

# **JEWISH SOCIALIST**

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— The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group —

## **Can Poland face its Jewish past?**



*Also in this issue*

- Iraqi and Israeli dissidents speak out
- Religious schools – parents say no
- The limits of national liberation



# Editorial

Nationalism is on the march. In eastern and western Europe, in the Middle East and in Africa, nationalism is gaining strength. The Jewish people, whose historical condition has been that of a stateless minority, and continues to be so 43 years after Israel was created, has long had an ambivalent relationship with nationalism. In its aggressive chauvinist form it has been our most destructive enemy. Antisemitism and fascism could not have harnessed their ferocious power and mass support without the nationalist element. And yet significant numbers of Jews have unquestioningly embraced their own nationalism. Others less enthusiastic for state nationalism have nevertheless sought to defend Jewish rights and a Jewish national and international existence.

If aggressive nationalism has principally been the province of the right, nationalism has also been co-opted to the left's agenda, as occupied, colonised and exploited peoples have sought their "national liberation".

Orthodox Marxism has found the Jewish "national question" particularly perplexing, and has offered little more than the paltry pickings of "assimilation". Jewish nationalists though promised peace and freedom for Jews in a revived Jewish nation. The legacy of both responses

exists in especially stark form today. In the USSR, seven decades after the Bolshevik revolution, the situation for Jews there is precarious. In Israel, Jews stand in perpetual conflict with the national aspirations of the occupied and stateless Palestinians.

In the aftermath of Nazi genocide, Zionists recruited the support of many Jews on humanitarian and idealistic grounds, distinctions quickly became blurred between national consciousness and assertiveness and nationalist chauvinism. Instead of equality and coexistence, a positive attitude towards "our own people" became a negative attitude towards the rights of others.

History provides many examples of the ideals of national movements being transformed beyond recognition in the process of state formation. And socialists' commitment to self-determination – people controlling their own destiny – has not always distinguished between peoples and states.

It is time for socialists to reassess Marxist views on nationalism and national liberation, and many insights can be drawn from the experience of the Jews as a supranational people and from the Jewish workers' movement. We hope the articles we present in this issue will stimulate this debate. □

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# Peace-meal

"Why is this night different from all other nights?" is one of the key questions asked for centuries traditionally by children during the Seder (ritual Passover meal, literally meaning "order") to distinguish and elaborate upon the celebration and so enable exploration of our history. The Jewish Socialists' Group aimed to make this year's Passover Seder different and meaningful by relating it to the current liberation struggle of the Palestinians. Always an integral part of our political agenda, we felt a Jewish/Palestinian Seder for peace was particularly important at the present time because of the isolation

and vulnerability of the Palestinians in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the retreat into intransigence among many Jews.

The evening was open to JSG members and friends and the Palestinian community. Among the 50 participants we were very pleased to include Afif Safieh (Head of the PLO delegation to Britain), his wife, their two daughters and his sister, visiting from Jerusalem, and student activist Reem Abdelhadi.

The Seder was held in the congenial surroundings of the Westminster Quakers' Meeting House, much to the pleasure of our hosts who felt this was exactly the sort



Afif Safieh (second left) and daughter in festive mood at JSG Seder

of event they should be hosting.

JSG member Michael Feinberg led the proceedings and gave an introduction to the Seder and to Passover as a festival of liberation. Afif gave an impromptu appreciation of being invited and said that his sister was very pleased to attend as these joint events are rare in Jerusalem. There was a dedication to two people – an Israeli and a Palestinian – both killed for their peacemaking efforts: Emil Grunzweig, a Peace Now member, murdered when a grenade was thrown by far-right Jews at a demonstration in Israel and Issam Sartawi, a leading PLO voice for a two-state solution, who was assassinated on Abu Nidal's orders at a Socialist International meeting in Portugal.

We then followed the basic Seder order but with alternative readings and cultural contributions from the participants, including Yiddish and Ladino songs, Arabic poetry, short stories and, of course, food, an interesting mixture of East European and Middle Eastern Arabic and Jewish dishes and tastes. After eating and chatting to background sounds of klezmer music and songs of the Intifada, we ended with traditional Passover songs, "Chad Gadya" and "Echad

mi Yodea".

It was significant that the children present made an important contribution to the evening and they reaffirmed that the Seder is above all a time for questioning. From amongst her drawings done during the evening, one of Afif's daughters presented to us a very perceptive one depicting a huge question mark and the word "why". Reuben and Jacob Bard-Rosenberg introduced the traditional four questions but accompanied by four alternative answers taken from the American Passover Peace Coalition – especially pertinent: "Why do we break the matzo in two? Because the bread of affliction becomes the bread of freedom – when we share it. Because the land that gives bread to two peoples must be divided in two so that both may eat from it". "Why is there an egg upon the Seder plate? Because when we came forth from Mitzrayim, the narrow place, it was the birth time of our people, the people of Israel; and today we are witnessing the birth of another people in freedom – the people of Palestine."

The inspiration of past and present striving for freedom from oppression brought home to us how involving and relevant the Seder can be to even the most avowed secularist.

LIZ MYERS

## Jews for justice

In the wake of the Gulf ceasefire, the Jewish Socialists' Group has stepped up its efforts for peace and justice in the Middle East. On 21 March it held a well attended public meeting in Central London addressed by Kurdish, Iraqi, Israeli and Palestinian speakers.

The group has also been active in taking this message on to the streets by marching under its banner on demonstrations called by the Kurdistan Liberation Front in April and

Iraqi oppositionists at the beginning of June.

David Rosenberg of the *Jewish Socialist* editorial committee, was one of a number of speakers representing a range of minority groups and nationalities who addressed a seminar in May on The National Question: Assimilation or Independence, organised by the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee and attended by over 300 people at the Kurdish Cultural Centre in North London.



## Unity sprouts in Brussels

Four European Jewish socialist and progressive Jewish movements marked the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising by jointly hosting a public meeting in Brussels in April and by submitting a dossier to the European Commission stressing the links between racism and antisemitism.

The Jewish Socialists' Group, the Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique from Belgium, Blanes from Holland and the Rencontre Progressiste Juif from France have a record, in their different ways, of fighting racism and antisemitism in their own countries. However, the event on 20 April, attended by 250 people, marked the first time that they had taken action together on a European level.

The past few years have seen a worrying growth of racism in Europe and a growing consciousness that action against it must be co-ordinated Europe-wide and through European institutions. The move towards a single market by 1992 has prompted questions as to how Europe's black and ethnic minority citizens can protect their rights. Furthermore, the election of neo-fascist members to the European Parliament has led anti-racist Euro-MPs to make concerted efforts to combat them.

The dossier and the public meeting aimed at lending a specifically Jewish dimension to this debate in the spirit of the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto whose stand we were commemorating.

The dossier documents incidents of racism and antisemitism in the different countries and how it has been fought. The Dutch section of the dossier concentrates on what occurred in Holland during the Gulf War. The Belgian section documents Jewish experience of antisemitism during the Second World War, when much of the Belgian Jewish population was deported to death camps. It details the actions of those who today seek to pretend that these camps never existed. Finally it goes on

to show how minorities in Brussels such as the Moroccans and Zaireans are suffering from racism and discrimination today.

The French portion of the dossier shows how both racism and antisemitism in France have grown recently with the rise of the French National Front. Finally, the British section attempts to draw links between the black and Jewish experience of immigration laws, of being subject to racist attacks and shows how both communities have organised to defeat racism. The French and Belgian sections of the dossier are in French; the Dutch and British sections in English.

The dossier was presented to the European Commission on 22 April. Members of the participating groups were received by the Chef de Cabinet of Karel van Miert, a Belgian Socialist Commissioner. He took two copies of the dossier, promising to pass one on to Jacques Delors. We met with a Belgian socialist MEP, Raymonde Dury, and with a group of communist MEPs, which included Vasilis Ephrimides, vice-president of the Left Coalition Group of MEPs.

A press conference publicising both the dossier and the meeting was reported in 15 French and Flemish newspapers in Belgium.

The meeting itself was held at Brussels University. The speakers were Mel Read, Chair of the European Parliamentary Labour Party and co-author of *Against a Rising Tide*, Michele Ganem, a national secretary of the French anti-racist movement, MRAP (Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples), and Bruno Vinikas, who is deputy commissioner in charge of questions of immigration in Belgium. The meeting concluded with a live performance of klezmer music by a duo from Odessa who live now in Amsterdam. The Jewish Socialists' Group hopes that the success of this first joint event will lead to further united activity by Jewish progressives across Europe.

MICHAEL HEISER

## Franco's children A socialist life



The 15th annual Bookfair at Barcelona in the first week of June 1991, organised by the Ministry of Culture of Catalonia, was graced as it has been in past years by a Nazi bookstall replete with flags, posters of Hitler, and antisemitic and racist literature. There have been protests each year, and it is time that the left and anti-racist movement took serious action to prevent Nazis being respectable in the heart of a fine city with a strong history of anti-fascist struggle.

SIMON LYNN

Alongside others across the labour movement, *Jewish Socialist* was greatly saddened by the death of Eric Heffer MP who had devoted his life to socialist and working class causes.

His courage in facing up to cancer by continuing to strive, within his capacities, for a better world, was as characteristic as his dogged insistence on re-evaluating socialist strategies against new or old orthodoxies, but without abandoning fundamental principles.

At one time Zionists counted him among the "Labour Friends of Israel" and were indignant when, as his awareness grew of Israel's treatment of the

Palestinians, he spoke forthrightly in support of their rights to self-determination too.

This did not diminish his commitment to understanding Jewish aspirations. Indeed, just a few weeks before his death he subscribed to *Jewish Socialist* and ordered copies of our pamphlets on the Bund and on the fight against antisemitism in Britain in the 1930s. Acknowledging how little time he had left he urged us to send this material "as soon as possible". We dispatched it immediately with a card conveying the JSG's best wishes. We hope that we added some pleasure to his last few weeks.

## The language of resistance

In a small room in London's East End, lit by six candles symbolising the six million Jews slaughtered by the Nazis, 25 Jews came together in April for their annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The evening included a memorial prayer, a talk on the uprising, poetry and songs, but it is a unique event – the only one held in Britain each year completely in Yiddish, the language of the murdered Jews of Warsaw.

The event, organised by the Friends of Yiddish, was chaired by Jewish Socialists' Group member and Bundist, Majer Bogdanski, a veteran of the struggles for a free and socialist Poland in the 1930s. As in previous years, he described the naked brutality of the invading Nazi forces against civilian populations and the heroism of resistance in the most terrible conditions. But there was a sharper

and more immediate edge to his talk this year as he pointed to the resurgence of antisemitism in many countries coupled with "academic" attempts to deny the Nazi genocide. He pointed also to the attempts by the House of Lords to prevent the trials of Nazi war criminals who were given refuge in Britain.

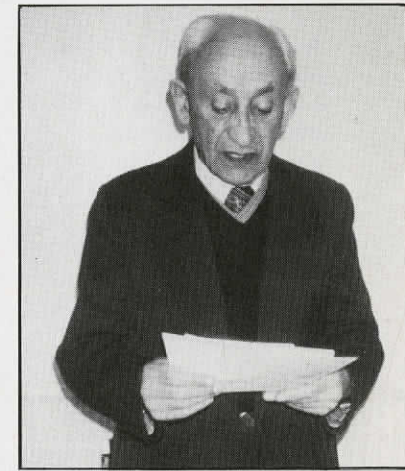
In stressing the immense personal courage of the ghetto fighters and referring also to the million children who were slaughtered, Majer condemned the Lubavitcher rabbis who claim that the genocide resulted from Jews' lack of religious observance; he also condemned the idea perpetuated in Israel and among other Jewish communities that the Jews went to the gas chambers "like lambs to the slaughter".

Older participants who speak Yiddish as their mother tongue and younger people who are learning the language

to reclaim it recalled the experience of the ghettos in songs and poems. The atmosphere was heavy with grief and sadness but the songs stressed resistance and hope. The evening closed with all standing to sing Hirsh Glik's stirring partisan hymn with its repeated assertion, Mir Zaynen do – we are here.

Majer was also the guest speaker this year at the JSG's ghetto commemoration held at Conway Hall on 23 April. On this occasion Majer spoke about the life and death of the Polish Bundist, Szmul Zygielbojm, the representative of Jewish workers in the Polish government in exile during the War, who took his life in London in protest at the apathy with which the world's powers permitted the continued slaughter of Jews in Poland.

Majer's talk was followed by readings and Yiddish songs from the ghettos. Recognising



Majer Bogdanski speaks

that the theme of Zygielbojm's story – helplessness in the face of continuing terror – has stark contemporary relevance, a collection was held at the meeting to help Kurdish refugees via the Kurdish Workers' Association in Britain.

DAVID ROSENBERG

## Witness for the persecution



Horseferry Road Magistrates Court, 23 April 1991. The public gallery in Court one is crammed full of Nazi thugs shouting "Long Live England", "Free speech for England", "This old lady is being martyred on St George's Day". The police ask all those standing to leave. After a bit

more shouting, "hard man" Tony Lecomber leads the retreat, followed by Richard Edmunds, deputy fuhrer of the British National Party.

Who is this martyr whom these valiant English knights seek to rescue? The Dowager Lady Birdwood, publisher and purveyor of antisemitic and racist filth, for which she was finally being brought to trial. Her "literature" attempts to resurrect the blood libel – that Jews sacrifice and drink the blood of Christian children (or at least we used to, she's not sure whether we do it now), the World Jewish Conspiracy, Jews responsible for wiping out the White Race by race mixing, and argues that the York "suicide" ought to be celebrated as a victory for

England...

Lady Birdwood has often been dismissed as an eccentric old lady whose ideas are too silly to be dangerous. This is a mistake which, in part at least, results from sexism and ageism. Eccentric she certainly is but eccentrics can be extremely dangerous, particularly when they have pots of money. Her money finds its way into the coffers of neo-Nazi organisations as well as the Conservative Party.

Lady Birdwood is General Secretary of the British Section of the World Anti-Communist League. Ironically, given her belief in the Jewish Conspiracy, this organisation really does attempt to dominate the world through its octopus-like

tentacles, linking, as it does, the CIA, the Moonies and neo-Nazi organisations throughout the world. A powerful position indeed.

Her publications are not used primarily for the purposes of propaganda amongst the white gentile population. They are used to terrorise Jews and black people – her antisemitic "literature" is delivered to Jewish homes, her anti-black material is distributed in black communities.

This does not mean that her poison will be ineffective in winning recruits for fascism. One lesson of this century is, surely, that medieval myths can retain their vicious potency.

DAVID LANDAU



## What's up doc?

A former defence director of the Board of Deputies, Dr Jacob Gewirtz, has made an astonishing attack on the Jewish Socialists' Group. Writing in L'Eylah, the house journal of the United Synagogue, Gewirtz condemns "the Jewish Socialists' advocacy of physical confrontation with neo-Nazis in a 'war of the streets' scenario of a kind which led to the destruction of the Weimar Republic in Germany and its replacement by Hitler's Third Reich".

His comments were made in an article defending the Board's mealy-mouthed response to rising antisemitism against critics whom he dismissed as "politically motivated".

During his last years in post Gewirtz made a number of outlandish and vituperative public comments on the JSG and others in a style which



some believe did not endear him to the paymasters of the Board's defence work and may have precipitated his departure. However, his latest attack on the group goes well beyond earlier excesses and it is an indictment of the current quality of the established organs of the community that he finds a platform for venting his spleen in one of its more distinguished journals.

