

JEWISH SOCIALIST

— The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group —

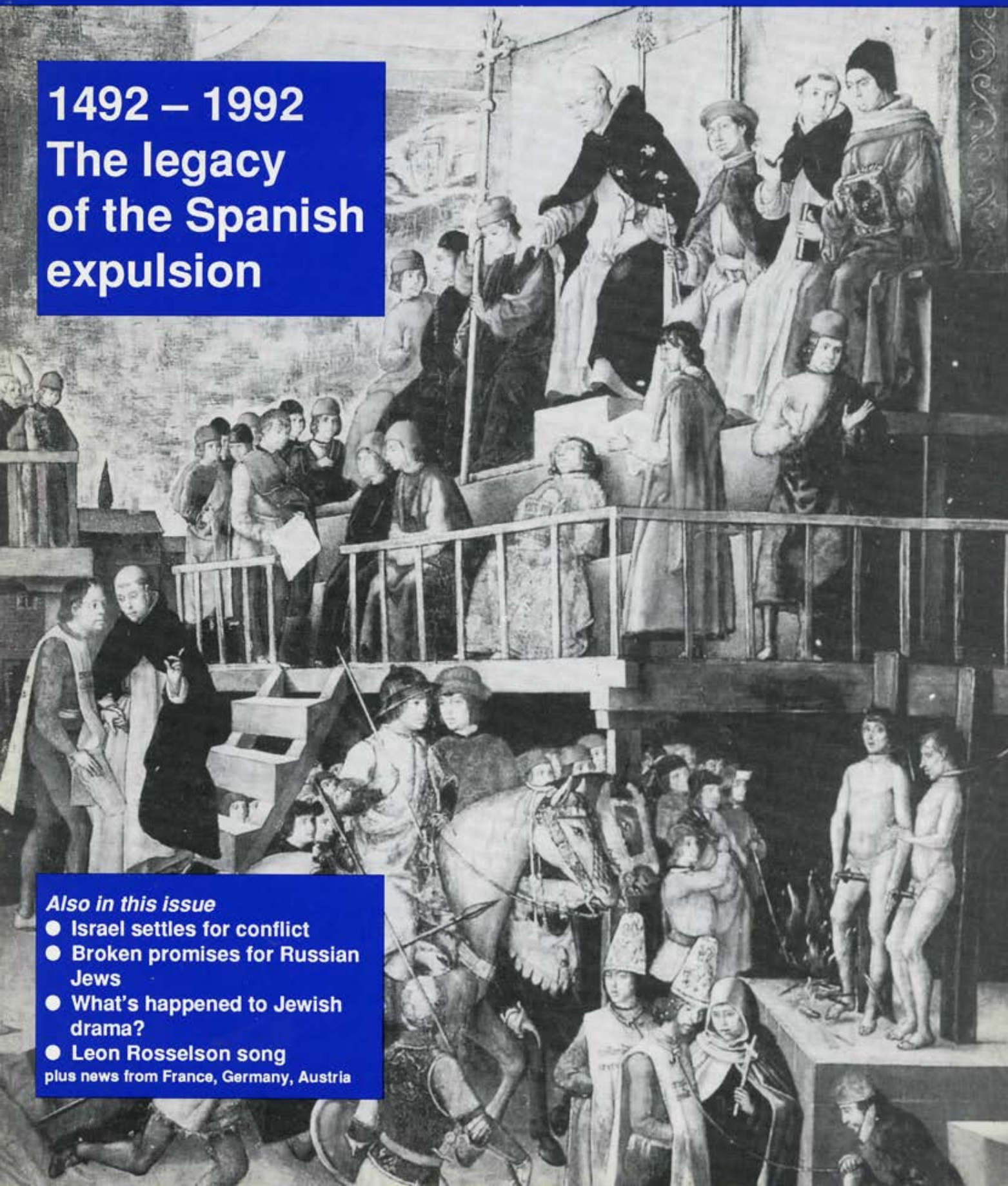
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**BUMPER
SILVER JUBILEE
ISSUE**

1492 – 1992 The legacy of the Spanish expulsion

Also in this issue

- Israel settles for conflict
 - Broken promises for Russian Jews
 - What's happened to Jewish drama?
 - Leon Rosselson song
- plus news from France, Germany, Austria



Editorial

AS 1991 drew to its climactic close, socialists were left to reflect on the abiding image of the red flag with hammer and sickle being lowered from the Kremlin and hurriedly replaced by the Russian national(ist) one. The red flag, which once symbolised hope to millions across the globe, had become a symbol of totalitarian control, and few workers in the former Soviet Union will have mourned its removal. Nor can we regret the collapse of a system which distorted the beautiful socialist ideal beyond recognition. By the same token, though, we cannot rejoice in all the new freedoms – the freedom to starve, to be unemployed and wasted by the chaotic and destructive laws of the market. Our thoughts are with the struggling independent socialists in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and we hope, with them, that one day their nationalist flags and ours will be replaced with newly woven red flags which will symbolise a truly international and democratic socialism.

If events in eastern Europe are reviving our sense of history, the Columbus Quincentennial will refresh another set of historical memories and challenge us to reassess a global order still based on conquest, occupation and exploitation. The curse of Columbus lives on in the everyday reality of indigenous peoples still struggling

for freedom and equality. And it has left its mark on the Jews, as we see in Nan Rubin's extraordinary article on the community in New Mexico (p24), and Michael Heiser's perceptive examination of how Spanish society is facing its Jewish past (p21). We hope that 1992 will herald a new voyage of discovery for ordinary people on the path to liberation from all who oppress and exploit them.

Never mind 500th anniversaries, we've got a special occasion to mark too. We are delighted to present to you our Silver Jubilee issue of *Jewish Socialist* full of articles that embody our unique contribution to socialist and Jewish life. The road to this milestone has been paid for not just in blood, sweat and tears, but with hard cash in hard times. We are immensely grateful to you, our readers, for the continuing support and encouragement you give us. But we must appeal to you for even more support. In this special issue we have provided our subscribers with a positive and practical way of benefiting the magazine. We have included an insert asking you to take out a subscription for a friend at a special discount price. We assume that if you like what you read, you will want at least one other person to share your pleasure. Your small individual contributions can make an enormous difference. We look forward to hearing from you. Meanwhile, enjoy the magazine.

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Echoes of Vichy

Nearly 3,000 people marched to a rally in Paris on 17 October, to oppose racist attacks and to honour the memory of over 200 Algerian immigrant workers murdered by police in the French capital 30 years ago.

On 17 October 1961, while France's bloody war in Algeria staggered its way towards the negotiating table, and that country's independence, about 50,000 Algerians took to the streets of Paris to defy a racist curfew then in force. Police opened fire on their peaceful demonstration, killing several people.

That was just the start. Rampaging police threw injured and wounded Algerians into the Seine. About 150 bodies were seen floating downriver, some with their hands tied. Some shocked policemen went to the offices of the left wing *France-Observateur* and told of seeing 50 people killed in the courtyard of the police headquarters. Bodies were also found hanging in the Bois de Boulogne.

About 50,000 Algerians were rounded up and taken to sports stadia that had

been converted into detention centres – just as happened to French Jews during the Occupation. Many were badly beaten, and the injured could get no treatment. Reporters were not allowed in to see the detainees. Mass deportations, and Gaullist press censorship, kept the massacre from being fully reported. A book about it was banned.

Now a new book has come out, *La Bataille de Paris*, by Jean-Louis Einaudi, recalling the horror of those days. No one was ever charged for the Paris murders. But Einaudi says Paris police chief Maurice Papon, who congratulated his men on their conduct, was 'the chief of the murderers'.

This is a further echo of earlier deportations and mass murder, reminding us of the continuity of racism. Papon is very belatedly awaiting trial for the part he is accused of playing as a senior civil servant in the wartime deportation of Bordeaux Jews to the Nazi death camps.

CHARLIE POTTINS

Mid-October 1991. Le Bourget, in the northern suburbs of Paris. The Front National is holding its annual rally. The eleventh 'Red, White and Blue' festival. Some 20,000 supporters are there to hear Jean-Marie Le Pen. In his speech, the FN leader returns to his favourite themes.

Le Pen denounces the decadence he sees in contemporary society, 'this sick, passive France'. He calls for the introduction of government by referendum on certain key issues, a system of 'direct democracy'. The issue he stresses most is immigration and his message is clear: 'France for the French'. Law and order is also high on his agenda: he calls for a referendum on, and advocates the restoration of, the death penalty. He then claims that the FN is being persecuted by the media: the names of (Jewish) journalists are cited. Finally, the cry goes up among the crowd: 'Le Pen for President'. Is France on the brink of fascism?

TONY BLEND (PARIS)

Western own goals

The leader of the French fascist National Front may think twice about making a return visit to Britain after his reception in December.

He was invited by an obscure far-right group, Western Goals UK, to be the guest of honour at their annual dinner.

The dossier was launched at a press conference at the House of Commons chaired by Jeremy Corbyn MP.

On the evening of Le Pen's arrival, 500 anti-fascists hastily gathered outside the Sheraton Hotel in Knights-



Le Pen at London press conference

bridge where Le Pen was staying. Two days later, 2,000 demonstrators assembled outside the Charing Cross Hotel where the Western Goals dinner was being held. They were kept back by police from the main entrance of the hotel but the chants were loud enough to make many a fascist choke over their canapés. Thirteen people were arrested as at one point demonstrators broke through police lines.

Western Goals UK hopes to make inroads into the hard right of the Conservative Party. However, all they produced was a flurry of Conservative politicians falling over themselves to dissociate themselves from Le Pen. Home Secretary Kenneth Baker said that Le Pen, as a Euro-MP, could not be banned but he condemned all the French National Front stood for. Even Lord Sudely, the vice-president of Western Goals UK and a Conservative peer, who had been the focus of an earlier demonstration by CAFF, let it be known that he was not meeting Le Pen.

The Campaign brought forward publication of a well-researched dossier tracing the growth of the French National Front and the fascist past allegiances of many of its leading members. For example, Le Pen himself was once found guilty of selling SS

Le Pen had obviously had enough. Rumoured walk-outs in Brick Lane and Bermondsey the following day did not take place. He slipped out of the hotel at 4am and flew back to France.

However, the danger posed by the French National Front and by its counterparts in Germany and Belgium is ever present, whether Le Pen is here or not. Following the success of the demonstrations against Le Pen, CAFF hopes to expand its remit to become a Campaign against Fascism in Europe.

MIKE HEISER

Further information and copies of the dossier can be obtained from the Campaign against Fascism in France, PO Box 273, London E7.

Tomorrow belongs to whom?

DURING the Cold War years, western Europeans demanded that citizens of the Warsaw Pact countries be allowed to travel freely. Now, with hundreds and thousands of eastern Europeans migrating westwards, Germany's conservative government is looking for ways of creating what some call a new Berlin wall, while a violent minority of neo-Nazis and skinheads attacks foreigners on the streets.

Of Germany's population of 80 million, some 5 million hold foreign passports, of whom fewer than 200,000 live in what used to be the GDR. The figure of 5 million includes relatively well-integrated Turkish and other 'guest workers' and their families, eastern Europeans of German descent, who receive automatic German citizenship, a small number of Russian Jews who are permitted to immigrate, and, the group at the centre of the debate, political refugees and asylum seekers from eastern Europe, Africa and Asia.

The west German constitution includes a clause, added after the Nazi period, which guarantees the politically persecuted a right to asylum. This means that the government must consider every application for asylum and cannot turn people back at the border. During this process, which may take up to 10 months, asylum seekers are distributed throughout the 16 German states where they live in dormitory-type housing, sometimes next door to Germans but often behind barbed wire. Basic needs such as food and clothing are taken care of, but medical care is provided only in extreme cases; asylum seekers receive only a few Deutschmarks of pocket money a day and they need a permit to travel outside their assigned district. Although technically allowed to work, in practice they rarely receive permission to do so.

Most applications for asylum are rejected: the total acceptance rate for 1990 was about 4% (though the rate after appeals is a little higher). Organisations working with foreigners claim that decisions are often arbitrary, but many rejected applicants receive permission to remain in the Federal Republic as 'tolerated' foreigners whose lives would be endangered by deportation. This amounts to temporary asylum and means they can be deported at any time should the government determine a change in conditions in their home country. They are not permitted to work.

The number of people seeking asylum in Germany rose to nearly 200,000 in 1991, with most coming from Rumania, Yugoslavia and Turkey, followed by Iran, Afghanistan and Bulgaria. Members of the departing Soviet armed forces have also sought asylum. Many of these fail to meet the criteria of political persecution which would entitle them to refugee status: Rumanian Gypsies, for example, are seeking to escape both extreme poverty and the increasing non-governmental discrimination they suffer in Rumania, which does not reach the required level of persecution defined by German law.

Conservative politicians have seized upon this 'misuse' of asylum as proof of the need to change the constitution to allow them to reject applicants at the border or at least to accelerate the processing of applications, partly through collecting asylum seekers in central camps, and also to limit their right of appeal. Last year's 'alien law' will reduce the number of 'tolerated foreigners'. Many politicians speak hopefully of a 'European solution' in co-operation with the EC. On another level, the German government has instituted strict visa requirements for Rumanians and will undoubtedly do the same to restrict travel from the former USSR.

Some relatively liberal politicians have suggested a solution which combines tightening up the asylum process and

acknowledging that Germany will continue to be a destination for immigrants, and should create an immigration process which reflects that, with quotas, contingents and simplified access to German or dual citizenship. But a more conservative position than this prevails, with the Christian Democratic Party attempting to co-opt growing anti-foreigner tendencies among the electorate, and the Social Democrats afraid to oppose those tendencies openly.

Most attacks on foreigners have occurred in west Germany, where polls show anti-foreigner sentiment to be greatest. In the 1980s, over 100,000 guest workers came from Vietnam, Angola and elsewhere into east Germany, and though most citizens had little contact with them, they became the target for young people in the east who were forming skinhead gangs even before the fall of the Wall.

