism, but does not see national and ethnic loyalties as purely modern and transient products of industrial capitalism. Instead, Smith locates their origins in pre-modern proto-nations or "ethnie" whose identities have been continually reinterpreted through the medium of myth, symbolism, moralities and half-remembered historical experience. Smith is not hostile to Marxist approaches to nationalism, but seeks rather to complement them by emphasising the importance of cultural factors in the emergence of communal identities and aspirations. He is, to put it crudely, a Weber to Nairn's Tawney.

Smith's open-minded approach helped my own struggle to come to terms with nationalism, especially his lack of censoriousness when he attempts to account for those emotions which well up under the most cosmopolitan and anti-racist breast. Yet he has very little to say about the way that *gender* intersects with ethnicity and class in the formation of national identities.

With a few honourable exceptions, it has been left to the women to make these connections. A recent and important collection of essays on precisely this subject has recently been published. In their introduction to *Woman-Nation-State*, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias point out how women's relations to the nation and to the state does not occur only at the symbolic level. Women are not only "signifiers of ethnic/national difference", but are also: biological reproducers of members of ethnic/national groups; reproducers and gatekeepers of the boundaries of such groups (as exemplified by, for instance, the recent Cohen case on Jewish identity); the "cultural carriers" of nationalist ideology; and "the participants in national, economic, political and military struggles".

The essays in *Woman-Nation-State* are especially valuable because they investigate the sexual politics of *particular nationalisms* in relation to particular states at particular times. This emphasis on historical and cultural specificity is crucial to understanding the political implications of nationalist ideologies.

In her penetrating and uncompromising essay, "National Reproduction and the Demographic Race in Israel", Yuval-Davis

demonstrates the "inextricable links between modern Israeli policies on marriage, divorce, birth control and child benefits with Israeli 'claims over territories and citizenship rights, class divisions and plans for mass transfer'".

But if Yuval-Davis appears to argue that nationalism always implies a variant of a *Kinder Kuche Kirche* role for women, Deborah Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter's piece, "Mothers of the Nation: a Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress", shows just how fluid nationalist sexual politics can be, depending on the particular context. The passive but nobly suffering Afrikaner woman of the Boer War and her more affluent modern counterpart are more domestically oriented and altogether less dynamic figures than their African opposite numbers in the ANC. However, the authors chart how the characterisation of the ANC woman has also altered through time. The growth of single mothers (a product of economic and political factors) seems to be correlated with the growth in female political activism. And, after the Soweto uprising of 1976, the image of the strong and impressively resilient mother who inspires her daughter to political activism contrasts intriguingly with the Afrikaner image of the mother "whose sacrifice rather than whose strength is the inspiration, generally to the son..." In both political/ethnic camps, however, the concepts of women and mother are more often than not conflated – a point I would deem more significant than the authors appear to do. Even those activist ANC daughters are characterised as "mothers of unborn generations". But despite this, the authors maintain, the role of women as revealed in the pronouncements and imagery of ANC propaganda seems a good deal more emancipated than those of Afrikaner women. This is, they argue, because the more democratic one's notion of nation is, the more the rights of women are prioritised in nationalist political agendas. Perhaps, then, one can begin to hope that not all nationalisms must be intrinsically sexist and racist.

This ties in with Anthony Smith's suggestion that some ethnic groups have a more richly documented history than others and that the richness of documentation allows for a range of different styles and types of ethnic identification within that given group to be established.

There are no prizes for guessing which ethnic group is amongst the most well-documented. I found that strangely comforting. *Jewish Socialist*, along with others, is attempting to formulate an ethnic identity independent of those wrought by Zionists and fundamentalists, a secularist, non-homophobic version of the Chief Rabbi-elect's notion of community? It's early days yet, but who knows? Maybe I can be a Bundist after all. □

Male-adjusted?

I am writing in response to Michael Heiser's review (JS20) of Lily Markiewicz's *I Don't Celebrate Christmas*, entitled *No Reflection*. I was amazed at the contrast with Heiser's preceding article, which poured praise on the work of Manfred Lemm.

Heiser, however, seems less knowledgeable on the subject of an installation, by a Jewish woman artist, which explored the complexity of her experience. "Neatly folded piles of cloth, which looked as if they had fallen out of the back of a linen cupboard" exemplifies Heiser's scathing treatment of his subject.

As a Jewish woman, I found my thoughts and feelings drawn out by the work, and I felt the symbols and objects were both relevant and stimulating. This for me is how good installation art

should be. The interplay between the viewer and the exhibit is a two-way process.

Markiewicz is an artist who has worked consistently over years, with complex, often painful and sometimes traditional Jewish symbols; her work deserves some respect. Yet Heiser clearly has no respect for Markiewicz or her work; his review seemed blatantly ignorant, ill-informed and full of condemnation.