L'Eylah's editors seem unabashed and unconcerned by Gewirtz's rantings. They received two letters from the JSG: one for publication countering the superficially more rational arguments in Gewirtz's letter; and a second private letter pointing out the seriousness of the charge they

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS GROUP

had published and asking the editors to comment. In response, L'Eylah explained that they would not publish the first letter since they do not carry a "letters" page, and they offered to explain why they do not. They added that they were passing a copy of the letter to Dr Gewirtz so that a private correspondence might ensue. In a further letter the JSG asked them to explain why they did not carry a "letters" page, since we remained unclear about how they corrected distortions or misrepresentations, let alone outrageous slurs on their pages, for the benefit of all their readers. Two months later we are still waiting for a reply.

Meanwhile, Dr Gewirtz's longstanding associate, Raymond Kalman, who has chaired the Board's Defence Committee in recent years,

has finally decided to step down. Temperamentally, Kalman and Gewirtz are like peas in a pod, and they also share a hobby of JSG-baiting. Kalman's favourite tactic has been to string together various names of people or organisations who are supposed to induce shock and horror in the minds of ordinary Jews and, however tenuously, try and tag the JSG on to this shocking list. His distinctive contribution to the anti-racist and anti-fascist field was to proclaim repeatedly that the most serious threat to the Jewish community came from the left rather than the right. Evidently he mistook the legitimate political threat to the anti-democratic cliques and business interests that run the community for the real threat against ordinary British Jews. Whether Kalman's departure will herald a more sophisticated and thoughtful approach on defence issues at the heart of the Jewish community leadership remains to be seen.

DAVID ROSENBERG

## Hidden message of hate

Between late last year and the early weeks of Desert Storm, the Front National kept a relatively low profile, unsure how to exploit a complicated situation that was unlikely to suit a party which thrives on simplistic explanations and solutions. However, Le Pen can't keep quiet for long, and sure enough he eventually came up with something provocative to catch the headlines.

This time, it concerned the wording of an FN poster campaign during the then ongoing local elections. On the particular poster in question, the FN designated four "evils" afflicting France:

Socialisme  
Immigration  
Drogue  
Affairisme

Socialism, Immigration, drugs and "wheeler-dealing". The first three are clear enough, the fourth is a term rich with innuendo, vague enough to cover almost anything you choose to read into it, inciting prejudice, yet incapable of being pinned down as an overt incitement to anything in particular. In other words, the classic Le Pen formula. For the leader of the FN spends sleepless nights trying to dream up slogans, which say nothing explicitly, say everything

implicitly, yet just manage to stay on the right side of the law.

But forget the ambiguous fourth word and concentrate on the vertical effect. Reading downwards, the first letter of each word spells out the acronym SIDA (AIDS in French). France has socialists, immigrants, drug-addicts and wheeler-dealers; France has AIDS.

However, Le Pen's public pronouncements are now systematically monitored by those who oppose him. Where appropriate, he is challenged in the courts. The latest legal battle was fought out in January.

Six organisations—three AIDS agencies (ALS, Système D and SIDA-Solidarité) and three anti-racist bodies (MRAP, LICRA and SOS-Racisme)—took the FN to court. Citing past instances when Le Pen had

sought to use innuendo to incite prejudice, Maître Alain Jakubowicz, acting for the six joint plaintiffs, declared: "The particular meaning of this new word in our vocabulary must be preserved."

The judge agreed. On 25 January 1991, the Court in Lyon ordered the FN to remove all posters it had distributed referring to AIDS, wheresoever they were; it ordered Le Pen to pay the plaintiffs the traditional and symbolic damages of one franc; and it ordered that the decision be published in five newspapers.

This won't be the last of such crude incitement to prejudice and hatred. But the case does constitute another legal victory against Le Pen and against prejudice.

TONY BLEND (PARIS)

## Missing the point

Community Care, the nationally circulated magazine which describes itself as the "independent voice of social work", used the graphic reprinted here to illustrate a series of articles on "Satanic ritual abuse" in the issue of 11 April 1991.

The central feature is a child's head enclosed by a Star of David. Jews working in social services and the voluntary sector immediately challenged this in writing. They pointed out that this image drew on the still persistent and medieval antisemitic accusation that Jews use Christian children as part of a Passover ritual sacrifice. This "Blood Libel" has been at the heart of antisemitic ideology in European history and has provoked persecution and pogroms against Jews, not least in Britain.

The editor replied personally to the complainants and printed a letter together with an apology in a following issue. His explanation was that "one of the symbols used by Satanists is a pentagram. Unfortunately its similarity to the Star of David—the former being five-pointed, the latter being six-pointed—confused the illustrator." Noch. Their timing too was impeccable: the issue in question came out at Easter/Pesach.

Perhaps we can grudgingly accept this weak explanation, and the sincere apology for the illustrator's confusing (a clear dumping of editorial responsibility), hope the damage is limited, and leave it there.

But are there also serious issues behind Community Care's carelessly commissioning and using this racist graphic that will continue to require our attention? In one of the accompanying articles the writer defends what has been a feature of the "ritual child abuse" controversy: fundamentalist Christian groups briefing social workers with "Satanic indicators". Jews (as well as anarchists and CND supporters if the illustration is any guide) should be vigilant once these groups start to encourage and guide a search for "human demons". We should be wary



of any attempt to impose a right-wing political agenda on the necessary defence of children against abuse and on the debates around this issue. A good example of this is the view expressed by the deputy director of Nottinghamshire Social Services (a member of the fundamentalist Restoration Movement) on the TV programme *After Dark* that abortion was the "biggest abuse" of children. He has since been suspended.

The editor assures us that the offending graphic was simply a case of mistaken identity; unintentional confusion. Seeing stars? Even so, at the very least they have unconsciously given concrete shape and context to a particularly nasty and persistent antisemitic myth and circulated it across the country's caring and social services.

Community Care avows a commitment to anti-discriminatory and anti-racist perspectives, which made seeing this graphic in its pages a nasty shock. It seems that an awareness and understanding of antisemitism is missing. Let us hope that the Jews, notably Jewish socialists, who strongly challenged the use of this graphic have made the point that illustrates the difference between the Star of David (six points) and the pentagram (five points), and this marks a turning point for Community Care.

SIMON LYNN

Woman desperately seeking child seeks sperm donor. No ongoing commitment required. Must agree to be screened. Strictly confidential. London area.

Please reply to: JS Hackney JSG, Box 11 Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8

### REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

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North Bank Jewish Socialists



# Nightmare on Allenby Street

The Israeli government's latest stunt to stop Jews leaving the Soviet Union from escaping to countries of their choice is to insist that they travel in separate planes from their new Israeli travel documents. A number of these Jews, on a transit stop in Budapest on their way to Israel, have decided to stay, without any documents, and apply for political asylum in Hungary rather than face unemployment, homelessness and official indifference in Israel.

Reports in the Israeli press of the awful conditions and prospects facing Soviet Jewish immigrants are worrying officials. Simcha Dinitz, chair of the Jewish Agency, said: "If there is not a revolution in the manner of absorption, *aliya* (immigration to Israel)

will decrease dramatically." And the Mayor of Kiryat Shmona, Prosper Azran, said: "I will try to put the brakes on the absorption of immigrants in Kiryat Shmona. I have neither apartments nor employment for them."

The immigrants themselves are showing signs of desperation. Some have resorted to begging and prostitution. Some sleep in parks or are forced to live in air raid shelters for which they pay high rents. Families have been split up and the high suicide rate among Soviet immigrants is the subject of an official investigation. Highly qualified people such as engineers and doctors are doing menial jobs, the traditional preserve of Palestinians, and this has generated concern but no action. Indeed,

the Physicians' Association has increased the difficulty of the examinations Soviet Jewish doctors have to pass before being allowed to practise, effectively instituting a kind of *numerus clausus*.

This wave of immigrants is receiving a free market version of Israel's traditional "absorption" programme—the government calls it "direct absorption". After a short registration procedure at the airport when they arrive, the immigrants are given a small sum of money and are put into a taxi so they can, ostensibly, choose for themselves where to live. If they have no one to stay with at first, they will spend a short time in a hotel while they look for a home in the increasingly expensive, crumbling areas of the cities where their

presence has priced many impoverished oriental Jews out of the housing market.

The Jewish Agency's prediction that immigration from the Soviet Union will start to fall is well founded as people in Israel write back advising friends and relations to stay put. Those already in Israel are experiencing some familiar restrictions on their freedom. One Russian woman living in Dimona in the Negev says: "Most of us would like to go on to another country. But it is impossible. They have us sign a document according to which we must pay back an enormous sum of money if we want to leave the state. And in order to prevent escapes, the authorities don't give us passports, only *laissez passers*, and only to one parent."

JULIA BARD

# No racist bars

A large number of pubs in Hackney, Haringey and Islington bear signs saying "No Travellers". Some publicans, afraid of legal action, have put up the notice "Travellers by appointment only". But the intention is the same, to keep out Gypsy and Irish caravan dwellers.

What is the current legal position? Britain has no Constitution or Bill of Rights so we need to look at legal precedent. The Appeal Court decision in the case of the landlord (since resigned) of the "Cat and Mutton" was that "Gypsies in the traditional sense of the term", ie Romanies, members of a race of Indian origin, are an ethnic group for the purposes of the Race Relations Act.

It is therefore illegal to discriminate against a Romany Gypsy in the provision of services. So a notice in a pub saying "No Gypsies served" is illegal, just as would be a clause in the rules of a golf club saying "No Jews can be members" (although so far there has not been a test case). A notice saying "No Travellers" is indirect discrimination against Gypsies as many Gypsies travel and many Travellers in England are Romany Gypsies. In a similar way, an advertisement for a job vacancy saying "no one with beards need apply" would be indirect discrimination against orthodox Jewish and Sikh men.

The Court of Appeal did not seriously consider the argument that Irish Travellers are also an ethnic group and a test case is needed to clarify this. A club in southern England did ban Irish Traveller members from signing in guests but on the eve of the case they conceded defeat and paid compensation. A further case of a club is pending which will clarify the definition of Gypsy.

Indirect discrimination can be justified, for example, if the owner of the factory was afraid of beards being caught up in a

machine. In the case of pubs the licensees would have to prove that the group were always so badly behaved or spent a lot of time sitting there without consuming drinks, to the extent that they were justified in excluding the whole group and not just barring individuals.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is the only body that can take legal action over discrimination under the Race Relations Act (though a private prosecution might theoretically be possible).

DONALD KENRICK

Donald Kenrick is the co-author of *On the Verge* (published by Runnymede Trust), a pamphlet outlining the situation of Gypsies in England.

● Hackney Jewish Socialists' Group, in support of the Hackney Travellers' Rights Group (see below) are working to have the blight of "No Travellers" signs removed from Hackney and surrounding boroughs.

If you see a "No Travellers" sign (or similar wording) write to the Commission for Racial Equality, Elliott House, Allington Street, London SW1 (please send a copy of your letter to Hackney JSG), giving details of the pub's name, address, and the name of the brewers. The CRE will normally write to the licensee and the brewers; if this does not have the effect of removing the notices, they will take further action given time and funds. It may not prove easy to remove these racist signs as pubs organising together have in the past strongly resisted pressure to do so. If you want to actively help campaign against these racist bars, contact Hackney JSG, c/o Box 11 Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8.

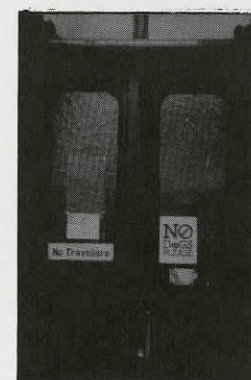
HACKNEY TRAVELLERS RIGHTS GROUP is committed to achieving basic human rights for Travellers in Hackney. The group includes Travellers, professionals and local residents, and is open to all who support the above aim.

The major issue facing Travellers both nationally and in Hackney is the failure to provide sufficient official sites and stopping places, though this has been a statutory duty since 1968. Public opposition, and the political consequences of this, are the underlying reasons for this failure, well illustrated by Hackney's own history of successively reversing its own decisions to build sites over the past 10 years.

Access to other public services is made difficult both by constant evictions but also by direct discrimination within those services.

To overcome the past breakdown in communication and consultation, Hackney Council Leader John McCafferty has recently committed himself to regular bi-monthly meetings with the Travellers Rights Group and one meeting has taken place.

Items on the agenda include the future of the Gransden Avenue tolerated site; Hackney's contribution to Traveller education; and policies and procedures towards Travellers on unauthorised sites. The group is also concerned at the continuing "No Travellers" signs in Hackney pubs and members of Hackney Jewish Socialists' Group will be following this up with a view to putting pressure on the Council pub licensing committee, and possibly seeking legal action under the Race Relations law.




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## TEMPS PERDU

Delighted to hear Professor Bill Fishman, whose subject is the past, doesn't forget an old face. Like when he spotted someone recently remembered from both the East End and student days at LSE. "Wotcha Alf!" chirped Bill cheerily, "ow's the Communist Party?" I'm sure the blush which suffused Sir Alfred Sherman's cheeks was sheer pleasure at nostalgia.

Sir Alf had an article in the *Jewish Chronicle* (19 April), attacking those irresponsible "lefties" on the Board of Deputies who want to identify with other immigrant communities "rather than with our English fellow-citizens", and taking a swipe at "Neo-antisemitism ... on the Left of the Labour Party where rabid anti-Zionism is often indistinguishable from antisemitism".

Nothing about our friendly swastika-daubers on the Right, who might not accept Sir Alf's claim to be closer to "the English host-community" than to any

Pakistanis – not even when he tried to bring French fascist Jean Marie Le Pen to Britain. Sir Alf doesn't mention that, and neither does the *JC*, although it reminds us he was a former adviser to Margaret Thatcher. Still, a "mere details", as Le Pen said of the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Continuing in their father's footsteps are Sherman's sons whose outfit, Western Goals, has been taking over the Tory Monday Club. A few months ago they held a dinner to celebrate the birthday of that gallant Christian gentleman, Generalissimo Francisco Franco. Wonder if they invited old man Sherman along to reminisce about his days as a commissar with the International Brigade?

## KEEP MY PEOPLE OUT

*"A right-wing cabinet minister complained in Bonn that too many Jews were being allowed into Germany. He*

*urged Chancellor Kohl to stop granting refugee status to Soviet Jews."* (Yediot Ahranot, Israel, 15 March)

Antisemite! This minister should be denounced by the entire Jewish community, and by every decent anti-racist. I've not noticed any denunciation yet, and can't find the minister mentioned at all in *Searchlight's* four-page exposé entitled "Fourth Reich 199?".

But then, the guy saying "Keep Out the Jews" was visiting Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

## CLOCKWORK ORANGE

"Yesterday Scotland Yard rejected reports that organised gangs of National Front thugs were planning attacks on Irish fans. A spokesman said they were aware of the National Front problem, but had succeeded in controlling it in recent years.

*"He also rejected claims that leaflets were handed out at Chelsea's ground last Saturday calling for attacks on the Irish and naming pubs where they were likely to congregate."* – *Irish Independent*, Wednesday morning, 27 March. England were playing Ireland at Wembley that evening.

*"At 4.25pm on the day of the match about 200 people suddenly appeared outside. They rained missiles at the pub, including large dustbins from the street, bottles and stones, breaking all the large front windows. The attack lasted about three minutes. They assembled and disappeared like clockwork."* – Phil McGowan, landlord of the Black Lion, Kilburn. He notes that none of the mob – coyly described by the English media as "England fans" – wore rosettes or football scarves.