The instability in the east following reunification enabled right-wing violence to grow, which immediately attracted the organised neo-Nazi groups of west Germany which are now established in many cities. West Germany's domestic secret service and politicians have devoted significantly less attention to right-wing than to left-wing groups. With the east German police force in disarray, the government sent in 3,000 police reinforcements from west Germany to clear left-wing squatters from a block of houses in east Berlin, but offered no protection to the targets of the recent right-wing violence.

Many ordinary Germans are starting to protest about this violence. On 9 November, the anniversary of both the fall of the Wall and of the Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938, several hundred thousand people, in cities across the country, demonstrated against anti-foreigner activity. Shortly before that, popular musicians from within and outside Germany had organised a day-long concert entitled 'I'm a foreigner'. The media have publicised the problem, encouraged debate and looked critically at their own role. Television stations have been reprimanded for allegedly paying skinhead gangs to beat up foreigners for the cameras, and the journalists' union, IG Medien, has appealed to its members to deal with the issues responsibly, though the tabloid press continues to promote stereotypes of lazy, criminal asylum seekers. Major television stations recently began a series of public service announcements in support of foreigners, and posters in the subways encourage Germans 'not to look away' when incidents occur.

A government-sponsored group in Berlin, 'Youth Against Violence', is enabling young people to set up dialogue groups, partnerships between asylum seekers and schoolchildren, weekend seminars and poster actions. A private organisation in east Berlin counsels Soviet Jews and Gypsies, co-operates with teachers in educational projects, and works with young people from violent housing estates on the outskirts of Berlin. In Cottbus, members of the city administration, church and welfare organisations, foreigners' groups, young people and the police, meet weekly at a 'Round Table Against Violence'. A group in Leipzig has organised telephone chains to warn of impending riots by violent soccer fans so people can be mobilised to oppose them. In Frankfurt-on-Main, where almost 25% of the population is non-German, foreigners are becoming active in local politics. Everywhere in Germany, churches are offering support and sometimes sanctuary to foreigners and asylum seekers.

The federal government acts only when Germany's image is threatened, but the extent of popular activity offers some hope that the far right will remain a small, if still conspicuous, minority.

BELINDA COOPER (BERLIN)

Dutch cowardice

The Jewish Socialists' Group has urged the Netherlands government to scrap plans to deport more Soviet Jews.

The plea followed the forcible expulsion of 51 Soviet Jews from Holland, including a baby aged eight months and a 78-year-old woman. One man suffered a back injury when he jumped from the second-floor window of a hotel in Eindhoven.

In recent months, 200 Soviet Jews and non-Jews have arrived in the Netherlands from Israel seeking political asylum on the grounds of religious discrimination. Large numbers of Jews who travelled to the Netherlands went originally to Israel because this was their only way to leave the Soviet Union. Many Soviet Jews cannot secure employment, despite professional qualifications. They end up in menial jobs on low pay – or as prostitutes. Denied housing within Israel,

they are directed to occupied land seized from Palestinians.

Dutch police have predicted further deportations. The Israeli ambassador in The Hague, Michael Bawly, approved the action. He told the Under-Secretary of Justice, Aad Kosto, that the Soviet Jews could be deported 'without any consequences'.

The JSG wrote in protest to Joop Hoekman, the Netherlands ambassador in London. It branded as a 'mockery' Holland's decision to force people to return to Israel. The JSG argued that the Dutch government (and others in the Community refusing these people asylum) were undermining Middle East peace efforts, to which the EC was officially committed. Streamlined asylum procedures ignored the damage produced by deportation. These states also ignored the migrants' potential contribution to their new countries.

Austracised!

An opinion poll published in October revealed that one in five Austrians believe that the rights of Jews should be restricted and that the country would be better off without any Jews at all. One in three people prefer not to have a Jew for a neighbour and half of those polled believe Jews are partly responsible for the persecution they suffered. But the poll results are not the hardest evidence of attitudes in Austrian society, and reactions to the publication of the results may have been more significant than the results themselves, writes John Bunzl from Vienna.

Several recent events, including desecrations in the Jewish section of Vienna's largest cemetery, highlight the persistence of unpleasant trends in Austrian society. However, the

lack of public reaction was even more alarming than the outrageous actions themselves. It took the personal initiative of myself and one other Jew and two long weeks of organising before we succeeded in mobilising 8,000 people for a silent protest march. This was an achievement, considering the terrible weather and equally adverse political climate in the run-up to the elections to the Vienna city council. In these elections the rightist Austrian Freedom Party, whose leader openly praised the 'orderly labour policies of the Third Reich', gained almost a quarter of the vote. But this success was not due to antisemitism so much as to the general xenophobia that has followed the breakdown of 'communism' in eastern Europe.

Vanunu is not alone



Stage and screen celebrities joined in a demonstration against the imprisonment of anti-nuclear dissident Mordechai Vanunu outside the Israeli embassy in London.

Among them were actress Julie Christie and Pink Floyd rock star Dave Gilmour (left), pictured with Vanunu's brother, Meir.

The Jewish Socialists' Group took part in the protest over his solitary confinement which followed his revelation of the existence and capacity of Israel's nuclear bomb plant at Dimona.

The group also staged its own demonstration at the embassy two weeks earlier to demand that the Israeli government stop building settlements in the Occupied Territories, which threatened peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

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The Promised Land? Soviet Immigration to Israel. Speaker Elfi Pallis. Meeting organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign on Tuesday 28 January, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Arab and Israeli Women. Speakers include Samar Alami and Sonia Nimr. Meeting organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign on Tuesday 3 March, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

London JSG meeting: 'Religious coercion and Jewish identity – the question of circumcision'. Speakers include Rabbi Sheila Shulman. 7.45pm, Sunday 2 February, Central Club, YWCA, 16 Great Russell Street, London WC2.

Bill stickers will be prosecuted

'Racist jailed

Tony Lecomber, east London organiser of the British National Party, was convicted of causing grievous bodily harm and jailed for three years for attacking a Jewish youth at an underground station. Lecomber, who was imprisoned five years ago for an attempted bomb attack in south London, kicked and beat the youth after seeing him removing BNP stickers.

Observer, 10 Nov 1991

This article marked the end of a case at Snaresbrook Crown Court: a successful prosecution against racist violence and one that made legal history.

The case entered the history books because of the unorthodox method of identification that, in spite of strenuous defence opposition, was accepted by the court. The purpose of this article is not only to describe what happened, but also to explore the factors that made one young man acknowledge and act on his experience, and made his family encourage him.

On 13 October 1990 our son, Arthur, was preparing to leave for a teaching post in Greece. He was doing the rounds of his friends to say goodbye. To this end, he descended the escalator at Gants Hill on his way to Sloane Square. On his way down, he picked off the ubiquitous British National Party stickers enjoining him to 'Love the White Race'. Once seated on a platform bench, he was surrounded and attacked by at least three men. One man stood out, both because he was dressed differently from the others and because he seemed to be in command. This was the man Arthur described to the police as he sat beaten, bloodied and shocked in the casualty department of the local hospital.

Arthur's assault was witnessed, but no one helped him. The station staff refused to descend the escalator to apprehend the villains and no train was stopped to enable Arthur to identify his attackers.



Tony 'Le bomber' Lecomber

There the matter could have rested, and normally would have, because the police seldom pursue these assaults with the diligence they demand. Arthur, however, had other ideas. He decided to challenge the system. He felt he had no other option and, unusually, he won. He was still in shock when, two days after the assault, he contacted a local press reporter to inform him of the attack. His hope was that this action would encourage the publicity necessary to enable witnesses to come forward. He was unsuccessful in this, but the reporter suggested he approach the anti-fascist magazine, *Searchlight*. He looked through their photographs, identified Tony Lecomber, and was then put in touch with Thames News.

It was, indeed, a lucky coincidence that the annual BNP general meeting took place on 13 October 1990. Thames News had been detailed to report it, and had been particularly anxious to film three of the leaders: Edmonds, Lecomber and

Tyndall. As a result they had a picture of Lecomber addressing the assembled crowd. Lo and behold, he was wearing the same clothes that Arthur had described. Arthur obtained the photos and video, and sent them off to British Transport CID. The rest is history. The footnote to this case is that for the first time in a British court of law this means of identification has been used by a victim to nail an assailant.

The days before the hearing were extremely anxious for us. We have an unusual surname and are aware that fascists have a predilection to violence. We were fearful for our safety. Arthur left home to settle somewhere else before the case was heard. We still felt apprehensive. We were particularly anxious about the effect of a 'not guilty' verdict.

A friend who attended the court asked me: 'Didn't you feel afraid of going on with this?' I made some anodyne response. Nevertheless, the question haunted me. Neither I nor any of the family had ever considered that we had an alternative.

To explore our response further, one has only to delve into the history of Jewish experience this century and consider its effect on all those scarred by the collective consciousness that has grown in the wake of the Nazi period.

Some Jewish people had direct experience of the Holocaust. All Jewish people were influenced by it. Young Jews who, by luck, were not trapped in the crucible of Europe in those terrible days still grew up under its shadow. Those of us who grew up in the far-flung corners of the world were still aware that had we lived somewhere else our lives would have been forfeited. There was an implicit feeling that our survival burdened us with a responsibility to the future. Some of us were unwilling to accept the prevailing Jewish ideological construction that the Holocaust was the price to pay for the 'Miracle' of the State of Israel.

We chose, instead, to see this event as a sign of the barbarity to which nations could descend. We chose to

see Jews, not as uniquely singled out, but as representatives of all minority groups placed in a position of total vulnerability when states presume to divert attention from other shortcomings by scapegoating those without power. We recognised that the suffering of our people had no resonance unless it could be as witness to the horrors inflicted by any one on others.

As parents we brought up our children to be aware of, and to challenge, racism and antisemitism. We could not look to the Jewish community of that time, with its stress on downplaying the evils of fascism and the likelihood of its resurgence. It seemed strange that a community which annually reminds its congregants that they were slaves in Egypt had no effective response to make to the greatest cataclysm ever to befall the Jewish people. Neither could we turn to the state education system with its stress on conformity and obedience to authority for support in our endeavour to rear a vigilant generation. Mostly we felt alone and dependent on our own efforts. There was no organisation to provide a blueprint in those days. We were isolated from the mainstream and so, as a result, were our children. It is hard to take on the prevailing ethos, shape it according to one's own interpretation and demand that one's children conform. Argument, not diktat, was our means of instruction. What is ultimately inspiring is that, in spite of the isolation and loneliness to which the children were exposed because of our beliefs, they did not deviate from their commitment to challenging racism and fascism in all its manifestations. They still bear the emotional scars of that time.

Was it worth it? We look at the grotesque revival of a hated ideology in Europe. We see people once again willing to march to a barbaric tune, and we allow ourselves, in spite of everything, a moment of pride in the iron courage of one young man who took up his personal challenge and helped to deliver a public verdict.

DIANA NESLEN

Moving pictures

Those who missed the Jewish Film Festival had a chance to catch up with a couple of its most interesting offerings at the Rio Cinema, Hackney, in December. A *Jewish Socialist* benefit event attracted an audience of 120 for two films with contrasting links with the East End. Set in Spitalfields, Brett Turnbull's *The Golem of Princelet Street* is a modern treatment of the old Yiddish folk tale. A Golem – a clay man brought to life using a magic formula derived from the *Kabbalah* – is made by two unlikely friends: an elderly Jewish recluse and a young Bangladeshi boy.

'Erudite, Kabbalist scholars used to discuss the Golem as a philosophical speculation,' says Brett. 'It became a popular legend when east European pogroms were at their height. Jews recreated the old Rabbi Lev of Prague myth of a Golem of supernatural strength saving the Jews from being framed from blood libels. As a child, I'd rediscovered a version of the story, written in turn-of-the-century Czechoslovakia by Gustav Meyrink, who bowdlerised the folk tale with dabblings into other occult material. Later, in more scientific form, the story became a seed for the Frankenstein story.'

Intending to make the film in the Golem's original setting, Prague's Altneuschul, Turnbull became inspired by the story of an old shoemaker who lived in the attic of a synagogue in Princelet Street. Rodinsky was a self-taught scholar who spent his time painstakingly translating Aramaic, Sumerian, Yiddish and Russian, filling up endless penny notebooks sellotaped together into volumes: 'dictionaries of material'. After his death in 1968, his belongings remained untouched until the late 1980s, when the building was saved from gentrification or bulldozers and turned into a Heritage Centre, using his materials as props. 'I was fascinated by the idea of creating a character based on this strange, romantic, but very lonely old man: a leftover, part of the remnants ... just like a ghost.'

His camera follows the meanderings of Yusuf, a young Asian boy, as he nips through labyrinthine back streets, delivering a suit from his family's sweatshop. Sidetracked into a disused synagogue, he becomes fascinated by its decayed splendour, gradually becoming drawn into its only remaining occupant's life: a fastidious old scholar who tells him the story of the Golem. Using a knife, fork and potato recreation of the Golem as tailor's dummy, he teaches the boy how to make it a miniature suit, imparting mystic words from the *Kabbalah* to bring their creation to life.

Enthralled, the boy leads him to a builder's yard, where they secretly fashion a clay Golem and attempt to bake it with flames. Terrified at the force of his actions, the old man flees, the Golem is desecrated, but Yusuf returns to conjure up a new Golem using the ritual words. Later that night, the old man stumbles out to look for the boy, who has not returned. To his horror, there is movement in the clay pit. Has the Golem returned?

A thread running through the film is the decay of an area plagued by bulldozers tearing down the fabric of its culture. 'Spitalfields used to be 98% Jewish,' says Brett. 'Divided by trade or *shtetl*, every street had its own synagogue, originally Huguenot weaving houses. Financed on a shoestring – shilling donations were recorded on the gallery walls – they were built out into backyards to avoid building regulations. For location, I was drawn to the hidden-away mystery of the Princelet Street synagogue, with its history of housing different immigrant cultures.'

'At the moment, there's an interesting triangle with a collision of forces – three different cultures in opposition: the

Bengalis eking out a living in the sweatshop garment trade, an older generation of still-active Jewish activists with interesting stories to tell, and weektime yuppie residents working the stock market, cashing in on the area's gentrification during the property boom due to its proximity to the city.