Perhaps a dyed in the wool male reviewer doesn't do Markiewicz justice, perhaps a woman reviewer with a knowledge of her field could have offered Markiewicz and her audience a fair review of the exhibit. After all, is this not the *Jewish Socialist*, should we not expect more?

Ruth Novaczek
London N7

A day to remember

We were some of the people who organised the Hackney Jewish Socialists' Group event, "Jewish Culture and Resistance". We feel that the day was extraordinary and warrants more attention than it has received.

The last issue of *Jewish Socialist* only gave a very limited idea of the content of the day – not

the feeling of what it was about and what it was like and not of its scale. We had thought at most a couple of hundred people would come; between 700 and 1,000 adults and children came.

Songs were sung, drawings, paintings and photos scrutinised. The unexpected happened – people listened to each other even when discussing "Revolution or Reform". You could feel the will to change the world.

Since the day, Hackney JSG has organised a series of meetings and events. We have campaigned on issues including "No War in the Gulf" and antisemitism. In the spring there will be an education conference on "Antisemitism and Hackney's Schools".

Currently we are compiling a book based on interviews with Jewish socialist activists, tapes, articles, photos, drawings, poems and drama which came from the day. Please write to us with your comments and ideas.

Brian Simons, Adi Cooper and
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Hackney Jewish Socialists' Group Meets regularly. C/o Box 11, Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS

Nottingham Jewish Socialists' Group meets monthly. Contact Myra on 0602 603355 for details.

Manchester Jewish Socialists Contact Adrienne on 0204 591460.

Bristol Jewish Socialists Contact Madge on 0272 249903 (5-6pm & 8-9pm).

East Midlands Jewish Group meets regularly. Contact Joy 0780 720194.

Challenge/Etgar: English edition of new quarterly Israeli peace camp journal. Details from POB 2760, Tel Aviv 61026, Israel.

Israel & Palestine Political Report Details from Magelan, 5 Rue Cardinal Mercier, 75009 Paris, France.

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Is there a Jewish Socialists' Group in the West Midlands area (Coventry, Birmingham, Leicester)? Please contact: Sylvia on 0926 882760 (eves) or 0203-844091 (day)

INHERITANCE: an art therapy workshop on Jewish identity. Two linked days 8 and 22 March. For details and application form contact the University of Leicester, Department of Adult Education, Vaughan College, St Nicholas Circle, Leicester LE1 4LB

Left outside

Viewers who criticise this four-part documentary on Britain's Jews may find themselves mocked with the diner's jibe: "Poor food – and what small portions!"

The reluctance among numerous observers to challenge the series at its London screening in the recent Jewish Film Festival proved as revealing as the quartet's shortcomings. It suggested that the failure by the gentile press and broadcasters to examine our community has brought a fawning response to perhaps the first purported effort. This is not to be churlish towards director Paul Morrison's welcome aim to provide a varied look at Jewishness today. On the contrary, such a lofty objective demands rigorous judgment – and, in qualitative and quantitative terms, he fails to deliver.

A string of extended films may seem long enough. The fourth, devoted to new wave spirituality, felt like eternity.

No avowed spotlight on contemporary Jewry could illuminate the subject without showing the widening gap between its leaders and their opponents. The ultimate inadequacy of the series must be gauged by doubtless relief among the community's establishment. One brief clip from a Board of Deputies meeting cannot be excused by reference in the new "alternative Jewish" magazine, *New Moon* (Eclipse?), to the fuller book of the series, or to the scope it has left for other programme makers.

Morrison regretted his omission of lesbians and gay men but explained it by claiming that all the prospective interviewees he approached said they were not ready to participate. The inevitable conclusion is that had he had a deeper commitment to representing them, he would have looked harder and found replacements who were ready. Equal disbelief meets his rejection of the

charges that he was showing stereotypical images of "middle classes basking in leafy comfort". Superior laughter at the première which greeted the only regional accents in the series – from a Jumbo couple (Jewish, upwardly mobile, but ordinary) – betrayed the hollowness of this defence.

The opening segment contains amusing moments, in which suburban families appear obsessed with gastronomic and material satisfaction. Confinement to "mainstream" individuals, however, limits the impact to a shallow dimension. Some people will cite *A Sense of Belonging's* third focus – radical political alternatives, through Jews Against Apartheid, Jews Organised for a Nuclear Arms Halt and the Jewish Socialists' Group – as proof that Morrison's intentions are praiseworthy. Yet rare television exposure for these groups, compounded by a ghettoised context, reduces their importance to that of peripheral dissidents. Symptomatic of this marginalisation is the cursory footage afforded the critique of Israel from Jewish Socialists' Group national secretary, Julia Bard. In contrast, the series

reaffirms Zionist centrality, showing flag-waving school-children and claiming that Jewish identity is harnessed to the 1967 war.