Windows were also broken at Biddy Mulligan's and the Old Bell. Several people were taken to hospital, injured in the attacks. Local people say seeing an organised mob like this was frightening. They don't hesitate to blame fascists. Maybe if the police paid as much attention to what leaflets were given out at Stamford Bridge as to what songs are sung in which pubs, they'd have been better prepared to stop the violence, suggests a sympathetic outsider.

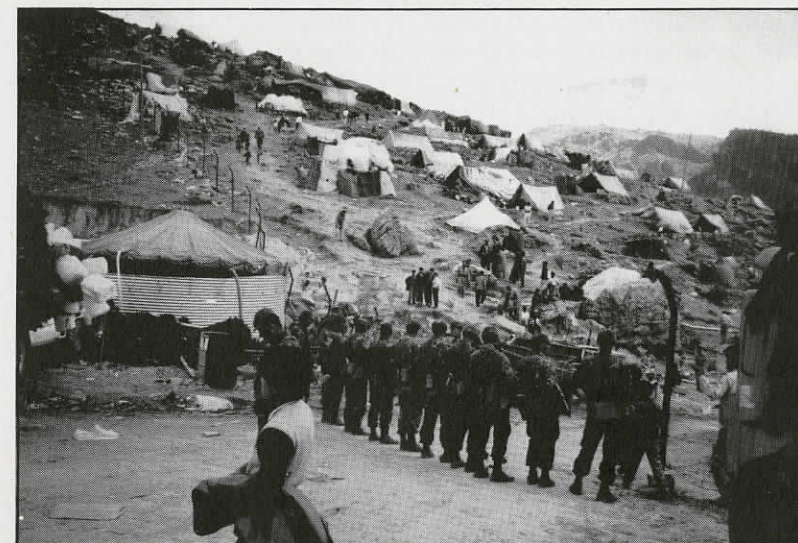
Ah, but then maybe if the plainclothes plods had not been taking such careful note of what songs were sung where, the fascists wouldn't have been so well-prepared, knowing which pubs to aim at, replies one Kilburn Irishman.

# The silenced majority

Recently returned from the Turkish border with Iraq, Ibrahim Samera'ee claims the left is ignoring the views of the Iraqi people.

As an Iraqi who has lived in the United States most of his life, I experienced the conflicting reactions and emotions that Iraqis in general felt during the recent tragic events. The starting point for understanding Iraqi responses is to recognise that almost all Iraqis oppose the regime in power in Baghdad. The Ba'athist regime that took power in 1968 has brutally extinguished all freedoms rightfully belonging to human beings – to speak freely, to travel where one wants, to meet, assemble, or associate with others, to read or write what one pleases, or to express oneself artistically or intellectually – not to mention the right to act politically. The country has become a large prison, watched over by a vast network of security agents, with its citizens living in absolute terror that their very thoughts might betray them to the nearest state spy, who could even be their own child. A European outsider might regard this Orwellian portrayal as an exaggeration, but that *has* been the reality in Ba'athist Iraq.

So when Iraq invaded Kuwait last August, Iraqis inside the country saw the invasion as one adventure-too-far by the Ba'ath regime and a possible chance for the regime to be toppled at last – albeit from the outside. To most Iraqis, it didn't really matter *how* the regime was toppled, as long as it was. Iraqis outside generally viewed the situation similarly, but felt slightly freer to express their views, though the fear ingrained by the Ba'ath regime is so deep that, even while living abroad, Iraqis have restrained their public activities for fear that their relatives inside the country might be made to pay for their outspokenness. For that reason, I am using a pseudonym here.



As the 15 January deadline approached, Iraqis everywhere hoped that Saddam Hussain would finally withdraw from Kuwait and avert another war. A letter from one friend expressed the fears of all Iraqis: what had taken thousands of years to build could be destroyed in minutes. When the intensive bombing of Iraq started, and continued day after day, week after week, Iraqis everywhere were shocked into numbness. No one anticipated the massive extent of the onslaught. As Dwight Eisenhower said: "Every war will astonish you."

By the end of the war, the Allied forces had dropped half the tonnage of bombs on Iraq in six weeks that the United States dropped on Vietnam in 10 years. My aunt, who left Iraq not long before the invasion of Kuwait to visit two of her children, pleaded for someone to telephone George Bush and ask him to stop the bombing, but it just kept going and going. And as the US media tallied daily the merciless bombing sorties, my brother remarked sarcastically that the US wouldn't stop bombing until there was a McDonald's in Baghdad. We wondered what was left to be destroyed.

The country now lies in ruins. The water system, the sewage system, electricity, telephone lines, bridges, the entire system of health

care – all in tatters in a country grown dependent on a modern infrastructure to survive. And with the onset of the summer heat, usually hovering around 50°C in the worst-hit central and southern regions, the country is on the verge of yet another major catastrophe. Already there are many reports of severe malnutrition and typhoid, cholera, gastroenteritis and other diseases that had long since been eradicated in Iraq. To Iraqis it still all seems unreal, like a giant nightmare we are waiting to wake up from.

A Jewish Iraqi living in England related recently that her father (like so many Iraqis living abroad) watched television and wept every day during the bombing. He has been out of Iraq for more than 20 years, a survivor of the Ba'ath regime's policy, in the wake of the 1967 war, of scapegoating Jews in order to consolidate its rule. His feelings for Iraq are not unusual for Jewish Iraqis, for Jews are an integral part of Iraqi society (in 1920, Jews comprised one-third of Baghdad's population). An Iraqi Israeli told me last year that people in his community feel such strong affinity for Iraq that if ever there were peace between the two countries, 90 per cent of Iraqi Israelis would visit Iraq. He also recalled the day, 40 years ago, shortly before he and his family left Iraq, when

## FIFTH COLUMN

Be part of the Fifth Column. Deadline for listings in the next issue of *Jewish Socialist* is 31 AUGUST. Please keep listings as brief as possible (50 words max) and send them to *Jewish Socialist*, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

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. 17 July: Evening of Jewish culture with Michael Rosen & Royte Klezmores £3.50 (£2.50 unwaged). Phone Myra (as above)

Manchester Jewish Socialists Contact Adrienne on 0204 591460.

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

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.

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

Israeli Mirror: Monthly digest of news translated from the Hebrew press. Details: 21 Collingham Road, London SW5.

Jews Against Apartheid: Contact Shalom 081-568 0971 / Diana 081-554 6112.

Red Rabbi offers services: for naming ceremonies; secular bat/bar mitzvah celebrations; commitment ceremonies; weddings; divorces; funerals; as well as counselling and home tutoring – all with an egalitarian, humanistic and progressive approach. No job too small! Fees negotiable. Phone Michael Feinberg on 081-346 8890.

The Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline and the Northern Region Jewish Gay & Lesbian Group can be reached on 071-706 3123 Mondays and Thursdays 7-10pm. Information, counselling and advice.

Beit Klal Yisrael is a new community/congregation which runs weekly services, events to celebrate festivals in a more cultural, inclusive and egalitarian way, a women's group, lesbian group and socials. New people welcome, especially those who don't feel at home in the more established congregations. Contact Sheila 081-969 5080.



three Communist Party leaders (one Muslim, one Christian, one Jewish) were hanged together in a public square.

Now, barely three months after the war, to most Iraqis the bombings seem to be part of the distant past. What dominates the minds of Iraqis today is the struggle against the regime. Throughout the crisis, nearly all Iraqis blamed what happened to Iraq, not only on the invasion of Kuwait, but also on the past 20-plus years of Saddam Hussain's Ba'athist regime. Our recurrent nightmare was that after the destruction of the country, Hussain and his cohorts would still be in power. Ousting of the regime was seen, and counted on, as the one and only positive result that could come out of the war.

Anger and rage grew in all of us

progressives, and leftists. The question is often asked: "How can you trust the United States, the same country that bombed your country back to the pre-industrial age?" It's not a matter of trust. Iraqis themselves question Western involvement. Almost all the refugees I met asked me at once what the motives of the US, England and France were in the "safe haven" operation, and whether or not the Allied forces were going to stay. They all said the main consideration for them was their safety, and that necessitated foreign protection. Even a hardline state socialist who has been with the Peshmerga guerrillas for 30 years expressed these views and enquired about permits for his sons to go abroad.

That is why the refugees want the foreign troops to stay, why another mass exodus of Kurds and other Iraqis from the north is likely as the Allied forces withdraw their troops. The Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, Turkomans and even Arabs of the north know what awaits them in the hands of Saddam Hussain. The Kurds I spoke to along the border with Turkey considered that their situation was better than any other Iraqis bar those living abroad. Their physical needs were being met and they were safe. But Kurdish refugees in northern Iran reported that many among them still had no blankets or tents.

we want to know  
where the bombs dropped  
we want to know  
who the cluster-bombs hit  
we want to know  
where the cruise missiles went  
we want to know  
how the fuel bombs burnt  
we want to know  
how many died of cholera  
we want to know  
who was shelled  
we want to know  
who was strafed  
we want to know  
who was maimed  
we want to know  
who needed blood transfusions  
we want to know  
who needed antibiotics  
we want to know  
how many died  
and we want to know  
why we don't know

MICHAEL ROSEN

Meanwhile, the situation of Kurds in southern Iran is reportedly even worse, and worst off of all are the Iraqis still in southern Iraq, especially the estimated 850,000 people hiding in the marshes. The Iraqi army has now begun moving into the marshes in the south.

It is important for Europeans – especially politically active people – to appreciate the situation, views and experiences of Iraqis, for these perspectives have been woefully lacking in much of the discussion of recent events. For example, in *The Gulf War Reader*, recently published in the US as a textbook for university students, only four of its 84 essays are by Arabs, of whom three are Palestinian and the fourth a Jordanian. The approaches of the pro- and anti-war forces in the United States also illustrated a neglect of the people most directly involved. Both looked inward and were re-fighting the Vietnam War. George Bush hoped victory in the Gulf would "once and for all put the Vietnam syndrome behind us". Likewise, peace activists, echoing previous anti-imperialist campaigns, demanded non-intervention, some groups even going so far as to oppose any condemnation of Iraq for taking over Kuwait and opposing the imposition of sanctions. However, after Iraq was expelled from Kuwait, and after the uprisings erupted and were crushed, followed by a mass exodus of Iraqis, the position of non-intervention became irrelevant.

The situation in Iraq raises fundamental questions about activism on foreign affairs. In whose interests should we campaign – those of the state, or those of the people who live within the state? How can we work towards those interests? Through which bodies? By which means? And what is the role of the United Nations? These questions have arisen before, as with the call for international protection for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, in the case of Iraq, traditional left wing ideologies proved inadequate to deal with a post-colonial dictator. □

\* Ibrahim Samera'ee, a US journalist, spent one week in south-eastern Turkey in late May.

# Israel – what the Scuds left behind

**During the Gulf War, as Scuds fell on Tel Aviv civilians, Adam Keller and a minority of Israeli peace campaigners refused to retreat into the narrow nationalist consensus and continued to organise openly for peace in the Middle East. Mike Feinberg and Mike Heiser spoke to Adam Keller just after the March ceasefire about the post-war prospects for an Israeli/Palestinian settlement.**

**JS: While the war was on, people were looking at things, particularly in Israel, from perhaps a different perspective. But, now the war is at an end, has anything really changed?**

**AK: Fundamentally, in relations between Israelis and Palestinians, it seems to be more of an interlude. But I think there was a way in which this war could have seen a very radical change, if the people advocating transfer had their way.**

**JS: Isn't the Israeli government's effort going to be to continue to muddle through? They're putting forward the Shamir plan again, and the United States may go along with it.**

**AK: The Shamir plan is to continue to muddle through, to earn time and to put more settlers into the occupied territories. He's shown considerable success with it so far. He hopes that if "Greater Israel" survives the present American diplomatic initiative, then the next initiative will only come after the presidential elections of '92.**

But I don't know how long he could continue. It might be that this time the American initiative would be more serious because the American position in the Middle East at this moment is different from what it was in the time of Rogers, or Kissinger, or any other time.

**JS: Do you think the US now has a more fundamental commitment to see a Palestinian state created next to Israel after the war? They continue to say they're opposed to it.**

**AK: They say they are opposed to it. But I don't see, with the Intifada, what could prevent the Palestinian state from coming into being, the moment when the Israeli rule is removed. Now, some people are playing with the idea of renewing the Jordanian option. The post-war situation of Jordan is certainly different. On the one hand, King Hussein is not so much in control. On the other hand, he is now regarded more positively by the Palestinians than ever.**

**JS: You characterise the majority position in the Israeli peace camp as an aberration, in their support for the war, but if there is a concerted effort on the parts of the United States, certainly some European governments and some of the Arab coalition partners to rule out the PLO, won't most of the peace camp in Israel follow along with that?**

**AK: That's two separate questions. It's true that it's not just an aberration. The majority of the Israeli peace camp is pro-American, building its strategy on the hope that sooner or later the Americans will force Israel**

to leave the occupied territories. It follows quite closely the line of demarcation between Zionists and non-Zionists. Only a handful of Zionists in Israel opposed the war. Political debate in Israel generally relates the policy of the government to what the Americans think about it. When the Americans seem pleased by them, they will not interfere with government policy, whatever it does in the occupied territories, continue to give money and not say anything. Then, it is the Likud and the right wing who seem powerful realists using to the full the opportunities which power gives – and the peace movement seems to be just a bunch of moralists, who wave abstract principles and have stupid squabbles... But, when the Americans show displeasure, we are the realists who understand world realities, and the Likud crazy people, fanatics with megalomaniac dreams, putting the country in trouble. What this war has shown is that it is more difficult in Israel to criticise the policy of Bush than to criticise the policy of Shamir!

**JS: And if the US says the PLO has no place in negotiations after the war?**

**AK: At this moment the people [in the peace camp] who are wanting to exclude the PLO are in the minority. The most conspicuous one is Yossi Sarid. He says that as long as Arafat is head of the PLO, there should be no negotiations, and has written a disgusting article which accused Arafat of being homosexual. As if being homosexual is the worst thing he could be.**



as the uprisings against the regime erupted, first in the south, then in the north, while the US and ordinary people all around, celebrations under way, stood by to watch as the regime brutally suppressed a last glimmer of hope. Iraqis outside had mixed views on what the United States or other outside powers should have done at that time, but the refugees I spoke to along the border with Turkey were unanimous: the US should have marched into Baghdad, occupied the country, and helped Iraqis set up a transitional government and begin the process of democratising the country.

Here lies the main point of contention between, on one side, Iraqis and, on the other, most other Arabs, Muslims, people from the Third World, peace activists,



**JS:** What does his party make of that? Ratz supports negotiations with the PLO.

**AK:** Ratz is in deep crisis because of this and may be heading towards a split. In many ways Sarid is now even to the right of the Labour doves. But in the last two years, a considerable number of people from the Israeli peace camp have developed quite good personal relations with considerable numbers of Palestinians. It was also important when they came out to support Sari Nusseibeh [a Palestinian detainee]. It was because there is a group of Palestinian leaders in East Jerusalem who are in good personal relations with Peace Now and a lot of people in Mapam and Ratz. They felt that he's a good friend and they have to stand by him also in time of war.

**JS:** They came out against the detentions. But what about issues like the curfew and distribution of gas masks?

**AK:** About the gas masks, there was no problem. They felt very strongly about the distribution of the gas masks. Anat Hoffman, from Ratz, made a demonstrative act of giving her gas mask to a Palestinian woman. In the first two weeks of the war, they were hesitant about coming out against the curfew. After two weeks, and especially after the appointment of Ze'evi to the cabinet [Ze'evi is a member of the far-right Tehiya party], Shulamit Aloni was speaking out quite strongly against the curfew. There were also a lot of actions of bringing food to the occupied territories. A lot of people who were not left wing protested against the curfew. All the farmers and the building contractors. Also, Ariel Sharon came out against the curfew.