'As mystic, philosophical legend, the story deals in the most basic elements of life and death, body and spirit. Within the folk tale, there's also a political spirit transcending hard times. It's important to show people with vulnerabilities dissolving culture barriers: a lonely old man wants to entice a young boy with a story. Because of the boy's enthusiasm, he starts to believe in it himself.'

This was a poignant, multi-layered story with haunting charm and a winning performance from Tanzemm Tariq. If the modern-day analogy with the original Golem myth didn't, for me, resonate satisfactorily, there was enough else in the film to be memorable.

Judy Montell's award-winning *Forever Activists*: stories from the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (she also directed *Rosie the Riveter*), celebrates those idealistic Americans who volunteered to fight alongside Spanish workers in the civil war against Franco's fascists. Three thousand men and women, a high proportion Jewish, joined the Brigade. In 1986, some returned to Spain for the 50th anniversary of the Civil War. This film is a tribute to inspirationally-lived years. Their involvement in the struggle provoked a life-long love affair with the Spanish people. Now in their seventies, they retrace their steps through an olive tree landscape calling up the spirit of Lorca and resistance, meeting local people who still treat them as heroes.



Against a political backdrop of newsreel footage linking their early struggles and marches during the Depression with continuing activism in the present, these longtime activists from the labour movement express their then-prescient view of the emergence of fascism as a forerunner for its spread throughout Europe. Movingly, the film pays tribute to a much-loved black commander: 'He said the only time he felt like a man was when he was in Spain.' On their return (a debatable, tactical decision by the Republicans to withdraw), they met, ironically, with the growing hostility of McCarthyism, branded as 'prematurely antifascist' political subversives, initially banished from active service at the front during WW2, though the only ones with combat experience.

If 'problematic', to quote a member of the audience – the film presented a romanticised view that didn't show conflicts within the Republican movement between the Communist Party, POUM and anarchists – at least two participants talked of their painful decision to leave the CP in 1956 after the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary, continuing as unaligned left activists. It was only later that their socialist idealism and experience could enjoy full resurgence, during the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements.

These veteran fighters were prepared to put their lives on the line for a humanitarian cause they believed in, and are still campaigning into their old age, imparting their energy to new generations of young American people.

Guests at the screening were East London veterans of the Spanish Civil War who fought alongside their international comrades. Bill Alexander and Charlie Goodman brought a list of east Londoners who died in Spain. Charlie offered some warm and witty anecdotes about his experiences, recalling the Jewish people's long history of fighting fascism and racism.

Building on the past

To awake this 'Jewish sleeping beauty', the Heritage Centre in Spitalfields, is going to take more than a kiss! The building is a former Georgian weaver's house, and built over the back garden in 1870 stands an Ashkenazi Synagogue. The synagogue was closed in 1967, leaving this beautiful space empty and forgotten until the early 1980s when the Spitalfields Trust acquired it.



The Heritage Centre now aims to become a resource centre and museum for all immigrants of the East End: the first of its kind, celebrating the rich and diverse cultures which have resided in the area.

At present the Centre desperately needs financial assistance. The paint is peeling off, the Ark is crumbling, the roof leaks, but through the layers of dust and time the evidence of people's past is still apparent. In the synagogue, painted on the balcony walls, are evocative lists of names, of people that donated the original funds to erect the building. In the attic there still remain the frames and silks of the Huguenots. And throughout the building, lying in cardboard boxes, are the original artefacts belonging to the synagogue. Also within the building are the treasures of

Mr Rodinsky, an orthodox scholar of languages and recluse who lived upstairs in the building as self-appointed caretaker. He left mysteriously one day and his little attic room was found untouched when the Trust opened the door.

These artefacts will become the focal point for my next project. The aim is to produce a photographic exhibition based on the building and its contents. I hope a wide variety of people will want to become involved in this unique venture. Each photographer will get the opportunity of two days' photography in the building, on a first come first served basis. The completed prints will be displayed at an exhibition in the Centre some time in March. An evening event will open the show with an auction of prints donated by each participating photographer, to raise funds for the restoration of the building.

All help is gratefully appreciated and is essential if this building is to remain for the benefit and inspiration of future generations.

RACHEL LICHTENSTEIN
Artist-in-residence, The Heritage Centre

Anyone who would like to take part in this project, either as a photographer or helper (for example with publicity), should contact Rachel Lichtenstein at The Heritage Centre, 19 Princelet Street, London E1 6QH, Tel 071-377 6091.



Erlich at Bundist demonstration

'Use it in the present climate. Keep on struggling.' His words echo the continuing radicalism of his American *companeros*.

This Jewish Socialist initiative, with a welcome opportunity to talk to film-makers after screenings, will, I hope, become an annual event.

NORMA COHEN

Midnight in Moscow

Political leaders in Poland and the former Soviet Union were urged to clear the names of executed anti-fascists and leaders of the Bund, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter at a public meeting held in London in December. There was a call too for both countries to organise official memorial events.

The meeting was held on the 50th anniversary of the arrest of Erlich and Alter. The Bund leaders were executed on Stalin's orders. Earlier both had attacked the Moscow trials and Stalin's deal with Nazi Germany through the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.

The meeting opened with the lighting of candles for the third night of Chanukah. From the chair, David Rosenberg remarked that their *yortsayt* (memorial day) coincided with a festival which celebrates resistance to oppression. Chanukah also urges people to rededicate themselves to their beliefs despite the most difficult conditions.

A message of solidarity was read out from Lidia Ciolkosz, the last surviving member of the pre-War leadership of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and now honorary Chair of the resurrected PPS. She paid tribute to the 'immensely heroic' and 'brutally murdered' Bund leaders. She added: 'I knew them both and remember well how much energy both gave in promoting a constructive working relationship between their party and the PPS in our common aim: a sovereign, democratically governed Poland in which socialist values would be achieved.'

Veteran Bundist Majer Bogdanski spoke in detail about Erlich and Alter's contribution to international socialism, to Jewish life and the daily struggle against fascism and reaction. He elaborated on the circumstances surrounding their deaths.

His talk was followed by a series of solemn, but defiant, readings. These included protests about their murder and Erlich's last letter to his family. In addition, there was a narrative about how the news of their execution was received by Bundist resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto: 'We learned about it through the Polish underground radio... Our tortured souls craved a bit of consolation, encouragement, relief. And here came the voice of that "wide world" to announce that our finest leaders and our dearest friends and comrades had been killed in the most despicable manner. And on top of it, their killers had dishonoured their sacred memory, covering it with the filth of the most vicious lie.'

The discussion focused in particular on the Bund's relationship with other left parties in Poland. It also covered speculation about whether Erlich's practical support in 1941 for an exiled Trotskyist, Walter Held, whom he had met in prison, might have contributed to Erlich's death.

The meeting ended with an inspired rendering of two workers' songs in Yiddish. *In Kamf* and the *Internationale* were popular on demonstrations in 1930s Poland, when Erlich and Alter led the Bund. The closing verse of *In Kamf* offers a particularly poignant epitaph for the Bund leaders:

'Ir kent undz dermordn tiranen / Naye kemfer vet brengn di tsayt / Mir kemfn, mir kemfn biz vanen / Di gantse velt vet vern bayrayt.'

'You can murder us, tyrants, but new fighters will arise. We will continue to struggle, until the whole world is free.'

HOLBORN CIRCUS

TO Holborn, braving en route the city jibes - 'Mirror's buoyant', 'Maxwell's new flotation' - for champagne and sea-shanties with the green eyeshade and inky-finger crew. Weeks before, the *Mirror's* mighty presses were brought screeching to a halt one night, because the captain demanded a last-minute alteration: 'Mr George Galloway' to read 'MP George Galloway'. Such subtlety! He could have been a Talmud scholar; or a certain kind of 'marxist'. Things won't be the same again. Or so the staff were hoping.

Buy enough Israel Bonds and, suddenly, you're a 'Jewish leader'. Buy enough Israeli business and you needn't worry about sermons against 'marrying out'. They'll reserve you a plot on the (occupied) Mount of Olives and as many black-hats as they can muster. But a 'nation mourning'?

When Maxwell wanted to take over the *Jerusalem Post*, the journalists went on strike. At Shamir's Jerusalem jamboree, from which many more genuine Jewish leaders had the sense to stay away, Maxwell heard the Israeli Prime Minister complain about 'irresponsible' newspapers printing stories which 'damaged the state'. Straightaway he got on to the editor of *Ma'ariv*, in which he had a major stake, demanding to know why they published 'such rubbish'.

HOW DID MAXWELL DIE?

Jewish Socialist's Investigative reporter, Issy Meshugge, suggests a new theory

NOW, I'm no *meyvin* (expert), but it seems that all the other ideas so far underestimate the extent of Mr Maxwell's return to Judaism. It wasn't just a few external gestures - like taking over Israeli newspapers or giving his money (or other people's - Ed) to dubious Jewish causes. It was a much deeper and more personal matter of faith. I don't want to go overboard on this idea, so to speak, but there is a strong rumour (starting here) that in the last few months of his life he would stop whatever he was doing to daven (pray) three times a day.

Now, any orthodox Jew will tell you (get on with it - Ed) that a person prays with most energy during *shakharis* - the morning service - and the more religious a person is the more they will *shokol* (shake backwards and forwards) while they are praying. In the comfort of a spacious penthouse suite with cushions laid out, or in a purpose-built synagogue, this is a perfectly normal and harmless activity. But do it on deck, on the open sea, then, believe me, you're asking for trouble... (seems about as plausible as all the other explanations - Ed).

DYBBUK'S DIARY

The editor protested that his story, about a row between Shamir and his intelligence chiefs, was true. As though that had anything to do with it! Israeli media plainly have much to learn from their British counterparts. The row was over a leaked intelligence report advising that Israel might have to talk to the PLO.

As Maxwell declared not long before his demise: 'There is absolutely no connection between my newspapers and intelligence.' I'll say! But if he did run the odd errand now and then, why are people suddenly saying: 'Mossad got him'? Perhaps the whisper is being put about by some people who have reasons to be satisfied at his downfall. A certain old firm is very efficient in such matters.

DRESSED TO KILL

BRITAIN's resurgent racists 'are not skinhead bootboys', wrote Robert Crampton in the *Observer* colour magazine a few months ago. 'There are some young men attached to the BNP who are looking for a fight, and doubtless some of them are responsible for the growth in racial assaults, but the dominant subculture encourages self-discipline and conventional dress.'

I suppose you could say Anthony Lecomber, the leading BNP member who has just been jailed for three years for violently attacking a young Jewish journalist, wasn't 'looking for a fight'. He

and two others took up position on either side of the victim, who was seated waiting for a train, then he started putting the boot in, and the other two joined in. Oh, and Lecomber was respectably dressed (probably en route to the same function attended by the *Observer's* Crampton) in a navy blue suit and tie. So much nicer.

NEVER MIND THE QUALITY...

NO sooner had the subject of the Chief Rabbi's trousers been broached in my diary, than the fellow himself is on about it. Just shows, you never know what effect you have on readers. Talking to Diana Hinds in the *Independent* (31 August 1991), Dr Sacks (no pun intended) says his job is to stem the secularist tide and stop people marrying out, by sticking strictly to the 'rules', because without them the community is held together only by 'ethnicity or nostalgia', or by 'negative aspects' like antisemitism.

If numbers have dropped by about 80,000 in the last 20 years, as is claimed, those upholding 'the rules' don't seem to be holding things together too well. Maybe more elasticity is needed? 'But,' insists Dr Sacks, 'I cannot tailor Judaism to fit me. I am challenged to grow by fitting myself into Judaism.' Wish he'd chosen a better metaphor. I chucked away my book of Jewish tailor jokes years ago!

SILVER JUBILEE QUIZ

1 In 1975 the United Nations passed a resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism. In 1991 it rescinded this resolution, deciding that Zionism had nothing to do with racism. What has brought about this change?

- a) The weather
- b) UN delegates read the *Jewish Chronicle*
- c) Israel has demolished thousands of Palestinian homes since 1975
- d) Israel agreed: to relinquish all occupied or annexed territories; to extend the Law of Return to all Palestinian refugees; and to grant equality to Palestinians over land and water rights and democratic freedoms
- e) Meir Kahane was killed
- f) Israeli troops have killed and maimed thousands of unarmed Palestinians since the Intifada began
- g) The world has realised that Shamir is a warm, generous human being

h) America won the Cold War and can get the UN to agree to anything
i) Israel's leaders won't negotiate with anyone, regardless of race, creed or colour

2 Now that Shamir has recognised that UN delegates are not a bunch of political baboons but decent people who had the good sense to reverse a dubious policy, will he accept all other UN resolutions relating to Israel/Palestine (eg partition, return of refugees...)?

- a) Of course. He is a man of honour and high principle
- b) Not on your nelly
- c) Who knows? Ask the Americans

Answers

- 1 Dunno. Try any of the above except for (d)
- 2 We don't make crystal balls, we make a magazine. You want a magazine to tell you the future, buy one with horoscopes.

Settlers bring no relief

As the Israeli government is dragged screaming to the negotiating table, settlers in the occupied territories are speeding up their efforts to nullify any possible compromises for peace. Benjamin Cohen investigates the continuing process of settlement.

Who is Aharon Dom? Nobody mentioned him at the opening of Middle East peace negotiations in Madrid. Haider Abdel Shafi, Yitzhak Shamir and Farouq al Shara didn't refer to him once in their speeches. Aharon Dom, it would seem, is just another Israeli.

Actually, Aharon Dom is one of 250,000 obstacles to peace living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and annexed East Jerusalem. A leader of Gush Emunim, the militant Jewish settler group, Aharon Dom was feeling confident as he watched the negotiations get under way. 'In the end, what we are talking about is playing for time,' he told the Hebrew newspaper, *Hadashot*. 'I need another three years in order to bring 200,000 people to Judea and Samaria. And then they can have as many conferences as they want. No power in the world can evict that many people.'