Only the second film manages to reach something approaching its full grasp, through a telling history of Anglo-Jewry. The Board of Deputies' current ineffectiveness in combating organised racists can be traced back to sustained cultural disguise imposed on immigrants by lay and religious chiefs.

As best, *A Sense of Belonging* will pass, almost unnoticed, through Michael Grade's schedules, devoid even of the usual hysterical claims that it is "antisemitic" from the *Jewish Chronicle's* unhinged correspondents. But the danger remains that audiences, not least potential Jewish Socialists' Group members and sympathisers, may gain the impression of a pluralistic community which allows everyone a say in our affairs. Small wonder the sensation derived from this series of films is not so much one of belonging, but rather of longing for a more dynamic approach to Jewish issues in the 1990s.

PAUL COLLINS

Stolen treasures

Israeli writers, artists, composers and performers are drawing on the riches of diaspora Jewish culture, says Michael Heiser.

It was perhaps unfortunate that *Israel – State of the Art* had its ceremonial opening on the day following the Haram al-Sharif killings. Demonstrators outside London's Barbican Centre held up placards saying "Israel – Art of the State" to make their point. When I first heard about the festival my mind's eye, with some trepidation, conjured up an amalgam of *horas*,

archaeology, and photographs of contented bedouins and surfers at Eilat. A crude stereotype, certainly, but one reflecting the view of Israel which we normally receive through the distorting prism of the Jewish establishment here.

I did not expect to find so much (Ashkenazi) diaspora Jewish culture. This was most immediately obvious in the presence of the Yiddish Theatre of Israel but also came out through the exhibition which was the centrepiece of the festival and through other theatrical and musical events. This then poses an important question. Does Israeli

A Sense of Belonging First shown at the 6th Jewish Film Festival in London last October and to be broadcast on Channel 4 TV in early April

artists' interest in the culture of diaspora Jews indicate a wish to perpetuate this culture, or does it represent Israel's treatment of diaspora culture as part of the past, to be honoured and respected as such, but with no relevance to Israeli reality today?

An outstanding example of the latter was the symphonic cantata, *Mechayei Hametim* (The Revival of the Dead), by the Israeli composer Noam Sheriff, given a thrilling performance by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under Zubin Mehta. The work, in four movements, was written for the opening of the Amsterdam Jewish Museum in 1987. On a scale which invites comparison with Tippett's oratorio, *The Mask of Time*, its programmatic content relates Jewish history as seen through Israeli eyes, from the *heytm* to the State.

The first movement, with echoes of Gershwin, conjures up the atmosphere of the *shtetl* to exuberant klezmer sounds. The second movement represents the Holocaust. Its theme is based on the Yiddish folk song, *Oyfn Pripetshik*, given a poignant tone by soloists Gregory Yuritsch and Cantor Joseph Malovany, and by the Ankor Children's Choir. The song is suddenly interrupted. This for me was problematic, since *Oyfn Pripetshik*, of all Yiddish folk songs, embodies the idea of *hemshekh*, continuity, telling of the transmission and perpetuation of Jewish culture as a rabbi teaches children the Hebrew alphabet. Its use here has the merit of being an interpretation of the Holocaust which emphasises the destruction of culture rather than supernatural forces or moral absolutes, but it seems to suggest that the culture itself is no longer living.

After a moving rendition of the mourners' *kaddish* by the soloists, the last movement takes us to modern Israel, a very different musical universe. To emphasise this point, the Hebrew, which up to this point had been sung using the Ashkenazi pronunciation, is sung in the Sephardi way as it is spoken in modern Israel. The programme

note referred to music from Samaritan sources. To my ear there was a resemblance to the use made of "Eastern" music by composers such as Britten (in the *War Requiem*) and Tippett.

The Yiddish Theatre of Israel brought two adaptations of Sholem Aleichem plays: *Shver tsu zayn a yid* (It's hard to be a Jew) and *Shimeles kholem* (Shimele's Dream). Israel's President, Chaim Herzog, wrote in the programme: "It is one of the great missions of the State of Israel to preserve the legacy of Jewish creativity as it was expressed throughout the ages and throughout the world." (No mention of the fact that Ben Gurion described Yiddish as a "grating and repulsive language".) Of the two plays, *Shver tsu zayn a yid* stood out. The story, set around 1910, tells of two students, one Jewish and one Russian, who change places, and of the misunderstandings which result from the Russian being billeted with a Jewish family.

The performances of Israel Beker and Ethel Kovenska had an authority and intensity which surely relates to their former membership of the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre. When Beker, playing the father of the family, spoke of the capacity of the Jewish people to overcome its *Hamans*, he was speaking about Russia in 1910, but his delivery gave the words a timeless relevance. A considerable achievement but, as an acquaintance I met in the foyer wondered, will the theatre go on to look for and perform Yiddish drama being written today?