**JS:** Really? Why?

**AK:** Because he's Minister of Housing and wanted the

construction workers to go back to work.

**JS:** Doesn't he want Soviet Jews to replace the Palestinian labourers?

**AK:** It doesn't work. The farmers say the Soviet Jews get higher salaries than the Palestinians and do 25 per cent of the work of the Palestinians!

**JS:** Those Palestinian labourers haven't come back full course to Israel. What's happening in that sector of the economy?

**AK:** There's still very much recession in these sections. Already, before the war, there

nothing is connected to anything there is no linkage nothing is connected to anything there is no linkage

South Africa in Namibia nothing to do with this Indonesia in East Timor nothing to do with this US in Panama nothing to do with this Israel in the West Bank nothing to do with this US in Grenada nothing to do with this Israel in the Gaza strip nothing to do with this

nothing is connected to anything there is no linkage nothing is connected to anything there is no linkage

selling Saddam arms nothing to do with this no democracy in Kuwait nothing to do with this underwriting Israel nothing to do with this blackmailing the soviets nothing to do with this oil company profits nothing to do with this sheiks buying airforces nothing to do with this

nothing is connected to anything there is no linkage nothing is connected to anything there is no linkage

**MICHAEL ROSEN**

were all kinds of moves and ideas to stop Palestinian workers coming to Israel.

**JS:** Kach campaigned...

**AK:** Yossi Sarid also came out in favour of complete separation and sealing of the border.

**JS:** As Amos Oz is doing now.

**AK:** This question was also one of the issues splitting the peace camp before the war and splitting Ratz. The war has given the government the chance to experiment with restricting the numbers of workers and having them tightly controlled, not staying the night in Israel. There will be strong pressure from employers to get rid of these restrictions. Of course, it is true what Yossi Sarid has been pointing out, that this is a way of disengaging Israel from the territories and the less the Palestinians work in Israel, the less economic incentive there is for continuing the occupation.

**JS:** The London PLO representative, Afif Safieh, says he doesn't put any stock in popular Israeli opinion coming around to support a peace solution, so a solution has to be "elegantly imposed" from outside. Do you think that's true?

**AK:** Let's say that it is important that the world, and especially the United States and the European Community, takes a great interest in what is going on. The more pressure from the outside, the more chance there is for the peace movement to get more support inside Israel. The great majority of the Israeli population will support the occupation as long as they don't have to pay a heavy price, and will not support the occupation when they have to pay a big price.

**JS:** So you don't think outside pressure would just strengthen the resistance, set the feeling that "the world is pushing us in one direction, we're going to

push back in the other?"

**AK:** I don't believe it. The average Likud voter, when he has to choose either giving up the occupied territories or giving up the money from the United States, does not have a dilemma. He gives up the territories and keeps the money.

**JS:** So you see a solution coming from outside Israel. US leverage will bring Israel to the negotiating table.

**AK:** If it's going to happen, it's going to be a combination of pressures from inside and outside.

**JS:** What do you think about US aid? In the States, Jewish leftists have debated whether they should be calling for a cut off of aid to Israel, unless there are negotiations with the Palestinians.

**AK:** It is even more difficult for an Israeli to say "I want the world to put sanctions on Israel". Few of us would say it outright in these words. But I think that's what many people in Israel would like to see. The United States will not need actually to do it. The threat would be enough. Even hinting about it would be enough.

**JS:** How did Israeli Jews from Arab countries react to the war?

**AK:** It did not come to the point of being against the war. But there were some ambiguous things. On television, there was an interview with an old Iraqi Jewish woman who had received a medal for her work in the underground Zionist movement in Iraq in the '50s, where she was smuggling Jews out of the country to Israel. The interviewer asked her: "What do you think about what is happening now in Iraq?" She burst out crying and said: "It is so horrible how Basra is destroyed." Basra was her home town. There was a strange coincidence that Ramat Gan,

which has one of the heaviest concentrations of Iraqi Jews in Israel, was the place which suffered the most from the Scuds. Many of them were joking that this was a war of Iraqis against Iraqis. There was an interview with three Knesset members of Iraqi origin. On the one hand, they said that Saddam Hussein is a bastard and a murderer, and we are with the West. And, on the other, they spoke about the Iraqis as wise people and the most ancient culture in the world. These people were trying for years to make peace between Israel and Saddam Hussein. In fact, they made peace with Tariq Aziz in '87. It was not public knowledge then - only now. During the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein made overtures to Israel. In the last week of the war, Moshe Shahal [Labour Party] came out in favour of a Palestinian state.

**JS:** What are his chances of assuming the Labour Party's leadership?

**AK:** The situation in the Labour Party until now was permanent rivalry between Peres and Rabin. Together these two have been fighting each other and blocking the way for any other contender. Now the middle-rank leadership of the party are in the process of trying to form a block together which will fight against these two historical leaders, and later decide who will be the candidate to replace them. It is not at all certain that it will succeed because there are bitter rivalries between several of these people. But it is moving ahead. And this group has a generally dovish line.

**JS:** What do you think Jews on the left should be doing in the diaspora at this key time to support the peace movement in Israel and to help move on the whole process?

**AK:** First, to get as many Jews as possible to criticise the Israeli

government as *publicly* as possible. A more superficial criticism from *many* Jews is more effective than a very deep criticism which comes from a very isolated small group of Jews. It is very important to deprive the Israeli government of the claim that it is representing the whole Jewish people. □

hallo Jeremy  
yes things are really hotting up here  
Robert Maxwell, stationed in his bunker in High Holborn, is urging forces to forward positions with enormous leaps in circulation figures in mind and very little risk to his own person.

further over towards Wapping, both Rupert Murdoch and Max Hastings are displaying tremendous verbal firepower and great bravery in justifying mass murder on any pretext available between bouts of sleeping in their own beds very soundly indeed.

Andrew Neil and Norman Stone both under Murdoch's command on the Sunday times have opened up second and third fronts with the Germans, and the Japanese berating them for not being as battle-eager as they are here in London

The Guardian and Independent Regiments have put themselves through some pretty tough heart-searching spare a thought for their agony but they are now fully committed to flattening Basra and a seat next to the television at home.

A new initiative by the old new left lieutenant columnist Neil Ascherson, major correspondent Hans Enzenburger, general commentator Fred Halliday moving forward under cover of all this artillery have all joined the coalition bombardment of children collected their salaries paid their mortgages and are waiting for call-up to the front at BBC HQ.

**MICHAEL ROSEN**



Amid the changes happening in Eastern Europe, Poland continues to be confronted with how to address its Jewish past and with the position of the Jewish remnant that survives in Poland today. Erica Burman went on a five-day tour of Poland this May, organised by the Manor House Society, a cultural historical organisation associated with the Reform Jewish movement in Britain. These extracts are based on notes written during and shortly after her visit.

#### Warsaw 10 May

When we get on the coach our Orbis state tour guide introduces himself over the speaker system: he says, "My name is Robert and I am 45 years old." Then he tells us the name and age of the driver. For an instant I am puzzled by the divulging of such private biographical information as age. Then I realise. It is my first indication of the Polish simultaneous recognition and denial of guilt when addressing Jews. I notice a Garfield stuck on the front of the coach – westernisation here we come!

Warsaw is full of grey 1950s and 1960s square, flat-topped tower blocks. Most of the city was razed to the ground during the Nazi occupation. The only colour comes from the fresh-leaved trees which line the avenues. On the way to the hotel we stop at the Jewish cemetery. What is most striking is its sheer size and the amount of greenery, with mature trees and shrubs almost blocking out the dazzling sunshine and long grass obscuring the stones in some areas. Part of the cemetery has undergone substantial restoration – you can see the contrast between the laid-out avenues and pathways and the tumbledown overgrown parts where the stones jerk out of the ground at odd angles like crooked teeth. Much of the cemetery was destroyed and disturbed by the Nazis. A new inner wall has been built, composed of fragments of broken gravestones set together in concrete. Fragments of Hebrew and Yiddish lettering are legible within this oddly modern mosaic.

It is difficult to comprehend just how big it is, and how large the Warsaw Jewish community must have been. I begin to realise the magnitude of the Jewish presence in Poland and feel angry. I also understand how maintaining and restoring the cemetery is about asserting the vitality and importance of Jewish life to Poland. There are very old graves, some highly ornate – with almost oriental mausolea. The carvings are unlike anything I have seen in Jewish cemeteries elsewhere...

Further into the cemetery we came to a gravelled path that crossed what seemed otherwise to be a roughly circular grassy dip. Behind it the old graves stretched out into the distance. I recognised what this was from Irena Klepfisz's description.\* About 10,000 Jews were brought here during the liquidation of the Ghetto, shot and buried in a mass grave that had already been dug. A new memorial has been placed in the centre – a grave-stone in black marble with a white stripe, with lettering in Yiddish and Polish. The perimeter of the circular

depression is framed by irregularly shaped white marble stones with a black stripe, apparently reminiscent of the design of the Umschlagplatz monument, as they were designed and set up at the same time (1988). There are fairly fresh flowers beside the memorial. The white stones flash brightly in the sunlight, contrasting with the ageing, crumbling stones beyond.

## JEWS IN POLAND – past presence, future tense

After saying *Kaddish* (memorial prayer), we move on and see the memorials to the Warsaw Ghetto fighters. Some are individual, set up by surviving friends and relatives, like that of Michal Klepfisz. Other stones bear several names, sometimes with the nicknames they were known by in brackets underneath: Blones Eliezer (Lusiek), Friedrich Zalmen (Zygmunt), Fryszdorf Gabriel (Gabrys). There is a stone for Abrasza Blum, with Luba Blum's nearby, while there are adjacent stones for various members of the Czweriakow family. The names hit me with some familiarity – Marek Edelman's descriptions are still ringing in my ears (I had read *The Ghetto Fights* on the plane). These memorials (not graves – since these were leaders of the Ghetto Uprising and almost all perished there) are close to a monument for those who died in the Uprising, depicting a man holding a gun surrounded by flames (but of course women were very active as well). Our guide, Stazjek, a young (Jewish) Polish academic, actively involved in preserving Jewish cemeteries and in committees which are setting up memorials, points to the clenched fist on some graves and memorials which signify membership of the Bund. Other devices indicate being Zionist. The continued reference to the Bund evokes some puzzlement within our group. They have never heard of it.

We see the statue dedicated to Korczak depicting him surrounded by, and holding, children. The grass here is so high I can only just make out the benches. Stazjek is critical of the monument. He thinks it should be in central Warsaw where it will be seen by many more people...

The hotel has a big foyer filled with people sitting on enormous leather sofas, including some rather scruffy taxi drivers waiting for work behind well-thumbed newspapers. It feels as if the western veneer could wear quite thin even in this five-star hotel...

Poland is not good for vegetarians. Tinned diced carrots, beans and peas with a dried-out mound of rice and potatoes was my dinner. By this time Stazjek has returned and we ask him questions. How large is the Jewish population of Warsaw? Of Poland? It depends on how you define Jewish. Is it dangerous to "come out" as Jewish? The greater freedom of expression has generated or confirmed Catholicism; now religion is part of state education – does this create both the conditions, and the need, for greater expression of other alternative identities too? Is it like in Moscow, where groups of people gather to rediscover aspects of Jewish existence, culture, life, crowding into tiny two-room flats – and not all Jewish, indeed often convened by gentiles? Stazjek says that ten years ago his flat was filled with people engaged in a similar project, but that in Poland there are not the numbers of people. I ask if the interest is expressed exclusively in terms of the religious, or also the Jewish

secular traditions. No, it is both more amorphous and more ambiguous. He says there may now be about 2,000 people in Poland today who have some kind of Jewish identification, but that this is clearly difficult to determine and means many things.

Then someone asks the question that has been lurking in many minds, but not yet dared to be spoken, but she tries to cast it in specific terms: how is it possible that Jews who live, for example, near Auschwitz can carry on or bear to live there? Stazjek responds that it is the same issue about him in Warsaw. Geography is irrelevant – what difference does 5 or 50 kilometres make? He continues, knowing that hundreds of thousands, millions of Jews were murdered is certainly not irrelevant; it adds a dimension, but it doesn't mean you don't carry on leading your everyday life in the place where you have always lived. After all, for Americans all of Europe is a Jewish graveyard. This hits the group hard. For some of us, Poland is so invested with symbolism that it is synonymous with antisemitism and extermination. For Polish Jews perhaps their proximity to the camps is seen as a geographical accident that is arbitrary and without special meaning. But for us this geographical "accident" is what we feel we owe our current survival to – so it is invested with enormous significance. While to Polish Jews staying in Poland may be about asserting, refusing to deny their (Jewish) presence and contribution to Polish culture and politics, to us visitors, staying in Poland sits uneasily with our need, firstly, to express our guilt at surviving by fetishising the geographical sites of extermination, and, secondly, to treat all Poles and Poland as culpable. I try to consider my own expectations. Going to the place where they happened does not alter the events which took place there.

And yet going to a funeral can be the most comforting way of dealing with death. I think of people's reactions when I told them I am going to Poland: those who think I am going on holiday, and those with fear in their eyes.

And yet going to a funeral can be the most comforting way of dealing with death. I think of people's reactions when I told them I am going to Poland: those who think I am going on holiday, and those with fear in their eyes.

#### Saturday 11 May

...Mum and I wander back to the hotel through an open market and lots of shops, mainly in the form of small, one-room boutiques. They sell western goods, clothes and varieties of bread, cheese, meats and trinkets. This is far from the stereotype of Eastern Europe. The only fashion accessory the young people seem to lack is Doc Martens. So much is imported. Most of the graffiti is about heavy metal and pop bands – "Punks not dead", "Napalm death", even The Simpsons. These were far more prevalent than what I could recognise as political commentary or the occasional Star of David on a gallows.

In the afternoon we have a tour of what was the Ghetto. On the way Robert, the Orbis guide, points out the Palace of Culture, an ornate Gothic type building towering above the market stalls, dominating the skyline. This was a "gift" from Russia to Poland on joining the Soviet Union. It used to be hated, but now, he says, people tolerate it – another small reference to recent changes. While most of the ghetto area is now residential

flats and shops, its outer walls have been preserved as a memorial. Each of the remaining part-walls has had bricks removed to the Yad Vashem Memorial in Israel. At one place a historian, who had organised for the memorial plaque to be placed there and who lived right beside it, rushed out and invited us into his home to see records. We signed his book, admired his scale model of the ghetto and bought leaflets about the walls. But is he Jewish? someone asked, finding it difficult to understand why a non-Jew would care.

After seeing the few remaining original houses of the ghetto, kept upright only by timber scaffolding at the base, we go to the official memorials in central Warsaw. The first memorial was set up in 1946. It was round, in the shape of a sewer entrance – since most of the few who survived escaped through the sewers. In 1984 a large sculpture was mounted to the ghetto heroes, on one side depicting fighters and on the other a line of men, women and children on the road to Treblinka. A swastika on it has not been completely erased. There are others on some of the other stones, and even on the main Umschlagplatz monument. Armed police or soldiers stand in the square (to guard it?). From here a "memorial walk" has been laid out to the Umschlagplatz, commemorating the route countless people followed to the site of deportation and death. It was opened on 19 April 1988, on the 45th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

In the square, as well as the main monument and one which lists the names of ghetto fighters, there is a stone dedicated to Polish non-Jews who died while supporting Jews escaping and resisting. Its wording is in Polish and Hebrew; the suppression of Yiddish is apparently due to pressure from Yad Vashem which subsidised the memorials. As we collect round the monument in the square a woman joins us. She speaks in Polish and Stazjek translates. She wants to find people who used to live in Mila Street (which was very close to where we are standing now). She lived there at the border

to the ghetto. She helped Jewish friends and was eventually taken herself to Auschwitz. Now she wants to trace others who might have survived who were her neighbours. We listen, moved, but can only communicate by gesture and handshake.