Since 1967, Israel has actively been creating facts in the Occupied Territories. The objective here is clear: to integrate the Occupied Territories and fortify them with settlements, and, at the same time, to squeeze the possibilities for an independent Palestinian existence. As a result, the options facing the Palestinians have been scaled down massively.

If the Israeli agenda succeeds, the Palestinians may – as Yitzhak Shamir now advocates – be granted limited autonomy. Or, in keeping with the desires of the Israeli far right, the process will lead inexorably towards transfer. Since the definition of autonomy in this context is so vague, the prospect of transfer is becoming frighteningly real.

Why, then, bother with the negotiations? For the Palestinians, the reason is simple. The Palestine National Council's (PNC) Algiers Declaration of 1988, which looked towards a two state solution in Palestine, was the culmination of the changes to the PLO's programme begun in 1974. The emphasis was squarely on reaching an arrangement with Israel through diplomacy. Objectively, the Palestinian position had also been weakened due to two principal factors. Firstly, despite the heroic persistence of the Intifada, the popular struggle in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was not, alone, able to dislodge the occupation. Secondly, the Gulf War and the collapse of communism meant that the Palestinians, like everybody else, had to rely primarily on the US to embark on an initiative.

Israel's position in the global order also changed. The Gulf War led many Pentagon analysts to question Israel's strategic value. Although Israel will continue to be an important ally of the United States, particularly if a wave of instability should cross the Arab world again, the Bush administration has become impatient. The US would like to create a consensus between Israel

and the Arab states, which would involve some compromise being made with the Palestinians. By holding the \$10 billion housing loan guarantee under Shamir's nose, the US ensured that a reluctant Israel came to the negotiating table.

Even so, Israel is winning. It is true that the Palestinian delegation's performance at Madrid, and its subsequent enthusiasm for continued dialogue, scored them a number of brownie points in the world's press. However, it is the situation on the ground that really matters. Israel has not, as yet, been pressured into freezing the settlements. If the building frenzy continues at its current pace, the Green Line will be a hazy memory within three years. And Aharon Dom, for one, will be smiling.

Settlement plans

The impetus for the latest round of land seizures in the Occupied Territories has been provided by the arrival in Israel of huge numbers of Soviet Jewish immigrants. Nearly 500,000 have landed so far, and the crisis in the former Soviet Union has led some Israeli officials to estimate that a million Soviet Jews will come to Israel in 1992. Big immigration, said Shamir in June 1990, requires Israel to be big as well.

This shouldn't be taken to imply that Israel has been suddenly besieged by immigrants, and is therefore using the settlements in the Occupied Territories as an emergency exit for its growing social problems. Immediately after its victory in

the Six Day War of 1967, Israel began to focus on ways to make its presence in the Occupied Territories permanent. The Allon Plan of the same year envisaged a chain of Jewish colonies along the Jordan River, the Rift Valley and the Judean desert. In 1970, the government released a publication entitled *Judea and Samaria: Guidelines for Regional and Physical Planning*, which stated Israel's intention to develop 'the periphery of Samaria and Judea so that it may become integrated with the rest of the country'. The Drobles Plan of 1981, updated in 1983 (its author, Matityahu Drobles, was the head of the World Zionist Organisation's settlement division), called for 120,000 Jews to be settled in the Occupied Territories by 1985.

The evidence was plentiful, and the US administration knew it. The Arabs, meanwhile, were justifiably alarmed. Nevertheless, international conventions, used as a fig leaf in the war against Iraq, were not brought to bear on Israel, even though the Fourth Geneva Convention explicitly forbids the transfer of civilians into occupied territories. The Jewish population in the Occupied Territories continued to grow.

When the Likud came to power in 1977, after 30 years of rule by the Labour Zionist establishment, 5,000 Jews lived in the Occupied Territories. By 1981, the number had risen to 16,000, followed by 52,000 in 1985. While the Likud chided the Labour Party for not being committed to its Greater Israel design, it was Labour that had laid the foundations for settlement. There are now 120,000 settlers living in the Occupied Territories, with a further 130,000 in annexed East Jerusalem.

Through the Soviet Jewish immigration, Israel will continue to deflect discussions on territorial compromise, at both the negotiating table and in the Occupied Territories themselves. According to data from the Palestinian-run Jerusalem Media and Communi-

cations Centre, the settler population could double by 1995 – going beyond even the expectations of Gush Emunim.

New immigrants

A report issued in 1990 by the Israeli human rights organisation, *Be'tselem*, revealed that 70% of West Bank lands could not be built on by Palestinian residents. Moreover, the evidence shows that their lands have been earmarked for the settlement of Soviet Jews. At the end of 1990, Israel Foreign Minister David Levi assured US Secretary of State James Baker that Israel did not intend to settle Soviet Jews in the Occupied Territories. A February 1991 report by Knesset Members Dedi Zucker (Ratz) and Haim Oron (Mapam) indicated otherwise. (The report caused a minor diplomatic scandal when Baker asked Zalman Shoval, Israel's ambassador in Washington, to comment upon it.) Zucker and Oron argued persuasively that Housing Minister Ariel Sharon – of Lebanon fame – was guided by three political principles in planning settlement construction and extension. Firstly, many of the settlements would be targeted for members of the ultra-orthodox community, thereby underlining the alliance between the ultra-orthodox parties and the right. Secondly, most of the construction would take place in already existing settlements, thereby reducing American fears of new settlements. Lastly, and most importantly, the Green Line dividing Israel from the Occupied Territories would be erased through the building of settlements spanning the pre-1967 border.

The Zucker-Oron report was most revealing in its examination of the use of Soviet immigrants, concluding: 'In 1990, the number of Jews living in the Occupied Territories increased by 15%. The source of this growth is the new immigrants, mainly from the

USSR.' It is here that Israeli policy is particularly insidious. The Palestinians are the most direct victims of settlement; over a three-year period between 1988 and 1991, more than 504,120 dunams of land were confiscated (1 dunam equals 1,000 square metres). Soviet Jews, though, are being used as pawns in a game over which they have no control.



Palestinian house destroyed by Israeli border police

Under the 1977 Helsinki Accords, emigrating Soviet Jews have the right to choose their destination. But the tightening of immigration restrictions in the USA and Western Europe has meant that Soviet Jews are, instead, being transferred to Israel (see report on the deportation of Soviet Jews from Holland, page 5). Unemployment figures in Israel have rocketed, even though many Palestinian workers have been sacked in order to provide jobs for Jewish immigrants. A Bank of Israel report issued in April 1991 estimates that up to 400,000 workers could be unemployed by 1993.

An infrastructure to absorb the immigrants is being steadily created in the Occupied Territories. The miserable situation facing Soviet immigrants in Israel is well known; few can find work in their chosen fields, and rents in Tel Aviv, Haifa and West Jerusalem are sky high. The meagre absorption grant they receive is simply not enough. But in the Occupied Territories the situation is different. According to Meron Benvenisti's West Bank Data Base Project, the government is luring both immigrants and veteran Israelis

into the Occupied Territories with promises of cheap land, low or interest-free mortgages and the possibility of escape from Israel's overcrowded cities. Even without these enticements, Benvenisti says, existing benefits for settlers are considerable. In the last 20 years, the World Zionist Organisation has spent \$2.5 billion building and maintaining settlements. Settlers also enjoy a 7% reduction in income tax, and industries opening in the Occupied Territories receive a 40% grant to cover the purchase of equipment. In addition, the Israel Lands Authority sells settlers building plots of land expropriated from Palestinians at 5% of the assessed value.

Israel is not planning to evacuate the Occupied Territories. Its strategy is rather the opposite: to make it impossible, through the creation of new demographic, strategic and political realities, for the Palestinians to claim their lands. Because of this, analysing Shamir's rhetoric with a magnifying glass in the hope of finding a glimmer of flexibility is pointless. Even if Shamir eventually does use the 'land for peace' formula to assuage the fears of the State Department, the reality in the Occupied Territories will be the reality of Greater Israel. That is why, at the September dedication of the new Tzur Yigal settlement (part of Sharon's Star Plan to wipe out the Green Line), Shamir was able to declare: 'As far as I'm concerned, the Green Line no longer exists.'

Radical steps are necessary. The Intifada is proof not only of the Palestinian existence, but of the Palestinian drive to exercise sovereignty against all odds. Therefore, the Intifada has to be central to any wider strategy to dislodge the occupation. The mass demonstrations with olive branches, the renewed confrontations with the army and the settler gangs, and the energetic debate over the Palestinian future are proof that

apathy and indifference will never be a feature of life in the Occupied Territories.

At the same time, the Palestinians are ready for coexistence. The call of many sections of the Israeli left to stop the settlements is an act of practical solidarity and a recognition of a physical Palestinian space that cannot be colonised. However, these courageous protests will not by themselves stop Sharon building more settlements, and nor will they prevent the increasing physical intimidation of Palestinians by the settlers. Getting Israel out of the Occupied Territories will require more than just a temporary suspension of the Congress discussion of the loan guarantee. Financial aid to Israel has to be linked to a commitment to withdraw.

Jewish organisations in the diaspora need to be more vocal in support of Soviet Jews, by

condemning Israel's transfer policy and by aiding emigrants to come to Europe and the US. The recent deportation of Soviet Jews to Israel by the Netherlands government, with the full support of the Israeli mission in The Hague, is an indication of Israel's willingness to use European racist legislation for its own ends. Ultimately, Jews and Arabs will both suffer for it.

Meron Benvenisti's notion that the occupation is irreversible has caused much debate among Israelis and Palestinians. While his data is the best evidence that Israel intends to remain in Palestine, bricks and mortar cannot defeat a sustained political struggle. It was Joshua – the Biblical hero adored by the Israeli right – who proved that even the strongest walls can tumble down. Shamir, Sharon and the rest of their clique may yet meet their own Jericho.

Unhappy landings

Jews emigrating to Israel from the former Soviet Union have no way forward and no way back, says Elfi Pallis

THE Zionist dream of Israel as the place where the Jews of the former Soviet Union would find their real home is rapidly turning into a nightmare. It was one thing for an Israeli Prime Minister to say: 'Let my people go.' It is quite another to cope with the reality. For many Jewish immigrants, the search for peace and prosperity, which since 1989 led nearly 400,000 of them to leave a country in which their families had lived for hundreds of years, is proving elusive. Instead, the prospect facing them is one of hunger and violently clashing nationalisms – in Israel as well as in their old homeland.

While most Soviet immigrants of the 1970s and 1980s have been

found suitable employment, the far larger wave of recent arrivals cannot expect the same.

A visit to Jerusalem's tree-lined Ben Yehuda Street illustrates the scale of the problem. Israelis sitting in the street's pretty pavement cafés are entertained nightly by pale, shabby figures seemingly from another time and place: bespectacled schoolboys clumsily tap dance in front of a shoe box filled with a few coins; middle-aged men, hat in hand, haltingly render Russian folk songs; and a gaunt woman in her 60s plays the violin in front of a notice saying 'Money, please, for food'. All the performers look deeply embarrassed.

What has put these people on

the street is only partly the obvious mismatch between their occupations and Israel's economic needs. By August 1991, the immigrants included 60,000 engineers and technicians, 7,000 artists, 5,000 scientists and 8,000 doctors.

Israel has long had a surplus of people with precisely those skills, leading to a high level of emigration. The growing recession has, moreover, hit low-tech industries (the only kind Russians are familiar with), scientific research and Israel's health services particularly hard.

Official data hide the scale of the problem. While 'only' 40% of immigrants are registered as unemployed, most newcomers have had to take the kind of work Israelis will not do. Immigrant gynaecologists push dustcarts and mathematicians peel vegetables in restaurants.

Moreover, the unskilled jobs, which the newcomers have often seized – with government help – from West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, cannot actually feed them. The economics of Arab labour in Israel simply do not work for the Russians: paid well below the official minimum wage, most Palestinians can – just about – make ends meet by living in refugee camp shacks or an overcrowded family home. The immigrants have to find the rocketing urban rents out of their income.

Women have suffered a double blow: many of the occupations they held in their country of birth are, in Israel, open only to men. Last year saw a wave of suicides by middle-aged women who had held senior posts in the old Soviet Union but in Israel found themselves unemployable.

For younger women, pressures to take up prostitution can be hard to resist: after touring the illegal but thriving brothels of Tel Aviv, a *Ma'ariv* journalist revealed that each establishment now boasts as its star attraction a handful of Russian blondes. Most of these prostitutes, he discovered, were married female engineers with young children and unemployed

husbands. The women's earnings not only fed their families, but allowed them to pay back the huge debt they had incurred by accepting their flight tickets and initial absorption grant from the Israeli government. Only after these thousands of dollars had been returned would they be free to leave the country. Almost all hoped to emigrate to Australia or Canada, countries they saw as more welcoming towards people with technical qualifications.

Some of the barely-teenage Russian girls who nightly loiter outside the seedy bars of Tel Aviv's sea front do not have even that prospect to look forward to. They are their family's sole wage earners. All they have going for them is their youth: at least half of

instead to projects in the Occupied Territories, mainly East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as even a quick tour of those areas reveals. There, slotted in between the increasingly poor Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps, is the cheap or free public housing new immigrants need. There is the full employment, based on job creation schemes funded by Israel's treasury. As opposition MK Yossi Sarid recently pointed out, nobody has ever heard of an unemployed or homeless settler.

The settlers actively encourage immigrants to join them, according to several surveys, but only 1% want to do so. The price of big houses, small schools and 'a healthy environment' – as advertised in settler propaganda – is life in the midst of a bloody nationalist conflict. The immigrants have come to Israel precisely to get away from this. Many dislike Arabs, and 38% would vote for one of Israel's right wing parties, but few want to sleep with a gun under their pillow.