Those who had seen Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto* looked forward eagerly to the rehearsed reading of *Adam*, the second play in his trilogy. When we interviewed Sobol when *Ghetto* was being performed in London (JS17) he said that other Israeli playwrights saw him as obsessed with diaspora Jewish themes. However, *Adam* had few of *Ghetto*'s strengths – the ghetto theatre songs and portrayal of cultural perpetuation as a strategy for resistance. It tells the story of Itzik Wittenberg, the commander

of the Underground, and how his comrades reached the decision to give him up to the Germans who had threatened, otherwise, to blow up the ghetto. Survivors in the audience felt that the play did not sufficiently emphasise the brutality of the Nazis. The only Nazi character, the officer Kittel, is witty and sophisticated.

It is perhaps perilous to speculate without having seen the third play in the trilogy, but on the evidence of *Ghetto* and *Adam* it is very much Gens, the Chief of the Jewish Police, who emerges as the central character. Gens assumes responsibility for taking unpalatable decisions with the aim of assuring the survival of as many of the inhabitants of the ghetto as possible. Put like that one may venture that Sobol identifies him with Israeli *raison d'état* and holds him up as a mirror to the Israeli public. He is thereby using diaspora sources to make a point which has specific relevance to Israel today.

Finally, the centrepiece of the festival, the art exhibition, *From Chagall to Kitaj – Jewish Art in the 20th Century*, begins and ends with the diaspora. Chagall's timeless invocation of the *shtetl* suffuses the earlier (pre-Holocaust) part of the exhibition. Artists such as El Lissitzky, Eliachar Ryback and Nathan Altman attempt to use themes from Jewish folk art (such as the architecture of synagogues and the *Had Gadya* story) in the service of the ideals of the Russian revolution. David Bomberg, a first generation immigrant, uses fashionable techniques of the English avant garde to represent the audience at a Yiddish play: statuesque, tense and rapt. Mane Katz comes to Paris straight from the *shtetl* and paints himself in *tefillin* (phylacteries) paying homage to the Eiffel Tower. The Holocaust is invoked most memorably for me by Felix Nussbaum's self-portrait with a yellow star and a Belgian identity card which declares him to be a Jew in both French and Flemish.

The creation of the State of Israel is obviously intended by the



Self-portrait with Jewish identity card by Felix Nussbaum, 1943

exhibition's selector, Professor Abram Kampf, to be the crucial event around which the exhibition is structured. Thus Lipschitz's sculpture, *Miracle II*, proclaims the birth of the state from the privileged vantage point of the landing linking the two levels of the exhibition. The Israeli art shows a progression from the certainties of Reuven Rubin's portrayals of simple pioneers and Yohanan Simon's 1940s, socialist-realist style celebration of kibbutz life, to the

doubts of an artist such as Yosi Bergner with his faceless armed idealists and flying spice boxes, or Abraham Ofek who paints immigrant families from North Africa in the 1960s adrift in the hills. (This was, incidentally, one of the rare portrayals of Sephardi concerns in the festival.) The final image that stays with me from the exhibition is Kitaj's *The Jew etc.* A man wearing a hearing aid leans forward from his train seat uncomfortably and introvertedly as the landscape flashes by, apparently unnoticed by him. True to its title, the exhibition has returned to the diaspora.

The exhibition raises the question as to what Jewish art is. Some critics have questioned whether the work of Jewish artists, not explicitly on a Jewish theme, should have been included. Yet I felt that Rothko's abstract expressionism, Modigliani's grave, long-faced women, and Soutine's riotous depiction of a carcass of beef, to mention just three of the artists to whom this charge might apply, were not out of keeping with the mood of the exhibition. Soutine, for example, can clearly be seen to

be an influence on Bergner.

What then are we to make of the festival as a whole? I am sure that a Sephardi Israeli critic might claim that the use of diaspora themes by Israeli artists is, in the Israeli context, just another way of expressing their Ashkenazi cultural hegemony. Equally, Israel's Palestinian Arab citizens would not have been able to find any expression of their cultural concerns. (The Barbican has apparently now decided that these will be the subject of a forthcoming event.) However, looking at the whole festival from a secular diaspora Jewish perspective, I find it ironic that at a time when Jewish cultural creativity in England is stymied by the obeisance of the Jewish establishment to an idealised vision of Israel, many creative Israelis are themselves taking a new interest in the history and culture of diaspora Jewish life. Even if this is within a context that denies its contemporary message, it is an improvement on an Israel that looks to the diaspora as the source only of its money and not of its culture. Perhaps somebody should tell the *Jewish Chronicle*. □

A legacy of hope

A review of Hirsh Mendel's book in another Jewish publication was headed "A wasted life". I suppose Mendel might have spent his youth bent over the Talmud, instead of learning revolution in Czarist and Polish prisons. And Max Adler could have built up a nice business, to leave behind for the Nazis, instead of risking his neck running guns to the socialist *Schutzbund*.