The stones are laid out at intervals down, or sometimes slightly set back from, the road. They link the monuments with the mound on the site of the ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organisation) bunker at Mila Street, the stone to Mordechai Anielewicz, the park square named after Szmul Zygielbojm and the wall monument at the Umschlagplatz. They commemorate resistance leaders and also important political, cultural and religious figures who were murdered. One of the group notes that there is only one stone to a woman. I think of this later in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, where I see so many photos of women amongst the fighters who died. The account and translation of what is on the stones is punctuated by mounting tension between Stazjek and the local tour guide. They dispute terminology about districts; the local guide talks of "Polish" and "Jewish" districts. But no, the Jews were Polish. Stazjek prefers to talk of the Jewish and the "Aryan" sides, since the demarcation, the ghettoisation, was created by the Nazis. Then they argue over Jewish participation in the communist party... We begin to appreciate that there are



Relatives of Jews murdered at Kleice, 1946



An elderly Jewish woman arrives at Auschwitz

\* "Oyf keyver oves: Poland, 1983", in I Klepfisz (1990) *Dreams of an Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes*, Portland: Oregon: Eighth Mountain Press.



current as well as past events at issue here...

The Umschlagplatz monument is a few feet away from the railway embarkation point which took so many to Treblinka. Some buildings from that time still stand. The one that housed the SS is now a university building. The monument itself is all modern simplicity. As well as a general dedication to those who died, all common Yiddish first names are listed alphabetically across the wall, from A-Z; so many names. This was a token, because it would not have been possible to write every name. It is a white wall with a gap in the middle. Through the gap a tree is visible, a symbol of continuing life and hope amongst the desolation.

In the evening many of us went to the Yiddish Theatre. It has been going at least since 1968. It's well established and has a significant throughput of actors, none of whom – we were told – are Jewish. The theatre was quite full, and the buzz of the earsets translating into Polish was almost inaudible. Both actors and audience were mainly young.

#### Sunday 12 May

Today is the anniversary of Szmul Zygielbojm's death. We set off for Cracow, stopping at Kielce on the way where 42 Jews were murdered in 1946.

...On the way Stazjek talks about the increasingly cordial relationship between Poland and Israel. He also suggested that many of the first foreign investors in Poland may be of Polish Jewish origin since they know the language.

Tonight we stay at Cracow. Tomorrow we go to Auschwitz...

#### Monday 13 May

There is a subdued air in the coach; tense, frightened. Auschwitz is about an hour and a half away from Cracow. The town of Oswiecim, which before the war was just a few thousand people, now has hundreds of thousands of inhabitants and stretches almost to the camp. The road runs alongside the railway line for a short while. We watch a train travel parallel to us. The old station now seems derelict, there is a new modern one in the centre of the town, but the old platforms and sidings are visible in the vicinity of the camp gates. It is only on the way back when we look out for the first houses that we realise the extent of the camp. Auschwitz houses the museum and exhibitions. The buildings are intact, originally built as a barracks for the Polish army but then turned into a prison for Poles and Russians who resisted Nazi rule before the extermination camps were even thought of. Tens of thousands of these political prisoners were tortured and shot here. Auschwitz was a prison camp, a concentration camp and a death camp – the only camp which performed all three functions; hence it has been preserved as a national memorial. All Polish children come here with their schools... A group of young Germans followed us into the small gas chamber and crematorium in Auschwitz 1, the only one the Nazis did not have time to blow up before their retreat. Nearby is the gallows where Hoess was hanged.

Our guide was a young woman, 26, who has been working there for six years. After a while, people started to ask her questions as we moved between the buildings that house the different exhibitions. We asked how could she talk about these things, guide people round these exhibitions all day, several times a day? She said at first she could not do it without breaking down. I thought of how terrible and frightening it must be to face the pain

so much, and then how even more terrible to fear that one will not feel it. We asked her why she was doing this. She said her best subjects at school had been history and English, she had not wanted to be a teacher, and that what she had been taught about what happened here at school was very little, so she wanted to know more. I asked about the training. This is updated and improved all the time. Some of the changes arise directly from political reforms. The recognition of the specifically Jewish loss, which was quite evident in her account to us, is quite new. There are buildings ("pavilions") which are devoted to different countries. Our guide told us that the East German and Bulgarian ones were now closed, and that they were entirely about the history of communism. Now the pavilions are being reorganised to reflect the nationalities of the victims. This is, of course, not entirely satisfactory, since most of them were here because they were Jewish.

It was bewildering, awesome and bizarre to be in this place and feel the account of history shifting. The original estimate of deaths here has been scaled down from the Soviet figure of 4 million at the time of the liberation of the camp to 1.5 million based on the number of transports – since only the names of those who survived the selections were registered. But this figure still fluctuates in both directions. Even odder still, when we were in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to arrive at the memorial and see the plaques wiped clean. They had borne a dedication in 13 languages "to the martyrs who died", but these languages bore no relationship to the nationality of those who died, nor did it acknowledge the Jewish and Gypsy or lesbian and gay loss. The black stones now await inscription in Yiddish, Polish and Romany. In the meantime, the memorial is blank.

Birkenau has been left as it was. All is space and silence. From the watchtower at the entrance rows upon rows of brick piles are visible, spaced out at regular intervals. These stoves from the timber prison huts are all that remain: the Nazis burnt as much as they could at the end. Some of the buildings from the "women's camp" remain. The "women's camp" is much smaller than the "men's". We left our *yortzayt* candles in one of these buildings. There are a few notices which identify what the areas or structures had been. One of the crematoria is labelled as having been blown up by prisoners. I marvel at and honour their organisation and resistance even here.

We must have spent four hours in Birkenau walking, walking, walking, even after a couple of hours in Auschwitz 1. I don't think we had any awareness of time. What chiefly happened was that an enormous amount of tension was generated in the group. We already felt we had been rushed round the exhibitions in undue, undignified haste; we wanted to linger, to reflect. A few people had already been temporarily left behind in the exhibitions and in the huts, which understandably made them very panicky and the rest of the group outraged. There was much vocal criticism of the group leader. We seemed to be rushing at a pace that even the most able of the party were hard-pressed to maintain. People wanted to know what had happened to our guide, since she had said she would accompany us to Birkenau, and they had unanswered questions about identifying what we were seeing. It emerged that the leader had dismissed her on the grounds that we would be having a service, but since we were doing much more than having a service people felt denied of information they wanted. But how could we make sense of this

place? What information could render it comprehensible? People are quarrelsome, and ashamed, and appalled, and so even more furious that we are feeling divided and indignant and preoccupied with our current feelings and circumstances...

Later on at the hotel few people turned up to meet in the room reserved for us. Stazjek talked about the debates about the representation and preservation of Auschwitz as a museum and memorial... Stazjek makes the point that, from the educational point of view, it is difficult to know how to represent the horror, that Auschwitz could be seen only as a museum of torture and efficient mass murder, and that the anonymity is part of the problem. I thought of similar discussions about efforts to mobilise against nuclear war, where the numbers can be too abstract, and where images of destruction can disempower... "I want to know who to blame. Tell me who to blame," one woman says, as we try to address the lack of Polish resistance and aid, Jewish disbelief (how could it be believed?), German participation, collusion and indifference, Allied delay. Someone asked if there had been any Polish fascist activity on which Nazism had built. Stazjek says that Polish nationalists have always been anti-German, and therefore opposed the Nazis, except for a very few who, when it was clear that Soviet victory was imminent, threw in their lot with the Nazis. Even now, he says, there is a significant German minority in Poland, 300,000 in Upper Silesia, who have only just been accorded minority rights.

#### Tuesday 14 May

Tour of Jewish Cracow in the morning before we set off for Warsaw. The history of the Jewish community here follows the depressingly familiar pattern of segregation, concentration and extermination. Unlike Warsaw, Cracow escaped destruction and its buildings convey an aura of elegance and beauty that contrasts markedly with those of Warsaw. Here some of the old synagogues still remain, though many are now used for other purposes. Only two *shuls* are still functioning – and then only really on festivals. In the first one we saw, an older woman welcomed us. She spoke of how she had escaped to Russia and been in Siberia, how the Germans had come to destroy the *shul* and cemetery which is in the grounds. When they tried to dismantle the railings round the tomb of a highly revered rabbi (which was a site of pilgrimage), one of the soldiers got a splinter of iron in his eye and was blinded. So they took this as a

sign that they should leave the cemetery intact, and in fact it is now restored to a condition better than it has ever been, with many gravestones that were buried by age having been recovered. The second *shul* was much bigger and had been used as a stable by the Nazis. It is highly ornate, and with some recent as well as original stained glass windows, but in need of some repair and restoration. A few men greeted us. One talked about an international Festival of Jewish Culture he and others had organised last year in Cracow, which had been an overwhelming success. I asked if the Jews involved in this were religious. He replied "it's impossible": he was not Jewish. My mother asked him "why are you doing this?" He said "I have to. I must know where I am. Poland is a graveyard." We left feeling moved, and feeling some hope. I have asked him to send me the catalogue for the next exhibition in 1992...

#### Wednesday 15 May

Last morning free in Warsaw. The man sitting opposite Mum at breakfast was English-Swiss, working for the Post Office, here to set up business contacts. On my right a young man from Stoke sat down. He was a representative of Disney, here to open a trade fair designed to introduce all Disney products into the Polish economy. "The problem here", he said, "is that people don't have the disposable income"...

Most of our group gravitated to the Jewish Historical Institute. The first floor is devoted to an exhibition about the ghettos. It was rather cramped and tended to mix up material from the different ghettos, but it was certainly powerful. On the second floor, as well as an art exhibition, there are the archives. Here members of our group waited their turn to look up records of names and towns. Two people were staying on beyond the tour to search for some trace of their relatives' lives and set up a plaque in the village cemetery. This was one of the most upsetting parts of the whole trip. Mum was trying to remember some of the towns we associated with members of our family. She came up with one name which in a haze I recognised. I left to go downstairs. She told me later that the archivist had told her that what she had shown her was the Polish name for Auschwitz.

I bought a small silver Menorah to wear on a chain, and Mum bought me a little *mogen dovid* (Star of David). There will be times when I will want to wear these, and they say more about my sense of Jewish connection than the *mazel* from Israel that has "Zion" engraved on it.

## Which side are you on?

#### Spurious splits harm the fight against racism, says Dave Landau.

Not all anti-Zionists hold to the formula that Zionism = racism. Not all Zionists hold to the formula that anti-Zionism = antisemitism. But many people in both opposing camps hold these equations dear. This is dangerous not only in that it presents obstacles to finding a just solution to the Palestinian/Israeli national

question but also in creating an unbridgeable chasm on the left, within the anti-racist movement and between parts of entire communities.

The power of these formulae lies in the fact that they both contain half-truths. They result from inability of many people to grasp the deeply contradictory character of the Israeli people – that they are at one and the same time a colonial and refugee people. The fatal formulae result

from appreciating only one side of this contradictory reality.

#### A colonial people?

Yes. Since the time of the Crusades the Palestinian people were a subject people whose livelihood was essentially of a feudal character, living off the land owned largely by Turkish landlords under the control (for much of the time) of the Ottoman Empire. After the First World War, the world was carved up anew



between the imperialist powers. The Palestinians found themselves under new rulers, the British. The war did not liberate them from their feudal yoke; the land they worked and lived on was not theirs, it remained in the hands of, still mainly Turkish, landlords. But the dramatic changes awakened hope of genuine sovereign nationhood.

These hopes and aspirations were in direct conflict with the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist project. The Balfour Declaration asserted that they would not become a nation, that they would remain a subject people. Nothing new. There was, after all, the possibility of negotiating a sovereign slice of the cake through some kind of partition. More serious, in a fundamental sense, was the method of Jewish settlement. The crucial point was that the land was being bought from the landowners to be worked and lived on by the settlers. The entire mode of production, albeit oppressive, was being dismantled from under the Palestinians' feet. This is what makes the settlement unambiguously colonial in character.

This colonialism, which was to be enshrined in the establishment of the State of Israel, was of a kind which squeezed out the indigenous population rather than exploited it. This was emphasised very clearly by the boycotting of Palestinian traders in the '30s, during which Jews who bought goods from Palestinians were intimidated by gangs, often organised by "left" Zionists and the nascent Histadrut (trade union movement). The character of this colonialism was the predominant reason for the exodus of Palestinians and their becoming refugees. To be sure, the Mufti of Jerusalem had an enormous influence on the Palestinian population and encouraged the trend in 1947/48. To be sure, right-wing Zionist terrorists wiped out Palestinian villages during the same period. But the underlying process of dispossession and

consequent movement had started long before that.

#### A refugee people?

Yes. Jews did not come to Palestine to be merchant venturers, slave traders, plunderers or missionaries, as have colonialists throughout history. Few came because they had an ideological attachment to Jewish nationalism or a religious desire to return to the Holy Land. They came because the rest of the world had persecuted them for 2,000 years. They came in the early part of the century to escape from Czarist Russia, pogroms in the Balkans, Poland, Hungary, the Middle East. After the rise of Hitler they

cution and the insecurity which runs along with it. So often we have thought we could carve out a niche for ourselves in this or that country. Just when we thought we had succeeded, out came the knives. Many have drawn the conclusion that history has taught us that the only security lies in a Jewish nation.

#### Beyond the contradiction

Was there an alternative to this contradiction? In principle, yes. One could envisage a Palestine, where land was nationalised, welcoming refugees to share in and work for a developing socialist nation. The Jewish settlers would have had no objectively colonial role. The mode of Palestinian subsistence would have leapt forward rather than collapsed. But everything stood against this – the dominant vision within the Zionist leadership, the naked antisemitism of the Mufti of Jerusalem and the familiar role of the British, encouraging the worst aspects on both sides so as to secure a role as policeman in the region. Only a massive socialist, anti-imperialist movement across both communities could have challenged all that. It was not to be.

#### The fatal formulae

Nothing I have said so far is sufficient to make a case for or against Zionism. This requires a far more detailed reading of history and examination of the existing possibilities for a just and peaceful solution and goes well beyond my purposes here. What I have done is laid bare the fallaciousness of the damaging dogmatic assertions, Zionism = racism and anti-Zionism = antisemitism.

Those who can only see the Israeli people as colonialists cannot but conclude that Zionism equals racism, just as the British Raj equalled racism, the settlement of America was racism, etc... Equally, those who can only see the Israeli people as refugees and their descendants, joined by those who see the Holocaust as a

warning that nowhere else is safe, are bound to condemn those who militantly demand that they should have no country as a safe haven as antisemites. Understand the contradiction and you must reject the equations.

#### Divisions at home

These dogmatic perspectives have the capacity to create a tremendous amount of damage to political movements and relations between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Zionists and anti-Zionists who hold with these formulae cannot but refuse to work with each other. How can a Zionist have anything to do with an antisemite? How can an anti-Zionist collaborate with a racist? Nowhere is this problem more acute than in the anti-racist anti-fascist movement. Why? Firstly, because nearly everybody in this movement is either a Zionist or anti-Zionist. Second, the refusal

to have any truck with racism or antisemitism lies at the heart of this movement. What is remarkable is that the movement hasn't torn itself apart long ago.