Even high living standards hold little temptation for those who have known the insecurity created by ethnic or religious intolerance. Israeli maps do not show where the pre-1967 borders used to run but Russian language maps, with the green line clearly marked, are circulated within the immigrant community and are carefully scanned by accommodation seekers. As a result, only about 500 Russian immigrants have in recent years officially settled in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, though a similar number of ulpan students and of unregistered residents have taken up the settlers' invitation to try out life amongst them for a while. These figures also do not include Greater Jerusalem, an entity created by Israel in 1967 when it annexed not just Arab East Jerusalem, but also a large chunk of West Bank land, today housing new neighbourhoods such as Ramot and Neveh Ya'akov. Several thousand Russian Jews (official figures are withheld by



the immigrants are too old ever to acquire the fluent Hebrew needed to qualify them for adequately paid jobs.

Misused money

While some of these tribulations have also been undergone by Israel's earlier immigrants from the Arab world, it is important to realise that the cause of immigrant hardship this time is quite different. Israel is today a developed industrial country and last year was the recipient of over \$3 billion in US aid. It also received several hundred million dollars in Jewish donations from abroad earmarked for the immigrants.

Most of this has simply gone

the authorities) are thought to have settled there.

However, as the shortage of housing and jobs inside pre-1967 Israel sharpens, such selectivity will be hard to maintain, and Israel's left opposition is convinced that it is government policy to starve these sectors of funds.

Shamir's reply to such critics has so far largely been that the \$10 billion loan guarantees he has requested from the US government will allow him to satisfy both settlers and immigrants. However, there are signs that immigrant needs would still have a low priority. After all, his government could already draw on other, substantial sums for immigrant absorption, according to a recent report in *Yediot Aharonot*. Most obvious among these, the paper said, were the \$7 billion foreign currency reserves Israel had accumulated, mainly thanks to the military aid paid to it after the Gulf war. There were, however, no plans at all to spend these growing reserves.

The paper also argued that it was quite easy to devise an economic policy serving this goal. The measures required were mainly a modest reduction in living standards, more serious devaluations, incentives for savers, some budgetary restraint and higher taxes. Instead, Israel had gone on a spending spree in recent months, as ministers plunged into West Bank construction projects and ordinary Israelis rushed to buy foreign products.

The Russian response

Government officials argue that if the situation of immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel was indeed so bad, they would not keep coming. But, while the number of arrivals during 1990 was nearly 2,000 a day, it was down to an average of 159 in December 1991, and is still falling. Since July 1991, all Soviet citizens can apply for passports and so Jews who can afford the fare have

started to try their luck elsewhere.

Those who have accepted Israeli papers, however, have found that the Israeli government will stoop to some very ugly measures to enlarge its Jewish population. It was, after all, intense Israeli government lobbying which closed the gates of the United States to most Soviet Jews in September 1989 after decades of free entry. The old entry policy, never questioned by any major American politicians, had enabled Russian Jews to join their relatives within the world's largest Jewish community (6.7 million compared to Israel's 3.8 million).

To ensure that Russian Jews, 90% of whom had hitherto left their Israel-bound planes in Vienna, would stay the course, Israel then pressed American Jews to withhold money from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which helped immigrants reach other destinations.

When Russian Jews in March 1991 tried to settle in East Germany, where their professional qualifications were recognised, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levi persuaded German President Helmut Kohl to expel them.

Those who recently tried to settle in Holland fared even worse. Not only did Israel successfully lobby for their deportation, but it threatened them with retribution. Asked to comment on the migrants' claims that they had suffered unacceptable hardship in Israel, the chairman of the Knesset's Immigration Committee, Michael Kleiner, declared that he intended to have them put on trial on their return because 'they have committed an act of libel against Israel'.

The role of other Jews

Israel is thus not the panacea for Jews in real need. For a start the Likud government, with its determination to retain the Occupied Territories, is not in a position to offer anyone peace. Moreover, its economic policy towards the Soviet immigrants

has not been charitable: the selective allocation of public money encourages immigrants to dispossess Palestinian workers, or Palestinian villagers, in order to maintain themselves.

These are not options that appeal to most of these Jews, yet their continued emigration indicates that their situation at home is not tenable either. For those of us who have always felt that the placid response of Britain's Jewish establishment to the 1905 Aliens Act was a disgrace, this creates a need for involvement. Action has to be taken on two interrelated fronts. The first is European immigration policy. We need a Jewish lobby for far less restrictive entry rules – and a public confrontation with Israeli ambassadors who are encouraging Britain and its neighbours to expel Jews. We must not allow European governments to prove themselves pro-Jewish by the convenient definition of the Israeli government.

US Jewry must also lobby to reverse US immigration policy. This might mean courting slight unpopularity, but it may compensate for their having done so little immigration lobbying in the 1940s.

However, the best thing we can probably do for the Soviet Jews is to help them live a decent life in the countries whose language, culture and professional structure they share. This is not the same as leaving them to their fate. There will have to be profound changes if they are to stay without regretting it. To bring about these changes, we would do well to get away from the notion that the best way to help the Jews of Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, etc, is to teach them how to be more Jewish. Instead, we ought to be exporting not bibles but race relations literature.

While we allow Israel to pretend that the solution to the plight of over two million former Soviet Jews resides in the little blue collection boxes, however, we have little right to complain.

This land is *our* land

A group of Palestinians made an emotional return to the village where they were born, and they shared the visit with Israeli Jewish friends. Josie Glausiusz describes what happened.

In June 1948 the village of Hittin, in the Galilee, was conquered by the Israeli army and its Palestinian inhabitants were scattered between Ein-El-Hilwe, a refugee camp in Lebanon, and other villages in Israel. The history of the village goes back to the 12th century, when the armies of Salah A-Din defeated those of Richard the Lionheart at Hittin: a battle which signified the 'beginning of the end' of Crusader rule in Palestine.

Before 1948, the total amount of land belonging to the village was 22,764 dunams. The area of the village itself, excluding agricultural lands, was about 70 dunams. There was a small market, a primary school and a mosque. The lands belonging to the village were characterised by their abundant fertility and by numerous springs and wells. The villagers relied almost exclusively on agriculture as a source of income. The most important crops were fruit trees, olive trees and beans. In 1922 the village had 889 inhabitants. By 1945, this number had risen to 1,195.

In 1948 the people of Lubia, a village of 6,000 inhabitants not far from Hittin, fought against the Israeli forces and lost. In revenge against this act of resistance, Lubia was bombed from the air and was later completely destroyed. Hearing of Lubia's defeat and fearing a similar fate, the residents of Hittin fled from their village. The houses were later razed to the ground and the land requisitioned.

After 1948, Jewish settlements were set up on lands belonging to Hittin: Kfar Zeitim, Ahuzat Naftali and Kfar Hittim. Hittin joined the extensive list of Arab villages which were destroyed after 15 May 1948, when the State of Israel was established. Some of the former inhabitants of the village remained in Israel and others were exiled from their homeland.

Siham Shbeita Can'ana, today a resident of Arrabeh in the Galilee, has never forgotten her home in Hittin. Forty-three years after fleeing from her village, she still identifies every stone surrounding the ancient mosque. In July 1991, Jewish and Arab women organised a trip to Hittin, and there Siham Shbeita told us her story: how she was born in the village and grew

up there, and how she fled when the village was conquered.

The bus left Jerusalem at 7am and took five hours to reach Hittin, collecting women at various points along the way. As soon as the journey began, I was aware of a special atmosphere; a feeling of togetherness. The women had brought fruit and cakes with them, which they shared. One Palestinian woman picked up the microphone and sang. We clapped, and with my limited Arabic I picked out the words 'my country', 'Falastin', 'Popular Intifada'. Eventually the bus hauled itself up a steep road and stopped at Nebi Shueib, a Druze shrine and Tomb of Jethro. There we were joined by a large group of middle-aged Arab women, richly dressed in greens and golds. From our vantage point high up in the mountains, we were able to survey the land around us. 'These lands belong to Hittin,' our guide told us. Spread out below we saw fertile country and new settlements with straight roads and factories. Beside the road we could see remains of ancient walls.

The only structure that remains of the once-thriving village is the old mosque, built before the time of Salah A-Din's great victory over the Crusaders. The minaret peeps up among a cluster of beautiful old trees; it is the only clue that shows that there was once a village here.

We walked down the hill and entered the old dilapidated mosque. I climbed a tiny narrow staircase and reached the top of the minaret. The group of women who had joined us at Nebi Shueib began to talk in animated voices. It appeared that these women were born in Hittin and until this day had never returned. It was too painful to see their village, destroyed and reduced to nothing. I tried to imagine what it is like to leave your village and return 43 years later to find only an ancient mosque, riddled with bullet holes and overgrown with weeds and thistles. I could not.

I was reminded of one of my father's cousins, who left Hungary after the Second World War and eventually settled in Bnei Brak. Some years ago she and a friend returned to Hungary to visit their home town, Szarvas. They stayed in Szarvas for half an hour; it was simply too painful to see the town, more or less the same as it had been, but the Jewish community had disappeared.

Later, we gathered under a huge old spreading fruit tree and were introduced to Siham, who began to tell us her story in Arabic.

One of the organisers of the trip, Michal Schwartz, translated into Hebrew.

'In 1948, following the fall of Lubia, I fled with my mother from village to village until we reached Ein-El-Hilwe refugee camp in Lebanon. I was seven years old at the time. My father stayed behind with his sister in Arrabeh, and would return to the village from time to time to tend his olive trees, hoping that the villagers would be able to return. He was in Arrabeh when the first Israeli census was taken and was thus able to obtain an Israeli identity card. Eventually, he was also able to obtain an identity card for my mother, and we returned to Israel in 1951.

'But no one was allowed to return to Hittin, and my family settled in Arrabeh. Over the years, the Israel Lands Authority applied continual pressure to my father to sell his land, but he repeatedly refused. When my brother applied to university in Israel, he was told that he would be unable to register unless my father sold the land. Rather than do so, he chose to study abroad.' Siham's parents died in a road accident while returning from the airport after saying goodbye to their son.

The lands that were once part of the village, and the olive trees that we passed on our way there, have now been taken over by the Israel Lands Authority. But the villagers still own the land and have ownership documents to prove it.

While Siham was talking, I became increasingly aware of a buzz of voices, and suddenly the other women (whom Siham had brought with her) began clamouring to speak. They were all born there and they all had a story to tell. One by one they stood up, middle-aged women, grandmothers, wearing coloured headscarves, and for the first time a group of Jewish Israeli women had taken the trouble to listen to them.

I listened, spellbound.

'I was eight years old when my father and mother took me from our village...'

'I was pregnant when we left and gave birth to

a baby girl on our journey to Ein El-Hilwe... I sat on the roadside, beneath a tree ... my mother helped me give birth. We called the child Hajjar.'

I thought of Hagar, the wife of Abraham, expelled from her home with her child, Ishmael, and left to die in the desert.

'We were bombed from an aeroplane...'

'We had nothing to eat ... we cried ... we were hungry...'

'We took our goats with us ... we drank their milk ... we had nothing else...'

The Israeli government offered us monetary compensation in return for our land but we wouldn't take it. We want to return to our village, to our lands.'

We were joined by a group of men. They too were from the village. One man was carrying ownership documents and British Mandate maps of the village, drawn from aerial photographs in 1946. He pointed out the school, the mosque, the spring, the houses. Every villager, he said, knows exactly where their house used to stand. 'I studied in the school behind the mosque - I was in Grade 4 when we fled.'

On the way back to Jerusalem, we passed the site of Lubia, of which nothing at all remains. A forest has been planted over the site of the town; it's called 'Ya-ar Lavi'. How odd. Nine years ago, on one of those pre-university pick-oranges-and-pretend-you're-a-pioneer programmes, I lived on Kibbutz Lavi, which was established in 1949 on lands belonging to Lubia. I knew nothing about Lubia except its name, and didn't think to ask. Besides, I doubt that any of the Kibbutzniks would have told me any more.

We stopped at Umm El-Fahm, Kalansuwa, Ramle ... one by one the women left the bus, some with babies, saying 'Ma-i-salameh', 'Come and visit us', 'Hayah na'im ve-ta'im' (it was pleasant and tasty). I was left with a sense of great solidarity with the Palestinian women; a feeling that, despite past atrocities, there is hope for the future.

Learning to live without Zionism

In *Reaching the Parts* (JS24), Adam Lent provides a thought-provoking way into the tactical and strategic debate with which Jewish socialists must engage if we are to expand our influence and meet our potential.

I have no argument with his overall perspective of targeting broader but well-defined sections of

our community through specific campaigning initiatives (democracy and pluralism in the community, support for a Labour electoral victory, support for Palestinian rights and anti-racism), but in some cases he underestimates the difficulties, while in others his answers are either undeveloped or extremely questionable.

These issues are, of course, linked. Adam perceives the need for the 're-creation of a progressive Jewish identity' but doesn't dwell on the form or content of this identity or the means by which it will be nurtured and maintained. He recognises that Jewish socialist values must be fought for in a war of position against current hegemonic ideologies (presumably political conservatism, religious orthodoxy and assumed Zionism), but he fails to define them precisely, and it shows.

As a result he says nothing about religious forces at a time when Jewish and other religious fundamentalists are rapidly expanding their outreach programmes and overlapping with part of our perceived constituencies. He responds to the Zionist agenda only within a narrow Middle Eastern context. And even in these narrow terms I take issue with his prescription. He argues that there is little room for anti-Zionism in the Jewish community and that our Middle East campaigning should focus instead on providing practical factual information on the Palestinian reality.

The relative isolation of vocal Jewish anti-Zionists in Britain, even since the Lebanon War, might appear to support Adam's view, although the ease with which some of them have been labelled 'self-haters', in truth, might tell us as much about the inadequacies of their brands of anti-Zionism as about the cynical manipulation of defence mechanisms by the powers-that-be in our community. But we should beware of generalising about the appropriateness of anti-Zionism as such.

I take the view that unless and until Jews release themselves from their dependence on Zionism for their overall sense of identity and security and hope for the future, they will continue to feel personally undermined by ideological attacks on Israel, however justifiable, and their response to information about the plight of Palestinians will be limited to a few twinges of conscience and expressions of anguish, rather than serious understanding and practical solidarity.