For Hirsh Mendel, it appeared almost as if he'd no other choice, the path of struggle was predetermined. He grew up in dark poverty, working at home with his father before he was 12, feasting on a bit of bread and herring. The family knew little beyond toil and their crowded little Warsaw abode. But in 1904, with production expanding for

war and strikes pushing up wages, things began looking up: a larger room, new clothes for *shabbes*, newspapers to look at.

"I have often been reproached for having never paid any attention to my personal life, to my own existence," Mendel comments. "Whenever I hear these barbs it makes me melancholy to think that this was as good as predetermined by fate. Not only my life, but the life of my whole family was ever and always determined by political conditions. Whenever the slightest gusts of freedom began to blow, the streets of poverty and want became brighter and our abode homier. And whenever material conditions improved, faces looked brighter too."

One evening, the young

Hirsh's elder sister brought some friends back home who impressed him with their talk of politics and strikes, but most of all with a song they sang. It was called "Di Shvue", the revolutionary anthem of the Jewish workers' Bund. If the material conditions of a Warsaw slum were fertile soil, here was the seed.

Not lacking in physical courage, and with the experience of the 1905 defeat and his father standing, axe in hand, to defend their courtyard against pogromists, Mendel was a few years later organising a fullers' union with the Bund; and a night squad to deal with scabbing. Illegal conferences of the Bund, street demonstrations and clashes with police, reading Gorki and Peretz, Tolstoy and Engels by candlelight,

Memoirs of a Jewish Revolutionary by Hirsh Mendel, Pluto, £8.95 (pbk), £19.50 (hbk)

A Socialist Remembers by Max Adler, Duckworth, £12.95

hiding the membership books and red flags of the *Tsukunft* from prying police (along with a revolver handed him by someone who turned out to be an informer) ... then on to the October Revolution and Civil War...

"There was a big difference between me and the other members of my family. The whole of life inflicted itself on them from outside; both at the moment of the revolutionary upswing as well as in the hours of defeat they were passive. For me it was the reverse; I was an active participant in the events, I chose my way consciously. But my free and conscious choice was determined by the events as well."

Max Adler's path to socialism was different. With "well-to-do conventional" parents, his mother "a social climber", he grew up in newly-independent Czechoslovakia, where the Germans still looked down on the Czechs, who looked down on the Slovaks, while the Ukrainians in the Carpatho-Ukraine were, like the Kurds of Turkey, not supposed to exist. (One valuable aspect of Max Adler's memories is his eye for the national question, and his rare insight into Czech bourgeois – and social – democracy, between the wars.)

With tongue in cheek, gently self-mocking, he puts down his youthful socialism to "a revolt against my parents". Unfair punishments from antisemitic schoolmasters might have toughened his sense of injustice. Already as a small child he had protested at getting strawberries and cream, because the children of the poor had no milk! Perhaps he'd heard that from his father, who gave much to charity? But young Max was made of intellectually sterner stuff. When, aged 12, he heard two worshippers doing business in *shul*, "that was the end of my religion". By his 16th birthday, Max had joined the Young Socialists. And his wise father gave him a copy of *Das Kapital*.

Social democracy in Czechoslovakia, unlike that in more powerful countries, could not be

"social-imperialist"; but it had its own opportunism, according to Adler, with Party membership (Czechs, Germans and Magyars had separate, competing parties) conferring advantages in competition for white-collar posts and privileges. Nevertheless, he was not tempted to join the Communists as an alternative – he could forgive many things, he says, but not their splitting his beautiful socialist youth movement.

In Hirsh Mendel's Poland, the Stalinists during the so-called "Third Period" around 1930 didn't just split movements and call other socialists "social-fascist". They acted as though it were true, turning to terrorist methods against the Jewish Workers' Bund; and this when socialist and communist alike, and Jewish workers especially, faced enough terror from the state and the real fascists.

Mendel, who had grown up amid violent struggles, been drawn to the anarchists, participated in the Red Army in Russia's Civil War, and been a founder member of the Polish CP, suffering Pilsudski's prisons, was sickened by the criminal depth to which the Party sank in its war of worker against worker. He turned to Trotsky's Left Opposition. Before long, he'd won a supporter – Isaac Deutscher.

Never a conformist, Hirsh Mendel had his differences with Trotsky too. Since he worked as a Trotskyist inside the Bund, Mendel also gives an unusual – and warmly-lit – perspective on this, recalling, for instance, how Viktor Alter insisted the Bund's *Folksajtung* had a duty to defend the victims of the Moscow Trials. Alter himself, together with fellow Bundist Henryk Erlich, was to fall victim to Stalin's secret police a few years later.