During the last year, however, things have come to something of a head with CARF splitting off from Searchlight and members of the Newham Monitoring Project being excluded from a meeting of the Jewish Awareness Group. The reasons for the timing are not difficult to find. The escalation in antisemitism has brought wider sections of the Jewish community into the movement, including many Zionists.

There is another sense in which the "fatal formulae" constitute a half truth. That is that there are racists hiding behind the flag of Zionism and antisemites in the camp of anti-Zionism. The conclusion to be drawn from this is not to uphold the hard equations and have nothing to do with each

other. On the contrary, it is vitally important for socialists and anti-racists in these movements to wage a principled fight against racists, antisemites and their ideas, and join together against their common fascist enemy.

Both the Jewish and Muslim communities in this country are under serious threat as a result of the Gulf war, not least from hostility between each other. Saddam Hussein called for Muslims throughout the world to support a Holy War to liberate Palestine, encouraging Jews and Muslims to see each other as enemies. The fascists are hoping to set the communities into violent confrontation. It is the duty of socialists and anti-racists in these communities to build bridges and unite these communities in self-defence. How can this be done, when these fatal formulae stop so many activists from talking to each other? □

## A comprehensive response

#### Asian parents have roundly rejected a bid by religious groups to opt out local schools, says Gita Sahgal.

Early this year, Southall Black Sisters, a group set up in the wake of the anti-fascist demonstration which ended with the death of Blair Peach in 1979, joined a campaign to oppose an attempt by some parent governors to opt out two local high schools, Villiers and Featherstone. The campaign involved members of the Indian Workers' Association, the Indian Workers' Federation, the Southall Monitoring Group, and some parent governors and local teachers and pupils. Organisations which had been hostile to each other for years came together on this issue because of the threat to the future of Southall as a pluralist society.

Tory education reforms have meant that the option of taking over an existing school and changing its ethos (even though

officially the "character" of a school could not be altered for five years) was more attractive than trying to establish and fund an independent school. Opting out was being encouraged by the Conservative government, and the Tory-controlled borough of Ealing was looking for ways to cut the poll tax.

The opting out campaign started when Sikh parents were approached to sign a petition saying "Save our Sixth Forms". The organisers were careful not to argue explicitly on religious grounds. Instead, the campaign based itself on the reorganisation of education throughout the borough which would shift sixth form education from high schools into local colleges.

Most parents said they did not know the petition had anything to do with taking schools out of local authority control but were alarmed that they might lose sixth form education. Some said that the people who had approached

them were active in local *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples). The campaign appeared to be headed by a few parent governors with support from some Asian teachers who were heard telling pupils they should wear *shalwar kameez* rather than dresses and not cut their hair. They had made remarks to parents about whether their children would be safe in the world outside the schools. So at the first stage in the campaign, which gathered the signatures to ask for a ballot, Sikh parents did not realise the implications of what they were signing, but their fears about the quality of education and for their daughters' safety were awakened.

The campaign to defend the status quo was called "Southall Save our Schools". It concentrated on the long-term implications for the school if it opted out and argued that educational choice would in fact be *increased* by reforms in tertiary education. On that level, there was a concerted

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attempt, particularly by teachers, to set forth the arguments.

But there were two arguments that were not addressed at all in the campaigning material. These were the religious involvement behind the opting out campaign and the sectarian way it had been developed, which led to fears that the longterm agenda was to turn the schools under parental control into Sikh-run schools. Secondly, the campaign was reluctant to raise gender issues at all, though it was acknowledged by both teachers and pupils that this was one of the major issues at stake. "It's the girls they are after," said one of the teachers privately.

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) raised these issues and contributed to the general discussion by addressing parents' real fears.

# Women Against Fundamentalism

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From WAF, BM 2706, London WC1N 3XX

Once the demands for a ballot had been achieved, the opting out campaign produced a series of well-designed leaflets. Although they were careful to refer always to "children" or "boys and girls", the bogeys they raised were that children would run away from home, there would be problems for parents, and families would be split up.

The leaflets also said that rumours that the schools would be turned into denominational schools were baseless. But the new governing body would be more "representative of local parents, ie Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims and others". This was a new construction of people living in Southall, purely on the basis of the religious communities from which they come; and since Sikh

parents would be by far the most numerous group, it implied that they should be in control.

When SBS canvassed parents about their views, most were firm in rejecting control by religious establishments of local schools, saying: "We came here to educate our children. We don't want our girls going round with their heads covered"; and "If it's anything to do with the *gurdwara*, I want nothing to do with it."

The assumptions of the left meant that they viewed the whole campaign through the prism of race (alleging that an Asian head-teacher who came out in favour of opting out was trying to use the racecard to smear white teachers). At an earlier conference on education, organised by the Southall Monitoring Group, the key issue was identified as being racial discrimination in the education system; and its solution: parent power. They were untroubled by considerations of the complex changes in education that the Tories were proposing, and of the fact that "parent power" had been adopted as their slogan. If it means a severe curtailment of the rights of children, particularly girls, it could be a very problematic slogan. To raise these issues would be to question the thinking that Southall was "a community in resistance". In an area like Southall, where the educational system is relatively popular and some schools have good examination results, it is possible to defend their record. But it is dangerous to try to ignore fears and discontents where they do exist. Keeping quiet about the religious arguments underlying the campaign also forced the assumption that many people in Southall would actually have been guided by religious dictat rather than being hostile to it.

When the results of the parental ballot came in, Southall parents had voted overwhelmingly to preserve the status quo. In Villiers, 93 per cent of those who voted were against opting out; in Featherstone, 73 per cent.

This campaign was an important turning point in Southall's history. Just as, in 1979 and 1981, a coalition of very different forces had come together to protect the community against external assault, in 1991 all the groups with secular traditions mobilised to defend themselves against a threat from within. But most were unwilling to be precise about the nature of the arguments in which they were engaged and so will probably lose the opportunity to generalise from this experience.

For SBS, the campaign was an opportunity to test, in a public arena, issues that we had debated for nearly two years in Women Against Fundamentalism. It also symbolised our acceptance by many who had previously refused to recognise our existence. Significantly, the defence of secular values, however covertly it was conducted, was seen to be an electoral asset by those politicians who associated themselves with the campaign.

But the schools campaign also contains a warning. The refusal to make the gender issue explicit implies that many of the campaigners were hoping to confine their argument to making a case for defending educational standards – in other words, the futures of the boys. We have no guarantees that if we were fighting specifically about women's issues we would be able to attract their support, though we do not feel that defeat even about these would be inevitable.

The assaults of ten years of Thatcherism have pushed some sections of the left in Southall into essentialist positions to maintain their ideological purity. Depending on the context, the slogan of defending the integrity of the community is as likely to be dangerously retrograde as it is to be progressive. □

This article is adapted from "Secular Spaces ... Experiences of Asian Women Organising" by Gita Sahgal in *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Contemporary Britain* by Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis (Virago, forthcoming).

# One step forward...

Paul Collins continues *Jewish Socialist's* exploration of class and conflict in the Jewish community.

Class, schmass! As long as they love their brother. Or sister. Not in the case of my elder male sibling. The other night, as I left work tired and late, my telephone rang. "Mum here," she announced. "I've got bad news." The mind leapt into overdrive. Had she overdosed on blintzes? Was Sir Rhodes Boyson to warn residents at her Jewish old people's home against virgin births? Nope. "Howard's business is in trouble." I knew he was no longer joint 188th in the *Sunday Times* top 200 richest men. But, in a Tory-made recession, those who live by the capitalist sword die by the same blade. "Oh dear," I said, conjecturing a rags-to-rubies-and-back fall. "Yes," she rued. "He's selling the other Rolls."

The idea that the Jewish community – any more than any other community in Britain – is a classless society could only come from arrivistes like John Major. Small wonder the comedian Dave Allen called him the only man who ran away from a circus to join a bank.

On a bus ride from an unlikely source, Golders Green, I met an elderly Jewish man, who told me his nephew was set to evict his own father from their home. With the economy damaging his company, he planned to buy a smaller mansion and maintain his otherwise spendthrift lifestyle. And my informant's taxi driver friend, asking a Jewish stockbroker fare for share tips, made £30,000 for lavish family *simchas*.

In the last issue of *Jewish Socialist*, Adam Lent is right to brand as crass the generalisation that over three to four generations, British Jewry have managed to convert themselves from a radical proletarian community into a conservative bourgeois one. The sight of an elderly Jewish man, sobbing before a private housing

estate in Bow, will always remain in my memory. "All my life, I've wanted a garden like this," he said. Less passive was the graffiti from presumed local youths – Jews, maybe, in their ranks – sprayed below the "no trespassers" sign on the estate. "Bollocks," it said. "We'll go where we like."

It would be naive and dangerous, however, to ignore the social competitiveness which has often frustrated progressive struggles. "Next year in Jerusalem" may still carry profundity in the Seder for Soviet Jews denied access to the United States. For not insignificant numbers of young Jewish couples here, with holidays in mind, their wish is, rather, "next year, Jamaica". Philippa Carr's play, *Consuming Desire* – concerned with a young Jewish wife, bulimic in reaction to materialistic pressures – has twanged a raw nerve with audiences.

I once asked one potential in-law whether he would put his aunt's memorial notice among the "classified" announcements in the *Jewish Chronicle*. "Classified?" he shrieked. "She wouldn't be seen dead there. Social and personal." For him, as the blessed Margaret reaffirms: "There is no alternative."

Such attitudes may disappoint, but should not surprise us. The reluctance of film star Mel Brooks to excavate his deprived background reflects a common determination among Jews to put maximum distance from themselves and their past hardship. Physical attacks from skinheads and desecrated cemeteries may underline that wealth offers no protection against historic demonology. Yet neither threat, on the surface, encourages the middle class to identify with harassed minorities living in their old ghettos. Jewish socialists can strive to break this mould by reminding them not only that international stormtroopers make no distinction between Jews and blacks. Within these urban slums live many of their own kind – some,

in London's East End, continuing to depend on soup kitchen aid established almost a hundred years ago.

In this context, we must exploit Adam Lent's correct analysis that links hitherto affluent Jews, struggling and scapegoated amid high inflation and interest rates, with similar, albeit more oppressed, victims on council estates. My apparent difference is the view that when Jewish corporate bosses are disgraced, some Jews on the Left share a capacity for censorship with Israel's worst ostriches. It cannot be acceptable for gratuitous reference to be made to creed or colour and we should emphasise that financial corruption is endemic in a greed-based system – not peculiar to certain races. But the hysteria which met Geoffrey Alderman's critique against some Jewish business ethics suggests he exposed rare vulnerability within the community's establishment.

In a recent *Jewish Chronicle*, Hyam Corney questions media reluctance to state outright that the stricken international leisure group chief is Jewish. He pondered whether journalists were scared to mention the notorious Harry Goodman's religion in case there were complaints made to authorities. In the *Jewish Quarterly*, David Cesarani attacked the Rachman-based drama, *Singer*, for negative imagery with enough zeal to make any Rushdie-baiter proud. This seems mere tokenism, akin to eulogising Paul Boateng, despite his shadow Treasury monetarism, or endorsing Keith Vaz on campaigns for separate Muslim schools.

As on *shechitah*, there are understandable apprehensions that prejudice will distort a just crusade for propagandist value. This should, though, not divert attention from ominous and influential circles. There remains a clear distinction between fascists who blame global ills on Jewish conspiracy and Jews uncomfortable with trends which betray, in Adam Lent's words, our



"unique role in the class system".

The *Morning Star*, in a characteristic megablunder, may have described Gerald Ronson as heading a £648 business empire. Yet the fact that the Chief Rabbi – the first to become a peer – visited him in prison stressed his place at the highest Jewish tables. I know large numbers of Jews share my unease at press reports about Ronson's unashamed will to mix Guinness with "goodness". Little respite can be gained from the response by a prominent spokesperson for "Jewish Care" to claims that Lord Young is unfit to be president. "He is not political any longer," she insisted. So, that's all right then. Leave to one side, as Employment Secretary, he brought misery to millions by sustaining Thatcherite policies which destroyed jobs. Overlook, as Trade and Industry Secretary, he privatised Cable and Wireless – then quit to take its chairmanship. Forget, nonetheless, his symbolic example as king to myriad courtiers in Jewish philanthropy? Let alone, even without Mrs Finchley, his role model for a community whose leaders' self-help philosophy has supplied a gift to ideologues ranged against state intervention.

It may perhaps be meaningful to observe the fuss over the £50 price for tickets to hear Neil Kinnock address the Board of Deputies. For my part, in more generous mood, I might be prepared to discard this sum *not* to listen to someone whom *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young dismissed as "possessing hidden shallows". Maybe the Board – dismayed by the forced resignation of their adored Boadicea – is just hedging its bets, with a general election approaching. The narrow left-right split on the Board resembles two bald men battling over a comb.

Few positive developments within the Jewish community in recent times include the growing realisation that the deputies have lived down to their name as substitutes for credible sheriffs. Witness the disbelief in their propensity to fight antisemitism which greeted Lionel Kopelowitz at public meetings. Loath as I am to quote Kissinger, as the forerunner to current American Imperialism said

about David Owen: "Is he any good as a doctor?"

The election poll – no matter the date – should at least throw some light on the contention that the Jewish and Asian communities are both misrepresented, to a great degree, as actual or latent Tories. Psephologists will point to disproportionate Jewish support for Conservatives since 1979. This is reflected in the larger number of Jewish Tory MPs than Labour today – never imagined amid post-war welfarism. Once we made cabinets – now, we're in them.

Commentators may explain maintained Asian endorsement for Labour – notwithstanding a Muslim



Party launched in disillusionment – as basic self-preservation. Save for the millionaire elite, the overwhelming percentage of Asians – through obvious visibility, and the last-in-immigrant-bashing syndrome – have good cause to fear any party which attracts voters with "swamping" paranoia.

At a recent JSG public meeting last week, a young woman informed me that she felt isolated at the Jews' Free School alongside overwhelming reactionaries. Much of this bigotry appears to stem from senior teachers. Targeting non-managerial staff, through the NUT, and school pupils via clubs and other activities can reverse a wretched tide. The youth motion carried at the JSG conference (1991) must prove a springboard for action to educate and organise mounting numbers of young Jews fed up with being neglected or patronised. Optimism may be gleaned from the truth – compared to the version published in the *Evening Standard*

magazine – over teenage Jews' late-night gatherings on north London streets. Ruth Lukom's article in our magazine allowed Louise, from Radlett, to refute parents' diatribes against black "muggers". The challenge facing the JSG is to persuade Louise and hordes like her to join us and unite with their black friends against new wave Nazis.

This is not to give up on Zionists in Habonim or the Union of Jewish Students. As ex-members of the former organisation, plenty of JSG members can harness inside knowledge to engage their successors on issues like war crimes and the environment. In the first UJS Arts Festival last year its play on Israel did not even make a cursory reference to Palestinian demands. But, in the aftermath of the Gulf conflict, we could feed off current pressures for peace by seeking fresh dialogue. At the opposite end of the age spectrum, AJEX, too, could be cultivated in a drive to convict the guilty for genocide. Through personal contact with retired Jews in JACS, we can make alliances on pensions, community care, and the health service. Marxists who spurn religion may yet strike a chord with United and Federation Synagogue goers – leave aside Reform and Progressive – over the moral case for a fair deal in Nablus, as well as Nottingham. And, with women priests forecast in the Anglican church, our weight thrown behind orthodox Jewish women, pursuing equality, might pay dividends. It could speed advances in this denomination on matters such as reproduction and sexual orientation.