This does not mean that we should hold back our supply of information until people are ready to receive it. We must raise these matters now but in the context of a broader strategy aimed at breaking the stranglehold of Zionism over our community. However, given the hallowed status extended to the term 'Zionism' and by implication 'Zionists', Adam may be right to suggest that a bald appeal for the adoption of anti-Zionism will have little success. Adam suggests lowering the profile of such appeals. I believe on the contrary that such work should be high profile but take account of language and approach.

As a general rule I mistrust dramatic conversions, and all my political experience in the Jewish community tells me that people do not stop being Zionists overnight. It is a gradual process, full of

contradictions, in which they lose confidence in various tenets of Zionism, some aspects more quickly than others. In my experience people are more amenable to reflecting on the distorted relationship between the Israeli state and diaspora communities - the clash between Israel's warfare and diaspora welfare needs - than in confronting the abiding myth of 'Israel as refuge'. It also matters where and when. The last two years have seen a resurgence of Jewish involvement in anti-racist and anti-fascist activities, especially among Jewish youth, in many areas. The 'Israel as refuge' myth will loom increasingly as a contradiction in their fight for an end to racism in Britain and the creation of a society where all minorities can live in harmony. Our dispute with the refuge myth might be taken up with such people while they are mobilised. Raising it in the abstract, in a context when there are justifiable fears about the future of different Jewish communities around the world, will not cut much ice.

Perhaps the Jewish Socialists' Group has suffered for operating ideologically in advance of the context in which our arguments might be most sympathetically received. Again this is not an argument for diluting or jettisoning aspects of our ideology. Rather it should tell us to think back a step or two and imagine how our constituency might be mobilised into the areas of activity in which they can convincingly receive and respond to our ideas.

And so we return to the re-creation of a progressive Jewish identity. The JSJ's work on reclaiming Yiddish culture has paid dividends in terms of encouraging a wider Yiddish renaissance in London, in strengthening the bonds between our members and Jewish labour movement history, and in solidifying their sense of ethnic identity. But now we must address a new generation who feel Jewish but are even further removed from their Yiddish roots and in many ways further detached from organised Jewish life, and who have also been the target of the most sustained campaigns by religious and Zionist ideologues trying to rescue and reinvigorate their anachronistic and backward world views. As a result of processes within society at large they have a keener sense of Britain as a multi-ethnic society but a cloudy perception of their position within it.

The strengthening of a modern, secular, humanistic Jewish cultural life in Britain can provide a bedrock upon which our identified but floating constituencies can touch base. Elements of this cultural life already exist both in remnant and embryo form, but atomised. It would be in the long-term interests of Jewish socialists if this goal was given concrete institutional meaning. Our narrow traditionalist opponents would have much to lose from such a development. How do we do it? I hope that the debate can now turn to address this question.



'Unless and until Jews release themselves from their dependence on Zionism ... they will continue to feel personally undermined by ideological attacks on Israel'

David Rosenberg continues the debate on Jews and socialism in the 90s.

As a rule Marxists do not believe in miracles. Yet it feels miraculous to be able to select highlights from the first 25 issues of *Jewish Socialist*. Alone among Jewish magazines in Britain in having no backing from established institutions, big advertisers or wealthy patrons, we have flourished (all right, existed) through a period of economic recession that has devastated print and publishing, with small and quite large magazines coming and just as rapidly going. (Note to any wealthy patrons who may be reading: if there are no strings we wouldn't necessarily refuse!)

Nu, so you don't believe in miracles. Okay, I'll give you another explanation: you are reading a magazine with a unique appeal which fulfils a need that others cannot or will not meet. At the heart of our approach is our determination to give a voice to those our establishment, and for that matter other self-appointed guardians of truth, do not want to recognise, let alone listen to, still less engage in honest and open debate.



Take the cover story of JS1. A photo of a man being hauled away by old fashioned looking police was headlined: 'Arrested at Cable Street 1936: where is he now?'; to which one of our readers retorted: 'I expect his wife would like to know!'. The man was Charlie Goodman and on page 17 of that issue he explains why and how, as a Jew still living in the East End, 50 years later, he continues to fight racism and fascism despite disappointments and frustrations:

I feel very much to my sorrow, that the majority of Jewish people remaining in the East End are taking their stand with the rednecks and with the racists...

They think maybe that if they keep supporting the racists against the Asians, they will leave the Jews out of it. That story has been repeated time and time again and it doesn't pay off... when they've finished with the Asian and the Irish, there will always be the Jews and they will be on the receiving end again.

The East End Battles on, Charlie Goodman, JS1

If it is difficult to convince Jews today of the urgency of fighting racism, this is compounded by the inability of parts of the anti-racist movement to acknowledge the significance of antisemitism. In some cases they offer succour to antisemitic opportunists arising within black political movements. *Jewish Socialist* pulled no punches in confronting these tendencies:

Traditional economic approaches in Marxist theory to racism ignore the distinctive vulnerability of minority groups that are both working and middle class in composition, or predominantly middle class... Admittedly it is difficult to draw middle class members of a vulnerable minority group into the socialist movement with economic and power interests conflicting with ethnic ones. But if the socialist theory of racism leaves them out in the cold then we have still not absorbed the horrific lessons of the Nazis. Black Versus Ethnic - conflict in anti-racism, Naomi Dale, JS4

When Lester Lewis, a Labour councillor in Hackney, London, invited Louis Farrakhan, the black American demagogue notorious for anti-Jewish outbursts, to Britain, the magazine responded sharply:

For the black middle class, struggling against the big banks and white monopoly, but aspiring to make it as capitalists or successful professionals, his message that the real obstacle is Jews can be heady, exciting stuff. For many ordinary blacks... Farrakhan's bogeyman image in the white media suggests he can't be all that bad... The only Jews likely to suffer any ill effects are precisely those who are poor and live in black neighbourhoods, or those who work with black people in places like law centres and schools. Some self-proclaimed 'black leaders' are playing an old white game. And they're also

playing a new white game - the game of the National Front and others who are eager to be the beneficiaries of a free-for-all fight between Jews, blacks and Asians.

Farrakhan: repairing the damage, Charlie Pottins, JS5

The same spirit of honesty and outspokenness has taken us into other potentially explosive areas. For example, the politics of language and the all-too-frequent use of Holocaust analogies:

It is perfectly consistent with a Marxist analysis to perceive a connection between social, economic, political and military processes, even where the events they relate to may be widely separated. But the labels used to describe these processes are often used not as a tool of Marxist analysis, but in an un-Marxist, subjective, emotive manner. This is particularly true with Holocaust analogies which play right into the hands of those who wish to stifle debate about the real issues.

Holocaust Analogies, David Rosenberg JS1

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To celebrate our
Silver Jubilee, we present
some of the highlights
from issues along the way

We returned to this area in JS14 in response to the free use of such analogies in the campaign against the bigoted legislation of Clause 28:

'The road to Auschwitz is clearly signposted' warned Capital Gay, while City Limits claimed that this law 'has no precedent since the Nazis seized control in Germany'. The new law was, in fact, not a measure to enforce racial hygiene, or to legitimise the incarceration of millions of political prisoners. It was designed primarily to undermine local authorities and capitalise on the Labour Party's problems with its 'loony left' image. Hardly Nuremberg revisited. Nuremberg Revisited, Tara Kaufmann, JS14

At the same time we have challenged the political exploitation of the Holocaust through the use of language within the Jewish community. There has been a growing insistence on using the modern Hebrew word *Shoah* rather than *Khurban* - the word used by survivors in their every-

day Yiddish language:

Those who insist on Shoah are denying parallels or points of comparison either in Jewish history or in the history of other peoples... Those who are engaged in combating racism and fascism today - Jews and non-Jews - need a language that can delineate the specific experiences endured by particular communities as well as describing the common experiences and common fate they shared at the hands of fascism, rather than words that principally serve the ideological needs of a narrow Jewish state nationalism.

What's in a Word?, David Rosenberg, JS16

On the subject of hot political potatoes, few controversies have generated as much heat in recent years as those surrounding religion and the rise of fundamentalism. The Rushdie affair thrust these issues to the fore, and while well-intentioned liberals lost their footing, *Jewish Socialist* met the challenge with clarity:

As socialists we can never defend racism, which dehumanises and oppresses, but we must defend the right for religious positions to be criticised and even ridiculed... Many of our parents and grandparents suffered similar oppressions to the Muslim community. We share their anger and fears against the injustice that surrounds them, but separation and intolerance are not the answer. Satanic Curses, Ralph Levinson, JS16

The affair also encouraged *Jewish Socialist* to be more outspoken on issues of religious coercion occurring regularly within our community. One of the most talked about articles we published was on circumcision:

... 'Jewishness' must be an act of will and choice... If being a Jew is reduced only to whether you have been born to an acceptable mother and been circumcised (or coerced into circumcising your child) - both without reference to your humanity - then I can think of plenty of other things it would be more useful to be. Circumcision: tradition or coercion, Julia Bard, JS16

This added a further dimension



to our already well-developed critique of the narrow cultural and political perspectives dominating Anglo-Jewish life. We provided a healthy antidote to the pronouncements of acknowledged experts such as Stephen Brook, author of the much-acclaimed book, *The Club: The Jews of Modern Britain*:

Mr Brook's Club of Jews is a strictly ideological creation, and a badly caricatured one at that, which takes at face value the positions and pronouncements of those who would like to make it in their own image, then use that image as a straitjacket into which members will be forced... This is a bad book about Jews and a bad book for Jews, from any standpoint other than those of crude market forces and dominant ideologies... the Thatcherite dream (or nightmare) is unlikely to last. In the Jewish community, too, the decade's prevailing influences will come under increased pressure. The Club will remain as a testimonial to times past. The People of the Book, Michael Safier, JS17

The close attention we pay to Anglo-Jewry has not limited our horizons, but has coexisted with first-hand reportage and analysis of Jewish socialist concerns across the world. We have given a platform to activists from many countries to inform our readers about their home circumstances, such as Ferenc Eros (Hungary, JS13), Stella Ovadya (Turkey, JS17), Raymond Suttner (South Africa, JS19) and John Bunzl (Austria, JS6/7). Other articles

have covered Belgium, Canada, Germany, Poland, the USA and, inevitably, Israel and Palestine.

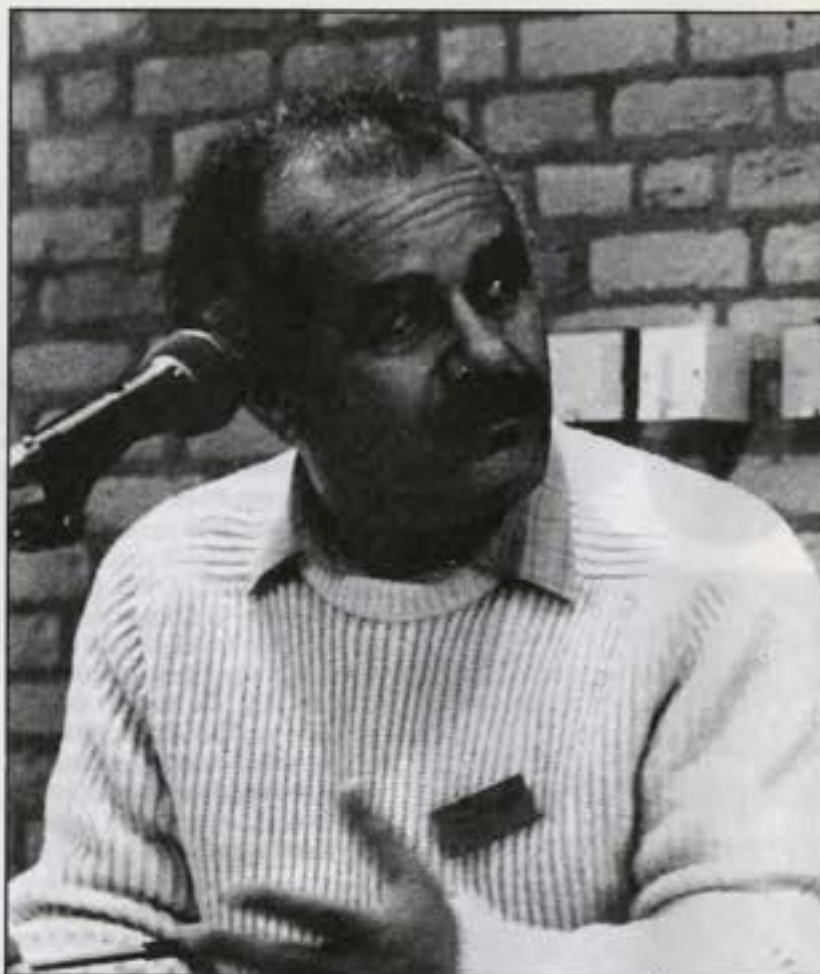
Our reports from France and the former Soviet Union gave early warning of the impending danger from far-right forces in these societies:

The political parties in France are now looking ahead to the Presidential elections in 1988. Not that Le Pen has the slightest chance of winning. But the way things stand at present in the French National Assembly, the Front National is a force to be reckoned with. On a few significant occasions, they have found themselves in the position that all minority parties dream of: holding the balance of power. They have taken full advantage of this by transforming all such votes into votes on the issue of immigration. Le Pen - the writing on the wall, Tony Blend, JS9

'Pamyat' has its friends and enemies in high places... Much depends on the fate of the Gorbachev reforms. Fascism is ... a desperate means of stopping a reform process that threatens established bureaucratic interests. A real danger of its ascendancy will come if the reforms run into the sand or are seen by the people to have failed. The Other Side of Glasnost, Stephen Shenfield, JS12

Coverage of the Israel/Palestine conflict in both left wing and Jewish publications is frustratingly inadequate. Many of the former extensively quote Palestinian activists but give little insight into even radical Israeli/Jewish perspectives. Jewish publications abound with conformist, right wing Israeli views but offer much less space to Israeli oppositionists and many only token gestures to providing any voice for Palestinians. *Jewish Socialist* has given a voice to representatives of the Palestinian movement fighting for national liberation and to Israeli Jewish socialist and peace campaigners in the front line of state repression. Our interviewees, such as Ziad Abu Zayyad (JS5) and Adam Keller (JS16), have been imprisoned for their search for peace with justice in recent years.