Memoirs of a Jewish Revolutionary was first published in Yiddish in Tel Aviv in 1959. The three-decade gap before this edition is surely significant, reflecting gaps in both Jewish and socialist consciousness. (Interestingly, though, there was a German

edition 10 years ago.) Hopefully, the book's appearance in English, thanks to translator Robert Michaels, will prove significant of a resurgence.

It was intended to be the first half of Mendel's memoirs. In later life, shocked like many other survivors of the *khurban* in Europe, he turned in despair to Zionism – albeit a "proletarian Zionism" in the tradition of Borochoy; a tradition which Israel's present rulers, schooled politically by Mendel's one-time Polish jailers, regard with hatred, and its official Labour leaders treat with cynical contempt. But then one can imagine what Borochoy, who saw nationhood as but a stage to revolutionary class struggle, and the socialist internationalist Mendel, who never ceased hoping for Arab-Jewish workers' unity, would say about Israel today.

Somewhere in their journeyings between Vienna, Bratislava and Paris, Hirsh Mendel and Max Adler's paths must have crossed. If they never met in real life, a good socialist playwright might imaginatively remedy this omission! Both Adler and Mendel were on the losing side in their battles with fascism and Stalinism. So, in their times, was the working class; so were the Jews. But they have left us parts of a legacy worth treasuring.

Max Adler's book ends with his farewell to his parents before leaving Prague. (His father died in Theresienstadt and his mother in Auschwitz.) It was published posthumously. A letter dated 19 March 1985 was received by the Jewish Socialists' Group:

Dear Comrade

I am an old socialist, in fact, 80 years old and became aware of your organisation through the Jewish Socialist to which I have subscribed.

I would like to join your group being in favour of your aims as printed in the journal. I am afraid that owing to my age and my frail health I cannot be active...

What can I do for you, therefore? Being an old age pensioner I live on

a fixed income. Nevertheless I supported the miners' strike by giving a hundred pounds every month. Although I could not keep up giving such large sums perpetually I can support you modestly with some contributions. Please let me know whether you

want my membership in the circumstances which I described. Yours fraternally, Max K Adler

What could Comrade Max do for us? He has already done it.

CHARLIE POTTINS

COMING SOON

Jewish Socialists
in History

Starting in issue 23

Tricky definitions

Some people confuse anti-Zionism and antisemitism out of ignorance or intellectual laziness. Others do so for dishonest political purposes. There are antisemites who try to hide behind a more acceptable opposition to Zionism, while some Zionists defend their ideology by labelling their opponents as antisemites. Whatever the reason, there remains great popular confusion between the hostility to Jews because of what they are: antisemitism; and the opposition to a political ideology: Zionism, currently adhered to by many Jews, rejected by some and treated with ambivalence by others.

The more such confusion prevails, the more difficult it is to develop a clear and effective response to antisemitism on the one hand and to assess and respond to the political agenda of Zionism on the other. If you wish to remain thoroughly confused and unenlightened about the differences between opposition to Jews and opposition to Zionism, then *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* is just the book you need.

No fewer than 14 (male) academics examine the convergence of these ideologies in various contexts: communist societies, the Arab and Islamic world, the non-Arab Third World, the western world, and inside the churches. (A further edition may include a chapter "on the moon"! None of them tells us much about antisemitism, but their chapters swell with examples of anti-Zionism. The strong, but rarely stated, inference in each case study is that such examples are probably examples of antisemitism. It would help if even one contributor

had defined Zionism, but such a definition is not considered necessary. Instead, the reader is encouraged to assume that "Zionism" is a benign, legitimate and healthy phenomenon, and attacks on Zionism are bad, retrograde and dangerous. The "debate" aims at little more than establishing whether different instances of anti-Zionism are rooted in crude antisemitism or mere political opportunism. The possible moral and material bases for rejecting Zionism are largely ignored in favour of a plethora of unsupported assumptions and generalisations such as: "In democratic societies, anti-Zionism [is] ... a systematised defamation of the Jewish nation" (R Wistrich p3); or "The literature of the political left [reflects] ... a built-in visceral hatred of Israel and Zionism" (R Wistrich p49).

The controversial claim that Zionism is a form of racism, affirmed at the United Nations in 1975, has helped to reproduce anti-Zionism as an unquestioned norm in many progressive and anti-racist circles. One might expect the esteemed authors of such a study critically to debate this idea. No such luck. Better to ruminate vacuously on its effects than grapple with its contents: it is "a peculiarly wounding accusation, for over the last century Jews have been the principal victims of racial ideology" (J Gould p190).