We should deploy more open media vehicles for these new initiatives. The new editorship at the *Jewish Chronicle*. The daily phone-ins – attracting Jews across the classes – on *Spectrum's* community broadcasts. Driving through London recently, I saw a man wearing a placard on his front, which read: "The government knows how the brain works." On his back, another one said: "They should realise we all have the same intelligence." Those who treat everyone in this spirit can make class our servant – not master – in the Jewish and wider communities. □

## Dimensions of socialism– Herbert Marcuse

Benjamin Franks

Few philosophers have interpreted the world so poignantly in such stormy times, and fewer still have been so committed in trying to change the world, than Herbert Marcuse.

Born in Berlin in 1898, the son of a successful textile businessman, Marcuse's comfortable and tolerant early life was characteristic of the turn of the century German middle class to which he belonged. Both his parents were Jewish, but the Marcuse household was secular rather than religious, following in the "tradition" of emancipation through assimilation. However, being born a Jew in that historical epoch was bound to have a marked effect on Marcuse's life and philosophical development.

In 1917 Marcuse joined the "party of the workers", the Social Democratic Party (SPD), essentially as a protest against the First World War, to which he had just been conscripted as a German soldier, and began to read books and pamphlets on political theory.

By the end of the war Marcuse had become a revolutionary and an active supporter of Rosa Luxemburg. He stood with Luxemburg and the Spartacist insurrectionists, an armed militant in Berlin Alexanderplatz drawing sniper fire. However, his youthful radicalism was cut short when the German revolution failed. The revolt effectively ended with the murders of Luxemburg and her comrade, Karl Liebknecht. Fifty years later, Marcuse continued to blame this event on the first political party he had joined; the SPD had employed the nationalistic *freikorps* to crush the socialist revolutionaries.

The murders of his friends made Marcuse suspicious of reformist political organisations in general and the SPD in particular:

*"Since 1918 I have always been hearing of left force within the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and I have continually seen these forces move more and more to the right until nothing left was left in them. You see that I am at least not very convinced by this idea of some kind of radical work within the party."*

The crushing of one group of radicals by another group of socialists using fascistic methods was a recurring phenomenon throughout Marcuse's life; with Trotsky's Red Army crushing the Kronstadt rebellion (1921), and Russian tanks in Hungary (1956) and again in Czechoslovakia (1968).

The events of 1918-1919, culminating in 1933 with the destruction of the Weimar republic, and the repression rather than liberation which resulted from Russian Bolshevism critically informed two

central concerns in Marcuse's philosophy: firstly, how radical parties and groups fail in their liberatory intentions – "Communist parties play the historical role of legal opposition 'condemned' to be non-radical" – and, secondly, why liberal democratic government tends towards repression and totalitarianism, what Marcuse termed "reasonable democratic unfreedom".

He developed these concerns in social philosophy at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, which Marcuse joined in 1932. His colleagues there not only shared similar Marxist interests, but also generally had similar Jewish middle-class social backgrounds. It was because of their leftist bent and ethnic origins that the institute's members were forced to flee from Germany only a few months after Marcuse had joined. Marcuse left Europe a couple of days before the "Night of the Long Knives".

In New York, the Frankfurt Institute was reconstructed under the name of the International Institute for Social Research. Under the directorship of Max Horkheimer they continued their studies into the roots of authoritarianism. This area of enquiry became known as *Critical Theory*.

One authoritarian current recognised by Marcuse was the tendency towards technological domination. As modern technology becomes more pervasive, the method of thinking and social behaviour, including that of protest, is restricted. This repression of opposition is partly due to technology, because of its expense, being available to the capitalists. As a result scientific research is geared specifically for their purposes; hence the development of computer surveillance to protect their property and profits from real or imagined threats. But there was also a more subtle and disturbing side to technological domination.

As a society becomes more dependent on automation for the production of necessary goods, the more dependent individuals become on the technicians that maintain the machines. So rather than mechanisation being the medium of liberation, as proposed by Marx in *The German Ideology*, people become reliant on an increasingly powerful technical elite.

As the machine process of repetitive standardised actions become more prominent, there is less opportunity for the individual to impose his/her own desires and capacities on the production process. Marcuse's great fear was that the more computers entered society and imposed themselves between individuals, the less room there was for meaningful protest.



The book which developed this theory, *One Dimensional Man*, and an earlier text, *Eros and Civilisation*, fusing Marxism with Freudian psychoanalysis, gained Marcuse greatest attention and a readership primarily within the student movement of the 1960s. The press claimed that Marcuse's critique of Soviet-style Communism (most notably in his work *Soviet Marxism*) and western democratic society inspired the students to riot in 1968.

Marcuse rejected this accolade as leader or guru of the students, claiming that the students did not need leading. The frightened establishment, however, insisted on naming Marcuse, rather than the injustices arising daily in society, as the prime mover in the student revolts, a move undertaken partly to discredit the student protests by suggesting that they were controlled by an evil (Jewish) professor, and partly to discredit Marcuse by implying that he was a manipulator of youth. Rather than distancing himself from the protests, Marcuse gave lectures to those students in occupations. These experiences are reflected in *An Essay on Liberation*, where Marcuse argues that,

while the students were not the revolutionary class, their actions were progressing toward a more liberatory society.

Identified as an active radical rather than the more common academically impotent, house-trained university Marxist, Marcuse was singled out for attack. At home in California he started to receive death threats and correspondence from groups like the "Minutemen" and the Ku Klux Klan. Less physical but nevertheless harmful attacks also came from respected academics, such as Alasdair MacIntyre who scathingly claimed that "what Marcuse invites us to repeat is part of the experience of Stalinism...", a thesis betraying a systematic misreading of Marcuse's writings, but widely acclaimed by the orthodox left. These allegations succeeded and, by the time of his death in 1979, Marcuse's reputation had declined.

Whenever writing specifically on antisemitism or Judaism, it is possible to detect a Jewish content in his unwavering desire for human liberation. As Barry Katz suggests, Marcuse was a "non-Jewish Jew, a living vehicle of the historical cultural and moral tradition of Judaism". □

# LETTERS

## UNION JEWS

Adam Lent's profile of British Jews (*Jewish Socialist* No 22) was a welcome challenge to stereotypes promoted by both antisemites and some Jews. However, one of Adam's points needs to be expanded: "The coming recession is already hitting the lower middle-class and upper working-class especially hard... The majority of Jews reside in this sector and, as such, are already experiencing a downturn in their financial welfare."

This sector can be divided into two broad groups. One consists of those working in areas like education, local government and social services, and tends to be ignored by those who assume Jews are accountants or estate agents. Many working in these areas are unionised and active in resisting government attacks on services.

The other, probably larger, group consists of Jews in so-called "typically Jewish jobs", often working for small, private firms in the financial or service sectors. These occupations are not as middle-class as some presume. Those working for estate agents are often closer to low-paid clerical workers than yuppies.

The predominance of Jews in these occupations is so important because they are at the centre of the "new working-class", which thrived under

Thatcher. The changing make-up of that class is also significant: Jewish women—sometimes under less family pressure to capture "high-powered" jobs—are often in low-paid clerical or secretarial work.

But, as the labour movement learnt to its cost during the last decade, those working in these areas rarely view themselves as working class. Instead, they are non-unionised and divorced from labour movement activity.

Among younger people this is often reinforced by lack of labour movement culture carried through our families. Beguiled by the "success ethic", many Jews have left notions of solidarity and collectivism back in the East End slums. My teenage sister feared being made redundant from her first job after some colleagues were sacked. I suggested a union might help. "What's a union?" she responded.

Wedge between the BMW adverts, news stories in the *Jewish Chronicle* reveal increasing financial difficulties faced by Jews, and expanding workloads for Jewish welfare agencies.

The JSG needs to respond to these trends. But how? We need to discuss how our limited resources can be used to offer an alternative vision to the wider Jewish community.

Clifford Singer  
London N16

## SMASH SLOGANS

*Jewish Socialist* can be relied upon to publish stimulating articles, which can vary enormously in opinion. I particularly refer to Adam Lent's article (JS22), especially his last paragraph:

"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."

This is an excellent suggestion, but completely contradicts the last paragraph of "Where We Stand" (back cover JS): "We support a socialist solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict..."

Can anyone tell me what a "socialist solution" is? Do they mean USSR-type, Cuban-type, Burma-type, or the 1945 British-type? Of course, the answer will be no. We have become used to political jargon and, in order to be seen as pure, in comes the word "socialist".

Large sections of the Jewish community would accept the last paragraph in "Where We Stand" but not the unknown "socialist solution", with all its connotations. I have had enough of solutions to last me a lifetime!

I believe that the vast majority of people in the labour movement refuse to discuss what is meant by socialism because of the enormous changes in the world in the last few years. All the certainties have gone.

Those who use the meaningless jargon are people who have been talking to themselves for years.

It is now imperative, especially for the Jews, to seek pluralistic politics and to avoid narrow, sectarian positions. Of course, continue and encourage discussion but widen and broaden it.

I have the most profound respect and admiration for Jewish Socialists' Group activists, who often lay themselves open to abuse and physical attacks. All I hope is that these brave and courageous actions are not frittered away and become

marginalised, like so many far-left groups. Best wishes to you all and many thanks for giving up your time to produce such a smashing magazine.

Barney Lewis  
Northampton

## MIRROR IMAGE

It's a great pleasure to be able to contribute to *Jewish Socialist* (page 21). I have always been excited by the breadth of the articles and the way in which they have mirrored so closely the concerns of Southall Black Sisters. For instance, among many others, articles on nationalism and identity and, unexpectedly, an account of disaffected young people.

Over the years, I have come across members of the Jewish Socialists' Group in various anti-racist and anti-fundamentalist campaigns—in Brent, in the early '80s, when I first came to live in Britain, and in anti-deportation campaigns with JSG members who helped me disentangle the bewildering strands and positions of politicians and community leaders.

Since then, I have worked with JSG members in Women Against Fundamentalism. I see this as a way to break down the sterile and restrictive politics of identity and try to build a common analysis which does justice to our individual traditions—both cultural and political.

Gita Sahgal  
London N4

# Jews and the Marxist question

*National Liberation* by Nigel Harris  
I B Tauris (£24.95)

National and ethnic identities and the political movements that represent them play a prominent part in shaping world affairs. Indeed, events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent, reflect a new round of struggles for national liberation, ethnic minority rights and self-determination which all too often demonstrate the "unacceptable face" of that struggle—of chauvinism, discrimination and internecine violence. For socialists, these renewed tensions in turn renew the challenge to interpret and analyse phenomena which have caused so much agonising and dispute on the left over the past 150 years and develop new strategies. The situation of Jewish people—in the Soviet Union, in Israel and as migrants from one territory to another—is closely bound up with these broader movements and the responses to them.

A succession of tracts and treatises has come from Marxists and Marxist groups dealing with the general question of nations and nationalism, and with the "particular" case of the Jewish people. This question is treated as a topic that needs to be "ironed out" of any socialist analysis leading to the final emancipation of all humanity from exploitation and oppression. Such an ironing out follows those well-worn (and vulgar) materialist propositions on the nature of "Jewishness" (or ethnicity, nationality, or gender) as the temporary and transient by-products of changing modes of production and class relations. All such divisive manifestations of class societies will eventually (and deservedly) be ended by the assimilation of sectional divisions of human beings into the "universal class".

Nigel Harris's *National Liberation* is far removed in style, scope and intention from such superficial

and tendentious treatments. The author is an independent intellectual, an academic with a long and consistent record of work and publication on this issue. This book is a continuation of previous works seeking to explore and explain the tensions between the idea and operation of national economies and societies, and the logic of "global capitalism". Harris aims to separate fact from fantasy in the thinking and actions of governments, intellectuals and activists concerned with the "national question" in political, economic and social policy. In particular, he tries to illuminate the origins and limits of Marxist thought and practice which has tried to combine an uncompromising secular internationalism with support for national liberation.

The first section of the book, on Marxism and Nationalism, focuses on Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, tracing the main lines of interaction between ideas and events from Marx and Engels through Luxemburg and the Austro-Marxists to Lenin and Stalin. Part II, the Russian Experiences in the 20th century, and Part III, on Asia, mainly China and the Indian sub-continent, continue and broaden the story. These three sections are a valuable resource, packed with information, observation and argument carried on at a great pace over a very wide and detailed canvas, and conveying a real sense of both the continuities and the decisive breaks in the socialist struggles in a variety of national questions. The chapter on the current contradictions of "economic" nationalism in an increasingly unified capitalist world economy is a sophisticated treatment of both the realities and the (often vicious) absurdities in the relations of national states and the policies of



their governments faced with world market trends, international capital movements and, most of all, labour migration (immigration) issues.

### The viability of nationalism

Any serious account of Marxist and socialist thought on the national question(s) must deal with the issues raised by the nature, position and demands of the Jews as a people rather than of Jews as individual citizens. In the preface, Harris promises to offer "fresh insights" by confronting the central issue: the long-term viability of nationalism in an increasingly integrated world. While in many areas he fulfils this promise, like many others, and with devastating consequences, the Jewish question finds him intellectually bankrupt.

It is instructive to find that this issue appears under the chapter heading "Perverse National Liberation". Here the perversity of the "national" movement of the Jews, that is Zionism, is treated as the most famous case of a species of "liberations" irrevocably undermined by their "brute oppression of minorities in the name of national self-determination of the majority". Thus the Zionists are said, en bloc, to stand in the same relation to Palestinians as Americans to Red Indians, Boers to black South Africans, Serbians to Albanians and the rest. The result was that as an "imperialist" creation, "for Zionism, British military power was decisive: without it Zionism would have been extinguished, and this would have made possible a common movement of Palestinian nationalism combining Arabs, Jews and Christians". There is the clearest implication that this would have been not only a more "natural", but also a more humane and "progressive" outcome. This is a definite falling off in standards of rigorous reasoning and originality of perception in the treatment of Zionism and the Israeli state, though there is no quarrel about either the external imperialist connections or the internal colonial occupation and oppression maintained by that state.

Far more important in the treatment of the Jewish question (and national questions in general) is what comes under the heading "Jewishness". For example: "...with the increased opportunities for assimilation that came after the Enlightenment, the definition of a Jew became a problem." The definition of Jewishness as a religious faith "came to exclude the overwhelming majority of those who called themselves Jewish ... (and) in all respects except religion, Jews are identical to non-Jews in the countries where they live... There is no (Jewish) culture or language in common. Never has a group which claimed to be one people covered such heterogeneity."

The definitive position is put as follows:

*In practice, European non-Jews originally defined, and subsequently redefined, Jewishness by*

"with devastating consequences the Jewish question finds him intellectually bankrupt"

'As a group ... "Jews" do not exist, but are the figments and fragments of specific class structures'

*determining the conditions of life of those who were called Jews, by preventing or permitting assimilation, and forcing or dissolving a separate communal existence. Non-Jews did not exist as a single force, but as a complicated structure of classes, within which Jews played an important, albeit involuntary, role in securing the power of some interests at the expense of others. As with all oppressed minorities, it is the social and political need of the majority which demarcates the boundary and the internal nature of the minority and enforces membership. The needs of the gentiles would have obliged them to invent the Jews if they had not existed.*

*However, given the overwhelming role of the context, it would have been less than human if at least some of those persecuted Jews had not come to feel that they must possess something in common which explained the hideous character of their oppression. It is always a temptation, faced with persecution, to blame oneself; at least such blame gives one a vital role in the action, and preserves a sense, even if mistaken, that there is some order of justice in the world.*

Here then is the "rational" resolution of the Jewish question. As a group, a common people, "Jews" do not exist but are the figments and fragments of specific class structures, whose shape and conflicts determine the need to create and reinforce persecuted minorities, or alternatively abolish the need and thus the historical viability of such identifiable groups. The "(un)reality" of Jewishness, and the "internal nature" of the Jewish people is just an instrumental (but necessary) mystification, and internalised acceptance, of the logic of oppressed minority status. Since no common religious, linguistic or territorial bond provides evidence of identity, there is only the "material reality" of distinct class roles and relations, which can allow no overarching commonality of interests or identity.