When Afif Safieh, the current PLO representative in London,



Palestinian activist Ziad Abu Zayyad, interviewed in *Jewish Socialist* 5

took office, one of his first extensive interviews was for *Jewish Socialist*:

I have been here for only a few days and half of my interlocutors have been of Jewish origin. I am proud of that ... I always hope to be available for dialogue with any Jewish institution on subjects of mutual concern. Differences of opinion should not be an obstacle to mutual exploration of attitudes. Oil on Troubled Waters (interview with Afif Safieh), Michael Heiser, JS21

Most magazines give a high profile to interviews because of the first-hand and spontaneous responses they elicit from well-informed figures. The demand on such figures is high and often personally lucrative. We have been able to offer nothing but the opportunity to address a concerned and serious readership. We have carried interviews with, among others, Ken Livingstone when he led the GLC (JS3); playwrights such as Jim Allen,

during the *Perdition* controversy (JS9); Yehoshua Sobol, during the London run of *Ghetto* (JS16); and with one of America's most prominent peace activists, Noam Chomsky (JS22), at the onset of the Gulf War.

When a few of us sat down in a park in central London on a sunny afternoon in 1984 and talked seriously about creating a Jewish socialist magazine, we had no doubt there was a demand and no illusions about the financial difficulties. We have, just about, kept our head above water (unlike Maxwell!) (That's enough sick jokes - Ed), thanks to you, our readers, and to members of the JSJ who do the hard and unrewarding work of selling the magazine at meetings, conferences and demonstrations. In doing so we have become a permanent feature of Jewish and socialist life in Britain. Whatever political issues and controversies emerge in the coming years we intend to be there. We hope you will be there with us.

The barbarians of Seville

The Columbus Quincentennial marks the expulsion of Jews from Medieval Spain. Michael Heiser examines how Spain today is facing its past

On 2 January 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella, the monarchs of the newly unified Spanish kingdom, conquered Granada, ending all Moorish presence in Spain. On 31 March they signed a decree which reads in part:

We have been informed by the inquisitors and by other persons that the Jews are trying to turn Christians and their children; by giving them Jewish prayer books or unleavened bread and persuading them to follow the Law of Moses. In consequence our holy Catholic faith is vilified. We have reached the conclusion that the only way to put an end to this evil is to put an end to all contact between Jews and Christians and this can only be achieved by their expulsion from our kingdom.

(quoted in Poliakov, *Histoire de l'antisémitisme*, Vol I p169)

Spanish Jews were given four months to settle their affairs and sell their goods. They had to leave by 31 July. Coincidentally, two days later, Christopher Columbus set sail for America.

On the 500th anniversary of these events the eyes of the world will be on Spain. How will the history of the Spanish Jews be interpreted? Israeli film maker Eyal Sivan, speaking after his film, *Yizkor*, was screened at the Jewish Film Festival, pointed out that the history of Spanish Jewry is not included in the Israeli history curriculum. This, says Sivan, is because Spain represented an instance of Jews, Muslims and Christians living happily together, which does not tally with the Zionist view of Jewish history.

The Spanish 'Golden Age' to which Sivan is referring was one in which Spain was a country of three 'nations', Christian, Jewish and Islamic. It was one that produced figures such as Maimonides and Yehuda Halevi. It was one where, for a time at least, Jews enjoyed security and material prosperity.

Anyone who visits southern Spain cannot but be struck by the contrast between the remnants of

Islamic Spain, with their gardens and water conduits and the Christian churches, gloomy and ascetic. (The writer, Americo Castro, spoke of the 'reconquest' of Spain by the Christians as being parallel to a scenario in which California was reoccupied by Mexico; it seems rather unfair on the Mexicans.)

However, while this reconquest was going on, Jews prospered in Christian as well as Islamic Spain. After the Almohades came to power the situation of Jews in Islamic Spain worsened, but they were welcomed in the lands of Castille and Aragon. During this period, from 1250 to 1350, Jews were employed by kings as administrators and financiers. Poliakov speaks of Spanish commerce, industry and artisanry being largely in Jewish hands. The absence of a Christian bourgeoisie, which took time to develop, meant that Jews played a key role. The guided tour to Maimonides' house in Cordoba points out that Jews there enjoyed their greatest prosperity once the city had been taken by the Christians from the Moors.

Julio Baldeón, a professor at the University of Valladolid, has a less rosy view. 'They [the Jews] were never really accepted; they were tolerated because they were useful' (quoted in *El País*, 29 December 1991).

The exponent of economic antisemitism, ever keen to look at possible grievances, could find plenty of tales of extortion and usury. Julio Caro Baroja in the leading modern Spanish work on Jews in Spain reproduces these faithfully; such as the Jew in Zamora who received 60,000 pieces for a loan of 10,000. He does not point to the fact that these stories came from ecclesiastical sources.

By the start of the 13th century the Church in Castille was imposing special taxes on Jews. Yet it was only after 1350 that conditions for Jews worsened spectacularly. The leading role appears to have been played by Church figures. Particularly notorious was the archdeacon Ferrán Martínez who, from 1378, waged a constant campaign against Jews in Seville. His sermons incited violent antisemitism (for example: a Christian who caused harm to or killed a Jew would cause no displeasure to the King and Queen). His complaints were of the traditional 'Christ-killer' variety; the remedies he proposed were strictly practical: the expulsion of Jews from towns and villages, the seizure of their property and the demolition of synagogues.

Martínez's bishop dissociated himself from his archdeacon's antisemitic campaign, but to no avail. A 12-year campaign bore spectacular fruit in Seville on 6 June 1391 when a mob descended on the Jewish quarter in the city and demanded that every Jew embrace the cross on the spot: if they didn't they were put to death. This wave of pogroms (to use a deliberately anachronistic term) spread to most other Spanish cities during the summer of

1391. Arguably 1492 was only the culmination of the process that began in 1391.

Many Jews chose forced conversion. Others became Christians for public show; to themselves and within their families they remained Jews. In the centuries that followed these became known as *Marranos*.

The 'Spain of three religions' was on the way to becoming Catholic Spain. Jews were suspect, whether they lived openly as Jews, which grew increasingly difficult, or whether they became what were euphemistically called 'New Christians'.

There is at least one instance recorded of militant atheism. In Medina del Campo a group of former Jews around 1460 wished to show up 'Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed' for the 'impostors they were'. All scriptures were a fraud and there were no certainties other than life and death (quoted in Poliakov, *op cit*, p157).

Throughout the 15th century the position of Jews worsened. 'New Christians' were accused of 'judaizing'. From 1480 the Holy Office of the Inquisition was established principally in order to combat such heresy. Caro Baroja maintains that the Inquisition was established as a defensive move by the state to control popular outbreaks of antisemitism and to control the religious lives of the 'New Christians'. The specific incident which led to its establishment was the evidence that some 'converts' in Seville had held a Passover *seder* in the old Jewish quarter. The King and Queen authorised a campaign against such 'relapses' and petitioned Pope Sixtus IV who, as a consequence, established the Holy Office.

Within this climate every New Christian was under suspicion, and the practice grew up, which persisted for centuries, of having family trees going back many generations to show how 'clean' – that is, non-Jewish – a lineage Spaniards had.

In 1490 a family (by the name of Franco!) which contained both converts and open Jews in La Guardia, near Toledo, were accused of the ritual murder of a Christian child. Despite the fact that there is no clear evidence that the child ever existed, the 'Holy Child of La Guardia' became a rallying point for those who sought expulsion as the contemporary 'final solution' to the 'Jewish problem'. The family were tried by the Inquisition and condemned to death. The verdict was pronounced at Avila on 14 November 1491 and carried out the following day. Copies of the sentence were read in other Spanish towns which led to a wave of popular antisemitism. Jews were attacked in many towns and cities. The expulsion edict, when it came early the following year, could then be presented as response to popular pressure.

It seems that some 70,000-100,000 Jews left Spain in 1492, though the total size of the diaspora is put by most historians at 300,000. Some chose conversion at the last minute. The most publicised

of these cases was that of the Spanish Chief Rabbi, Abraham Senior, and his entire family. Some of those who left took the keys to their houses in the expectation that they would be allowed back; these were later passed through families, down the maternal line.

The 'Sephardi' diaspora spread throughout the Mediterranean and later to Holland and eventually to Britain. They maintained a version of medieval Spanish popularly known as Ladino (properly called *Judezmo*) which is still spoken in, for example, Morocco, Bulgaria, Turkey and Israel. As for Spain itself, the Inquisition was not abolished until 1835, though it had ceased to be effective around a century before that. But for at least two centuries it went about its business, trying and burning, sometimes in effigy, sometimes for real, suspected 'judaizers' and other heretics.

Until quite recently attitudes towards Jews in Spain bore signs of this centuries-old legacy. For example, the contemporary Spanish writer, Camilo Jose Cela, in his book *Viaje a la Alcarria*, published in the late 1940s, tells of his visit to the town of Cifuentes, near Madrid. He visited an old house known as the 'Synagogue'. He asked the owner whether she knew that the building, an old two-storey house with small windows and a columned patio, had at one time been 'full of Jews'.

'The shame of it; the devil take them; the killers of our Lord!'

Cela records that the inhabitants of Cifuentes, and those of other towns nearby such as Torija and Uceda, were known disparagingly as 'Jews'.

But it would be wrong to suggest that antisemitism as direct as that was widespread in the Franco era. More common was a defensive attitude, which did not seek to defend the expulsion and the Inquisition but argued that Spain had been held in opprobrium unfairly by those unfamiliar with the country. The outstanding example of this attitude is Julio Caro Baroja's 1,600-page work *Los judíos en la España moderna y contemporánea*. He chronicles the proceedings of the Inquisition meticulously, but is careful to take a stance which he defines as neither 'antisemitic' nor 'philosemitic'. For instance, in the affair of La Guardia Caro Baroja chooses, after considering both 'antisemitic' and 'philosemitic' interpretations, to believe that the murder of the child did in fact occur.

On a personal note, when I was growing up in Spain in the late 1960s, the memory that stays with me most clearly was the reaction from my Spanish classmates when, after a visit to Israel, I brought a Ladino newspaper we had acquired there into school. They were fascinated by the preponderance of Ks, which they saw as 'spelling mistakes'. The teacher reminded them that this was closer to the Spanish of 1492 than modern Castilian.

With the restoration of democracy has come a much more favourable attitude. Towns have taken

pride in publicising their Jewish past. Within the context of the 500th anniversary events a group called Sefarad 92 has promoted an exhibition in one of the old synagogues of Toledo, now called the Sephardi Museum. There have been long queues to get into this exhibition. The Basque sculptor, Eduardo Chillida, sponsored by the Sephardi Foundation, is completing a work called *Tolerance* on the river bank in Seville.

How, then, should we approach the 500th anniversary of 1492? The poet, Antonio Machado, referred to 'Two Spains'. It is possible to see Spanish history through the ages as a struggle between these 'two Spains', one inward looking, haughty,



Moses Maimonides

intolerantly Catholic, and the other as more open, taking pride in pluralism and regional diversity. This second Spain takes pride in the Jewish and Arab inheritance of Spain, too long ignored. The president of the regional government of Andalusia, Jose Rodriguez de la Borbolla, speaks for this second Spain when, in 1985, on the 850th anniversary of the birth of Maimonides, he referred to him as a man who in the 12th century, in the midst of fanaticism, preached the virtues of tolerance. Maimonides, he says, 'was a Cordoban of Jewish race who lived among Arabs, and who had a profound influence on Christian thought. He gives us a formidable lesson of the historical value of this enriching cultural synthesis' (*Los judíos en Córdoba*, p187).

Questions will remain about the extent to which Jews will be presented to Spaniards in this 500th anniversary as a living community rather than a historical phenomenon. There are some 10-12,000 Jews in Spain today, mostly in Madrid and Barcelona. How more aware will non-Jewish Spaniards be of the ways in which members of that community, like any other Jewish community in the world, can use their cultural roots as well as their Spanish identity to participate in the many facets of Spanish life today?

But, these doubts aside, let the last word go to Spain's leading liberal newspaper, *El País*, which in an article published to mark the beginning of the quincentenary year (29 December 1991) says, '1992 will mark 500 years since the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Various cultural events will commemorate it. Celebrations are not in order, because the expulsion was not only a tragedy for the Spanish Jews but for the nation as a whole.'

Hide and seek

The legacy of the Inquisition and the expulsion from Spain still reverberates for a community in New Mexico that is now acknowledging its Jewish roots. Nan Rubin reports

'Well, was he?' That's the big question. It comes up every time I give a presentation on the Hidden Jews of New Mexico. 'Was Christopher Columbus really a Jew?'

As the United States and the rest of the western hemisphere lurches into 1992, this question seems to be on the mind of many

Jews. Here in the USA we're girding ourselves for the impending onslaught of 'The Columbus Quincentennial', the transatlantic celebration of 500 years since Sr Columbus made his fateful voyage west and 'discovered America'.

To progressives, this event is largely being marked as the beginning of an unchecked expansionist era which triggered the disastrous plundering of the western hemisphere and the subjugation and destruction of millions of indigenous peoples who were living here. To Jews, though, 1492 signifies not the beginning of an era, but a tragic

ending. That year finally brought to a devastating close the 'Golden Age of Spain', a period of unparalleled wealth and culture which the Jews of Spain had enjoyed in relative peace for more than 300 years.

About 100,000 Jews left Spain, but an equal number stayed and were baptised as Catholics. In the eyes of the exiled Jewish community, they were *marranos* – filthy swine. To the church, however, they were *conversos*, converted ones or New Christians. The large number of instant New Christians were everywhere and, to the great dismay of the Spanish,

many quickly entered influential areas of political and civic life which had been closed to them as Jews.

Many of these New Christians were insincere converts who continued to practise Judaism in secret. Despite the constant threat of exposure, they were *crypto-Jews*: hidden Jews who became special targets of the Inquisition courts, with hundreds tortured, imprisoned and burned at the stake. Against this tumultuous backdrop, it would be no surprise if Columbus had chosen to hide a *converso* background (though there is no evidence to indicate it) – if he had one.