Julius Gould is not the only contributor here to slip casually between the discrete categories of "Jews" and "Zionism". Yehuda Bauer declares that "Anti-Zionism can be seen as the denial of the right of Jews to be part of a worldwide community" (p199), and he concludes that "Anti-

Zionism is a destabilising, basically anti-democratic trend. It poses a danger to Jews and to Israel" (p207). Such sloppy use of terminology might be more forgivable if, in this volume, the very same criticisms were not being levelled at those the writers consider the enemy. Without offering a shred of evidence, the aptly named Raphael Israeli asserts that "Arabs in general use the word 'Jews', 'Zionist' and 'Israelis' interchangeably" (my emphasis) (p102).

Don't throw this book away immediately though. David Cesarani's review of the *Perdition* affair and Tony Lerman's study of "Fictive anti-Zionism" in the Third World are both cogently argued in measured tones and written in a spirit of debate rather than an otherwise pervasive smug certainty.

Cesarani criticises *Perdition's* author, Jim Allen, for relying on pre-selected facts and quotations from poor sources which distort his interpretation of the events covered by the play, and for allowing his approach to these events to be "overdetermined" by his anti-Zionist ideology. It is a brand of anti-Zionism that draws heavily on Christological anti-Jewish imagery and is shot through with conspiracy theory. These points though are much more convincing than Cesarani's coy dismissal of the existence of an orchestrated campaign against the play.

Tony Lerman draws a useful distinction between the ideological doctrine of anti-Zionism as a political opposition to Israeli statehood, and a "fictive construct" of anti-Zionism used instrumentally to serve specific

Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World, Robert Wistrich (ed), Macmillan, £35 (hbk)

internal and external political purposes. It is the latter, he argues, which finds flowing rhetorical expression in arenas such as the UN. He shows how such anti-Zionist rhetoric can survive even when the state in question extends its practical relations with Israel. Lerman argues that there may be similarities between these fictive anti-Zionist constructs and classical antisemitism but he

warns against any simple notion of convergence: "It is one thing to show that they have similar characteristics; it is quite another to claim an equivalence."

In the good old days Zionism had to make out a case for its claim to be a positive and liberating force in Jewish life. Today, unfortunately, it feels no such need, even though (or maybe because) many arguments could

be put forward to show its negative effects on Jewish life politically, economically and culturally. It would be nice to see a companion volume looking at the complex relationship between, possibly even the convergence of, Zionism and antisemitism. Well, distinguished Jewish academics, are you up to it?

DAVID ROSENBERG

Resist and survive

The Ghetto Fights
Marek Edelman
(Introduction by John Rose)
Bookmarks,
£3.95

"We, who did not perish, leave it up to you to keep the memory of them alive – forever."

These are the words with which Marek Edelman, Second in Command of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, concludes his narration of that uprising, published immediately at the end of the war in 1945.

For many years the Jews under the Nazi regime were scoffed at as having meekly let themselves be led to the gas chambers. When the newly created state of Israel found itself at war with its Arab neighbours the boast was that, unlike the Jews in the ghettos, the Israeli soldiers did not let themselves be led like sheep to the slaughter. Even at the Eichmann trial the chief prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, cross-examining an elderly Jewish witness who told the court of his horrible experiences in the ghetto and concentration camps, shouted at him: "Why didn't you fight?"

In communist Poland attempts were made to make us believe that the Poles – not the Jews – made the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, and that the Jews only helped through auxiliary, non-combat work.

Marek Edelman gives them all the lie. His short narrative tells of the extra harsh conditions that the Germans imposed on the Jews; how the struggle just to keep alive was one great and constant fight against the Germans; how the Bund, the Jewish Socialist

Party, was in the forefront of this battle: "Even during our darkest moments, the Bund did not suspend its activities for the shortest time" (p37); how hard it was to obtain the weapons; how difficult it was for the Bund to persuade the people not to believe the German propaganda that their daily deportations of the Jews were to better places, where they would find work and better living



Marek Edelman, author of *The Ghetto Fights*

conditions, when in fact – as the Bund had discovered – they were deported to the gas chambers in Treblinka. Marek Edelman pays due tribute to all non-Bundist groups who took part in the uprising under one, unified command. He takes us through all stages of this unparalleled battle of two unequal forces, which lasted almost seven weeks.

But this is an account of only one uprising, in the Warsaw

ghetto alone. There were many more uprisings in many more ghettos and concentration camps. The Jewish encyclopaedia has a map which points out 32 ghettos and concentration camps in which armed Jews rose in open battle against their Nazi oppressors.

Reading – not for the first time – Marek Edelman's account of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, one could not help being overtaken by a sense of pride of having been a member of the Bund and by a feeling of pain to heartbreak (after all, one is only a human being) to see the names of comrades who were also one's personal friends and with whom one used to meet almost every day in actions for a common cause.