There is a great deal of work which would illustrate the inadequacy of this conception of material and social "realities" as applied to the Jewish people. Harris refers to the writings of Abram Leon, Ilan Halevy and Lenny Brenner, but also draws on Maxine Rodinson and even the liberal Jewish historian, Simon Dubnow. Much of this ground has been undercut by David Hillel-Ruben (in the *Socialist Register* 1982), who shows that in the whole of Jewish history the "internal nature" of the Jewish people and its various communities has been moulded as much by the internal dynamics of demography, ethnicity, religion, secular culture, economic position, class, linguistic and institutional conflict, as by the variable pressures of non-Jewish societies and state policies. What is more, the range and heterogeneity of the Jewish people do not preclude an identifiable and shared set of traditions and organisational forms, even in the midst of conflicts over authenticity, authority and assimilation.

We need to deal specifically with the position Harris presents insofar as it contributes to the continuing Marxist (mis)understanding of the "Jewish question". But we also need to go beyond this to examine the universal implications of this position. The paragraphs quoted above display the chasm that separates Marxists' aim to promote the socialist project and the real circumstances in which that project must be grounded. Even Harris's sophisticated account founders on the contradiction of a materialist analysis which does not comprehend essential components of the material reality it is trying to interpret and act on.

This contradiction is further highlighted in the Introduction, on the nature of nationalism, and in the concluding comments on its past and future. Here, Harris reflects on nationalism and national liberation taking the form of competing national states in the light of the logic of global capitalism. The many attempts to give separate status to national identity are seen as misguided and mystifying; beyond that are those deliberately managed mythologies, opportunistically created by those struggling for, or in charge of, class interests and state power.

This treatment of the "material factors determining the emergence and continuation of nationalism" is itself a disabling combination of mystifying method and moral fable. The analysis is simply incapable of illuminating or analysing the object of its concern, for it cannot encompass the real material factor of national (or ethnic) identity: a factor that is a "collective cultural product" involving shared and recognised sentiments, symbols, allegiances, interpretations that are founded on historical and current experiences and reference points.

### Hidden agenda

What we are left with instead is a "flat earth" conception of material and social realities, where the only legitimate actors are the carriers of class consciousness, or those who can at least be associated with a class in the national and global system of competitive capitalist relations. The "system" itself is ineluctably driving individuals, classes and nations, by the forces of competition, to identities and actions that correspond with "causes" produced by the logic of the system. All of this is presented in impeccably empirical terms, yet we end up with a classical mechanistic and evolutionary vision worthy of those structural Marxists like Althusser who would be regarded by Harris as heretical idealists.

Once we become sceptical of such an analysis in which certain central facts are treated as fictions, we can perceive the hidden agenda of moral preference and exhortation in Harris's work. Despite his careful consideration of two centuries of appalling experience to the contrary, Harris still

"we are left with ... a 'flat earth' conception of material and social realities"

"he seems unable to escape from the ... tradition that imprisons all ... efforts to deal with the national question"

believes in the priority and privilege of the "universal class", and the necessary ending of all other demarcations in human society that reinforce the barriers to the emancipation of a "universal humanity".

The notion of a universally applicable law of capitalist class relations and material conditions as the exclusive arbiter of people's interests and destinies leads inevitably to a truly comical incomprehension of collective identities. This "commodity fetishism" view of social life and aspirations allows Harris to offer the following preliminary observations on the question of national liberation in the Soviet Union:

*Each separate (nationalist) struggle covered (up) a vast diversity of different issues. The Tajiks attacked what they saw as an invasion of Armenian refugees jumping the queue to gain access to desperately scarce housing – so the answer to nationalism was a housing policy. Estonians and Armenians opposed the siting of polluting nuclear power stations in their midst – so nationalism required an environmental response (my emphasis).*

Such statements are the most clearly preposterous reductions of national identity, aspirations, and struggle to the terms of material economic advantage, offered to us by an author who is otherwise a careful and precise analyst of economic and ideological relations.

These passages point up the fundamental divorce of any socialist project based upon such positions from the felt lives, energies, commitments and struggles of peoples in every age and condition. Harris is as informed, articulate and principled as any current exponent of these issues from a Marxist perspective, yet in the end he seems unable to escape from the classical tradition that imprisons all creative efforts to deal with the national, and especially the Jewish, question.

So crippling has this analysis been to both socialist theory and practice that a more radical response is called for. New views on Marxism and the Jewish question are clearly required, as are critiques of the classical contributions such as Harris's. But this is not sufficient. What is clear and urgent is the need to infuse the socialist debate and practice with new views arising out of a consideration of the Marxist (or socialist) question from the standpoint of one ethnic and national grouping, the Jewish people. Turning the terms of the debate on their head, the question becomes: can we forge a view of the self-emancipation of people, individually and collectively? Can we help to construct a self-organised association of people and communities that will address the real material plurality of chosen and celebrated identities, such that people everywhere in every condition can recognise and participate in the self-definition of universal emancipation? **MICHAEL SAFIER**



# Own Golem

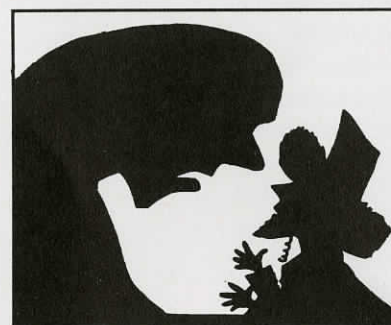
*The Golem, Theater Brostowska, The Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, London*

Theater Brostowska makes quite a claim for itself. Founded in 1990, its publicity material places the company in the tradition of the Yiddish roving troupes which flourished in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but dwindled into near oblivion after World War II. Their aim is to perform "plays and musicals pertaining to the Jewish way of life, thereby fostering and promoting a greater understanding of the Jewish historical experience."

The legend tells the story of a superhuman creature, the Golem, created from earth in order to help a beleaguered Jewish community ward off antisemitism. There are a multitude of stories about him and his creator, Rabbi Loeb. This production replays several of them, both comic and serious.

Covent Garden is well known for its street theatre and mime.

The four Theater Brostowska actors wore uniform, dark men's suits and white face make-up. They looked rather like refugees from the street theatre outside. The setting, Prague, was represented by a stage open on three sides, festooned with modern-day washing and stripy bedspreads, which later did somewhat incongruous double service as



prayer shawls. The anachronistic washing and non-period costume were presumably meant to pinpoint the timelessness of the story. However, combined with the mime-like greasepaint and the stylised acting, this had the opposite effect.

The production was devised by the performers and, according to the programme, "within the

narrative framework was improvised anew at each performance". This approach fared well at some points, letting the actors respond to audience reaction, but backfired at other times, especially when the actors had the freedom to repeat or exaggerate anything for a laugh. This seems a great temptation with theatregoers who react hysterically at every "Oy vey".

In addition, the costumes and mannerisms reinforced an impression of Jews as strange people in funny clothes. This was not helped by the bedspreads nor by the golem's mask, which resembled something which had escaped from the ET film set.

The play was framed within the context of the blood libel that Jews use the blood of Christian children to make Passover matzo. Yet the quasi-Brechtian style of the production had the unfortunate and probably unintended effect of making the story seem distant rather than immediate. It also meant the audience could interpret antisemitism as something remote and historical – not a current issue.

MARIAN SHAPIRO

# Dangers of reunification

*My Lovely ... Shayna Maidel by Barbara Lebow*

There are all too few occasions when one is moved emotionally in the theatre. The subject of the Holocaust will always have a searing effect on us – at least as long as it is within living memory, but *My Lovely ... Shayna Maidel* (a title which does not reflect the seriousness of the play) explored a facet of the aftermath of the Holocaust that I have not seen dealt with before.

The play tells of the Weiss family, split up by the cataclysmic events in Europe. Mordechai, the tyrannical father (John Burgess), and Rose, his younger daughter (Laurel Lefkow), escaped from Poland to America before the War. Lusie, his older daughter (Anita Dobson), was left behind and survived a concentration camp,

eventually to turn up in New York, her mother dead and her husband's fate unknown.

I have often wondered how my own parents coped, arriving in this country with three small children from Latvia just prior to the First World War, without language, money or home. This play gave me an insight into their lives and the lives of their relatives who had arrived several years before them. In *Shayna Maidel* the American life Rose has struggled to build seems endangered by the arrival of her traumatised East European sister wearing the clothes she was given on liberation and speaking only Yiddish. Lusie, having found her family, then tries to fit into a jigsaw that had been transformed since they lived

together in Poland. And throughout this process the father still tries to wield power as though the situation had not changed between him and his newly found daughter.

Anita Dobson gives an exceptionally sensitive yet powerful performance. She managed to evoke Jewishness in every respect – this happens rarely. But her husband, Duvid (Peter O'Brien), was unconvincing, particularly in flashback which was otherwise used effectively to portray both the historical context and the chasm so deep between past and present and between people who once shared their lives that you are left wondering if they can ever share a future.

ZELDA BARD

# Changing places

In 1957 Poland lifted its ban on emigration and gave Jews automatic permission to leave for Israel. A large proportion of Polish Jews took this opportunity and many of those remaining left in 1968. Eva Hoffman's parents had been the sole members of their respective families to survive the war. Shortly afterwards they had attempted unsuccessfully to get exit visas. They felt a justifiable ambivalence about Poland: "home in a way, but... also hostile territory." In 1959, two years after the lifting of the ban, her family left Poland for Canada. Eva Hoffman was 14.

The book is a moving account of the family's uprooting and of the transition, not always easy and only intermittently successful, from a known but hostile culture to a more friendly but unfamiliar one. In examining her own experience as an immigrant, Eva Hoffman provides extremely perceptive insights into the feelings of dislocation and alienation experienced in moving from one culture to another. On arriving in Canada, the family has a long train journey before they arrive at their final destination. Not knowing about dining cars,

they have brought suitcases of food with them. The immense differentiation in prices between Poland and Canada also bewilders them: "Two dollars could buy a bicycle or several pairs of shoes in Poland. It seemed like a great deal to pay for four bowls of soup."

One of the earliest and most significant changes is the Americanisation of the children's names by their new class teacher. The Polish Ewa becomes the American Eva, her sister Alina, after some deliberation, becomes "Elaine". Eva Hoffman describes the moment: "...nothing much has happened except a small, seismic, mental shift... Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. We walk to our seats, into a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves."

The sense of bewilderment was mutual. To the American teenagers who are suddenly her peers, images of Communist Poland are

mediated through the language of the cold war. They see "a dark, Plutonian realm in which a spectral citizenry walks bent under the yoke of oppression. The very word 'Communism' seems to send a frisson up their spines, as if they were in a horror movie; it's the demonic unknown."

Eva Hoffman relates her experiences of struggling with a new culture in a moving but entirely unsentimental way. Her individual story encapsulates problems and issues common to immigrant experience. The consequences of immigration, belonging neither to the new culture nor the old, are not just seen in terms of loss and alienation. On a visit to Poland in 1979 she found a culture and friends as alien in some ways as her adopted country. The immigrant experience is also positive since it bestows a unique perspective: "Because I have learned the relativity of cultural meanings on my skin, I can never take any one set of meanings as final... I'll probably always find myself in the chinks between cultures and subcultures... It's not the worst place to live..."

MARIAN SHAPIRO

*Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language by Eva Hoffman, Minerva, £5.99*

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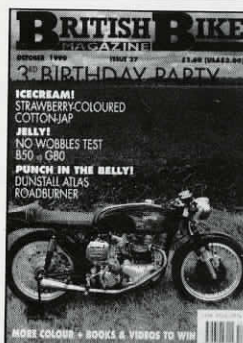
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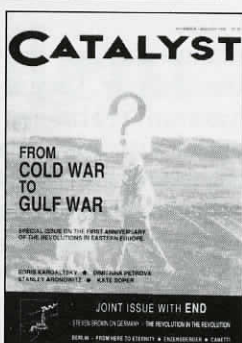


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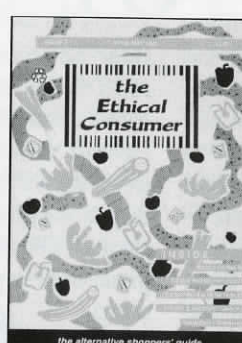
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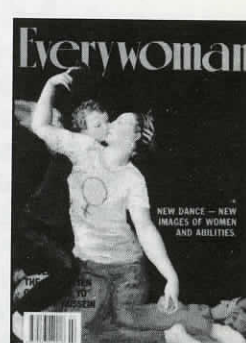
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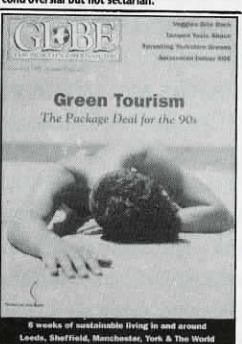
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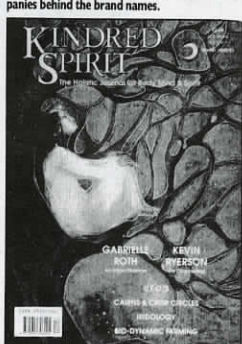
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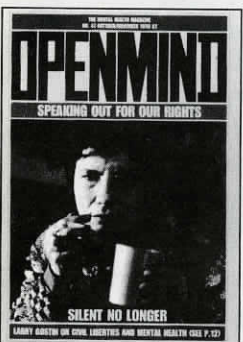
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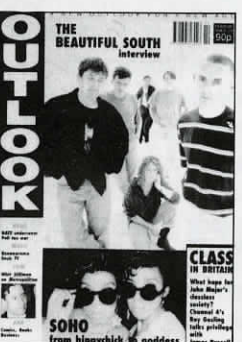
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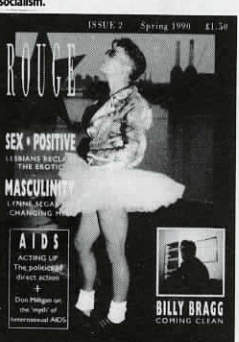
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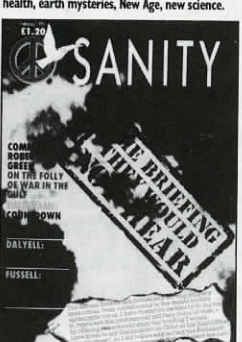
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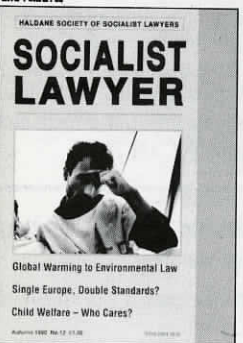
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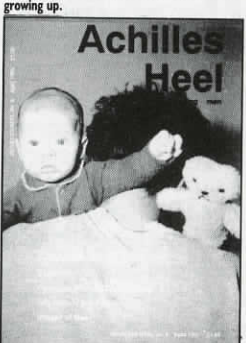
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