The present Bookmarks edition contains, also, an introduction by John Rose who uses this occasion to apotheosise Leon Trotsky. Has John Rose forgotten that Trotsky, together with Lenin and Stalin, established the Bolshevik dictatorship which is now crumbling before our eyes, and that he never regretted it even though he himself fell victim to it?

Trotsky was firmly established in the USSR government in the early 1920s when the Bund and the Russian Social Democratic Party were liquidated. Thousands of Bundists were shot or deported in the process of it (see *History of the Bund* Volume III, pp235-240, New York). "Never, in the worst times of Tsarism were so many socialists in the prison, were so

many socialists deported to the farthest banishment places" (Letter from Ukraine, 1922, *ibid*). Like Lenin and Stalin, Trotsky was of the opinion that the Jews were not a nation; that they ought completely to assimilate with the nations of the countries in which they were living and thus to disappear as an ethnic group.

As a contributor to *Iskra* – the Bolshevik periodical founded and edited by Lenin – and a delegate to the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, in 1903, he opposed the national programme of the Bund (*ibid*). In his history of the Russian Revolu-

tion, Trotsky calls the demand of national autonomy for Jews a "reactionary utopia" taken over from the "Austrian theoretician Otto Bauer", which in the first day of freedom – after the fall of the Tsarist rule – "melted like wax exposed to the rays of the sun".

En route to Mexico, Trotsky was interviewed by a correspondent of the *Folkszeitung* (the Bund's daily newspaper). Trotsky asked him if the Bund still existed. When asked by the interviewer if he would allow him to convey to the Bund his fraternal greetings, Trotsky answered "no".

However, John Rose speaks

with respect about the Bund and its leaders, so perhaps this can mitigate his exaltation of Trotsky.

Notwithstanding this fault, this book should be read by everyone who is interested in the history of the Nazi period; it ought to be available and exhibited in every library; history teachers ought to make it compulsory reading by their students or pupils. Just as the Nazi atrocities must never be forgotten, so the heroism of the ghetto people, who had the courage to stand up and fight the Nazis, must never be forgotten.

MAJER BOGDANSKI

Children of the Ghetto

Last year, the Polish presidential elections demonstrated that anti-semitism still exists in Poland despite the virtual absence of Jews. In this climate, a film by a non-Jewish Pole which focuses on the fate of Polish Jews during the Nazi era is to be applauded as a brave attempt to get to grips with this unpalatable episode in Polish history.

The film tells the story of the renowned Jewish doctor, Janusz Korczak, and that of his staff and the children in his care. An outstanding and innovative paediatrician and director of the Warsaw orphanage for Jewish children, Korczak chose to stay with "his" children and eventually to accompany them to Treblinka, rather than take up the opportunity to flee Poland offered to him by his non-Jewish friends. Near the beginning of the film, shortly before the beginning of the Second World War, the orphanage is portrayed as an idyll, an island protecting the children from the harshness of the real world.

Despite explicit warnings from children who have left the orphanage, those left behind are slow to realise what is happening. Gradually, reality starts to intrude. Korczak's regular radio

programme is taken away from him because he is a Jew; the orphanage is uprooted and its inhabitants incarcerated in the Warsaw Ghetto. Apart from two sub-plots involving orphanage children, the film concentrates almost exclusively on the character of Korczak and his reactions to the increasingly impossible life in the ghetto.

The film is made entirely in black and white and, even though this is intercut with archive footage, it acts as a device which helps to distance us from the events portrayed. It becomes history: safe, confined to the past and nothing to do with the here and now. The film maker also faces the problem of how you portray the life of someone wholly good who is, moreover, a real person whose goodness has earned him a place in your national history and who has therefore become sacrosanct. Is it possible to convey this truthfully and be dramatically interesting?

Wadja approaches the problem by portraying Korczak as the good, innocent victim of an appalling fate. Korczak is portrayed as childlike, both in his innocence and in his single-minded mission to save "his"

children. This rather one-dimensional portrayal of the central character also has a knock-on effect on the portrayal of both events and individual characters. The heroes are all good, and the villains have no redeeming features. In the event, his innocence was fatal. Even once the selections began, Korczak could not believe that the children would be harmed.

Another strong strand of imagery within the film is the depiction of Korczak as a father, both to the staff and to the children. He is a good father, but simultaneously a distant one. The lack of any close relationship to adults contrasts strikingly with his all-embracing love for hundreds of other people's children. The portrayal of the central character as saintlike and detached, combined with the persistent idea of the child as innocent and therefore good, has distinct echoes of Christian imagery. This is particularly clear in the final scene. The staff and children are deported to Treblinka and death, whilst the film ends with a fantasy sequence of Korczak leading his charges from the train into deliverance. Suffer little children?

MARIAN SHAPIRO

Korczak
dir
Andrzej
Wadja
(1990)

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