When they began to settle colonies in earnest, the Spanish Crown already had plenty of experience with mass conversions and subjugations. Even so, when the government began looking for colonisers to cross the great Atlantic a few years after Columbus' explorations, *crypto-Jews* immediately took advantage of the chance to leave.

Within a short time, hundreds of *converso* and *crypto-Jewish* families were moving to the colonies and, with the relative freedom of distance, began to practise their faith openly again. Unfortunately, faced with the prospect of populations of both unbaptised heathens and backsliding judaisers, the Holy Office of the Inquisition followed close behind. It began operating in Mexico City by 1580 and continued for the next 200 years.

Looking for refuge once again, an unknown number of *crypto-Jews* headed for the northern frontiers, to the territories which are now part of New Mexico, Southern Colorado and the Texas panhandle in the south west US. There, they effectively disappeared.

When I was going to be 12, my great grandfather called my grandfather in Spanish and said: 'It's time to tell the boy.' So the next morning, it was my birthday, my grandfather woke me up and took me to get water. He began to tell me about the Jews in the Bible,



Traditional Passover seder in medieval Spain

the stories I had heard in catechism class. I asked him, 'Why are you telling me all this?' 'Because', he said, 'eres Judío – you are a Jew.' And I said, 'No, I'm Catholic,' and he said, 'No, eres Judío.' I got angry; we had been taught to hate the Jews because they were the Christ killers, and here my own grandfather was calling me a Jew.

Then he pulled the water out and poured it over my head and said: 'No tas portisado,' that is: 'You are no longer baptised.' So by pouring the water over my head, he took away the baptism, it was time to wash it off. And all of a sudden, I realised that we had these strange foods and customs, these strange services we used to do, we were Jews, we were hidden Jews.

SC related this dramatic story on audiotape a few years ago. RS says that practice of *crypto-Jewish* traits has nearly vanished but they always knew. 'On my mother's side of the family, it seems to be common knowledge we were descended from Jews. Cousins on that side required in their will that they would be buried in a *casia*, a wooden casket with Stars of David carved on the sides or in the coffin lining.' EB, who grew up watching his grandmother light candles secretly in a shed on Friday nights and bake flat biscuits around Passover time, didn't know his family traditions could be remnants of Jewish rituals. 'They always told us not to tell anyone, but they didn't

explain why,' he relates. 'But everyone knew some families in our town were Jews. They were Christians, but they had different customs.'

The people speaking are hidden Jews of New Mexico. I produced a radio documentary about them a few years ago and recorded many of their family stories. It is remarkable that some Hispanic New Mexican families, like SC's, could know today that they are descendants of Spanish Jews. Cut off for centuries from the evolution of Jewish practice, their families have passed on remnants of Jewish prayer, sabbath observances, burial or food preparation. Despite their continuous Catholic upbringing, they have preserved small fragments of Sephardic tradition, disguised and hidden, for more than 400 years.

Although hidden Jews in Latin America are well-documented, until quite recently the existence of hidden Jews in New Mexico remained merely a legend. For decades, rumours have persisted in certain regions of this sparsely populated state about families that didn't eat pork, or turned their mirrors around during mourning, or only used Old Testament names. But it took the attention generated by Columbus to prompt a closer look.

Finding and speaking with *conversos* isn't easy. No one knows how many there are. They have

lived with generations of secrecy and contradictions, and those few who are willing to reveal themselves speak only personally to protect their families. The hidden Jews of New Mexico and their descendants remain largely a mystery.

Raised firmly within the church, *crypto-Jewish* families never questioned being Catholic. They needed the church which, in traditional New Mexican life, has been a focus of spiritual and community life for generations. And, because the Inquisition in Mexico City kept a close watch on its flock for more than two centuries, there never was a time when they could safely 'return' to their true faith.

But why retain the secrecy today? Researchers speculate that after 400 years, secrecy has become part of the culture itself, inseparable from the rituals. Maintaining anonymity is part of the legacy. 'To me, if you lived in a particular way secretly in order to maintain what you see as your relationship to God, the secrecy itself becomes part of the tradition,' explains DM, a journalist. 'While we may live in a more or less tolerant society, you don't give it up just because someone comes looking for you.'

On top of the protective cover of culture, many individuals are compelled to remain silent because having a Jewish identity raises too many painful contradictions. DM continues: 'If you have poverty, discrimination and then don't know who you are, it can be very difficult. Some people have always had doubts that they were Catholics, but they resolve it by not thinking about it.' She goes on, 'One gentleman in his nineties, it upset him a great deal. "We've got enough biases and prejudices against us," he said. "Adding Jewish on top of that might be maybe condemning our race to even more problems." He quickly ended the conversation.'

SC echoes that thought. 'There is a great mental anguish in living two lives,' he says. 'You can't

decide which side to live in. If you do decide to become totally Jewish you'll lose your friends and lose your family. And the other Jews may not accept you. The choice on either side is damned. It becomes a matter of conscience between you and God.'

While individual *conversos* are struggling with who they are today, researchers are struggling to uncover who they were in the past. The emergence of hidden Jews has thrown dramatic uncertainties into some of the long-held assumptions about religion, history and culture of the south west. 'We were always talking about how the Pilgrims came to Plymouth Rock as a refuge for them,' observes Tomas Atencio, a sociologist at the Rio Grande Institute who first began to ponder the 'Jewish question among Hispanics' in the 1960s. 'Couldn't New Mexico have been a region of refuge for the Spanish *crypto-Jews*?'

Dr Rowena Rivera, a professor at the University of New Mexico, is following that thread by tracing New Mexican folk songs to Sephardic songs from Spain and Portugal. 'I've come across poems that are almost directly Jewish prayers, and some have been found in other *converso* communities. This gives us a sign of where the culture originated.'

According to CS, 'There is a movement among some New Mexicans to uncover their Jewish roots. Some of us believe this history should be a source of pride.' In the process of reclaiming this past, some of the *crypto-Jews* are even planning to visit Spain in 1992 for the observance which will officially rescind the Edict of Expulsion (which has remained on the books all these centuries), thus closing the circle that began in 1492.

The relationship of the hidden Jews to counter-Quincentennial organising is not yet clear. While we think that discussion of the Expulsion and the Inquisition must be included in the debate, their importance in the context of

North America is not yet well analysed. Were the hidden Jews imperialist colonials or victimised fugitives? Should we be proud of their survival and claim New Mexican history as ours, or apologise for stealing land occupied by Indians? The hidden Jews raise too many contradictions for simple slogans, and their existence offers a wrinkle in western history and Jewish identity which raises too many questions about the meaning of faith, identity and historical accident for easy answers.

In contrast, the Sephardic community in North America sees this occasion, not for an honest examination of the breadth of Sephardic impact over the last five centuries, but as an opportunity to ride Columbus' coat-tails to celebrate past glories. Such celebration seems inappropriate. The tragic upheavals 500 years ago transformed Judaism as utterly as they transformed the western hemisphere, and Columbus' actions were but a single link in a chain of historical forces which created vast power and wealth for some and destruction and death for countless others. Jews were on both sides.

We must confront moral and realistic decisions about how best to find justice, security and peace for ourselves, our families, our communities and our nations. Whether or not Columbus was a Jew is not the big question. The big question is how are we, as Jews, helping shape the tumultuous events and dynamics of our own times – and will we be proud of that contribution.

For more information on the hidden Jews of New Mexico or activities of the counter-Quincentennial, contact Nan Rubin at 838 Riverside Drive, No 5A, New York City, NY 10032, USA. Tel 212-781 9409, Fax 212-397 8283.

Nan Rubin lives in New York City. She is an independent radio producer and is active in New Jewish Agenda and on the Board of the Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium.

No drama from the crisis

Why is there a dearth of contemporary Jewish drama and why are current productions so conformist? asks Paul Collins

Recent years have seen many writers emerge from various peoples who have suffered timeless discrimination. Growing numbers of directors now admit that their prejudice hid creativity among women, black people, lesbians and gay men.

Much attention is focused on the struggles plaguing Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. These disadvantaged groups still lack adequate representation. But, at last, their issues – neglected for so long – are being tackled. Though Britain's theatre is festooned with Jewish actors, writers and production staff, few seem able or willing to make drama from the crisis facing the community.

Jews hoping to witness their own contemporary lives on stage appear doomed to disappointment. Anger over this omission provokes telling responses.

Some theatre bosses, questioned on the scarcity of modern Jewish plays, regret a shortage in supply. Others, betraying their datedness, cite Arnold Wesker's 1960 pair, *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem*. And even Wesker – charging leading theatres with antisemitism for rejecting his recent creations – must concede that Jews warrant fresh exploration.

It can be argued that prestige flagships like the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company should commission a work to mount this inquiry. Indeed, the RSC may be inclined to pinpoint Peter Flannery's revered *Singer* as the missing link. But, for all its post-Auschwitz force and Antony Sher's epic performance, the gentile Flannery prefers his mirror reflecting Jews to be individual, not collective. There is no focus on establishment-led Jewishness – religion and Zionism – or a cultural alternative.

Elsewhere, where Judaism or Israel are scrutinised, these dramas lack the weight or will to afford wider context. The latest production from the amateur Jewish Community Theatre – *Steinberg's Day of Atonement* – exhibited sympathy for a repressed teacher in a Jewish school. Nevertheless, any hopes that its able cast might dissect the arguments which promote or dismiss sectarian education were soon dashed through a restrictive text.

Plays by Nomi Sharron and Simon Blumenfeld about the Jewish State – albeit with pungent characters – featured a similar weakness. Both

chose not to question whether leaders were right to make backing for Israel the yardstick for Jews' endorsement from their own ranks.

When a rare spotlight is shone on modern Jewishness, caricature again distances audiences from reality. Steven Berkoff's *Kvetch* triumphed in London and Edinburgh by displaying Jews' angst, despite failing to justify their selection as victims. Unsympathetic figures were compounded with Anita Dobson's rape

fantasy and Stanley Lebor's nightmare over his wife's desertion for a 'huge black cock'.

Broken Heads, at the Etcetera Theatre, offered solid acting from the Changeinspeak group. However, it presented an unlikely Jewish Mafia family, whose message about cyclical violence proved as extravagant as Flannery's internment camps for the homeless.

And Shylock gives our foes enough comfort without Maureen Lipman needing to grace *The Cabinet Minister*, whose antisemitic target for abuse comes from the Jew, Pinero. There is a distinction, all the same, between such crude stereotypes and censorship to prevent negative portrayals of Jews on the boards.

Juxtaposing our common virtues and vices in drama would enable us to comprehend how past experience shapes present circumstances. It will, though, demand reference to institutions and conservative financiers known to abuse their power over Anglo-Jewry.



Arnold Wesker

Marian Shapiro

The unaccountable hierarchy which fuelled a notorious ban on the historical work *Perdition* – notwithstanding its dubious quality – also opposes modern plays that could undermine their presumed authority.

Yet, amid these apparent deserts, there are precedents which encourage the search for oases. In *Ghetto*, Joshua Sobol's moving play, Jews destined for death in Vilna (now Vilnius) defied fatalism by showing resistance in their dramatic performances for Nazis.

The programme for the Berkoff production reported that in New York the American Jewish Theatre and the Jewish Repertory Theatre are together alive and kvetching. Those who envy our US counterparts might remember the honourable tradition of Jewish theatre in Britain. Yiddish drama across London's East End early this century delivered enlightenment in certain works and escapism in others for the deprived patrons. But, in Britain, internal and external pressures towards assimilation have almost killed off this heritage.

Its spasmodic revival is confined to lightweight material which, along with Holocaust drama and folkies, the Besht Tellers, offers worthy but unchallenging spectacles for Jews today.

For the most part, neither of Britain's most famous Jewish dramatists, Harold Pinter and Bernard Kops, have applied their trademarks – menace and obsession – to specific themes for Jews.

Limited evidence to counter this insistence on

a low Jewish profile comes in the unpaid Jewish Community Theatre's potential to jump tougher hurdles. Some hope young actor-director Phillipa Carr, professional on and backstage, will not let commercial pressures prevent sequels to her tirade against Jewish materialism. Moreover, Sandra Fox – like many Jewish actors, lacking roles to depict her background – started her own production outfit.

I felt mixed emotions when the literary manager of a leading fringe theatre described my first play, *Bitter Herbs*, as 'brave'. It examines a troubled Jewish family in Finchley and Spitalfields, amid growing racism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though my writing status was boosted, the comment underlined its loneliness, with few others prepared to stand up and be counted as Jews among playwrights. But, after two readings, I continue to seek a full production for this work and a second, about political and religious fundamentalism, including Hassidic sects.

My determination to ensure Jews' validation and visibility on stage is no different from renewing and reappraising our culture in alternative forms. Like the anthem for black people, this higher profile in the theatre aims to warn bigots aping Hitler that we are here to stay. It means six million genocide victims and countless survivors did not die or suffer in vain. In the ultimate analysis, the community which fails to confront its current and future plight is doomed to repeat its mistakes.

Don't ask the Rabbi

Dear Rabbi,
My husband's dearest wish is to be buried on the Mount of Olives. He is a kind, courageous man. He is proud of his Jewishness – embracing not just the religion, but its culture, emphasising its justice and compassion. He is loved and respected as someone who fights for the rights of Jews and non-Jews alike.

THE RABBI REPLIES

The Mount of Olives is one of Judaism's holiest sites and is thus reserved for the most devout.

You say your husband was a friend of the Jewish people. But was he a friend of the Jewish state?

Did he protect it from its enemies and deliver them into the hands of its state police? You say he was courageous. Would he have the courage to fire

employees when his shareholders' dividends had fallen, or continue to obtain ever-increasing loans and transfer them into accounts in Lichtenstein and the Channel Islands? Has he even once attempted to buy a football club?

If the answer to these questions is no, I would forget Olives and head for Bushey.

Dear Rabbi,
I would be grateful if you could give me advice on an intimate problem.

Both my husband and I are acutely aware of our duties to increase the Jewish race. Only last week, we saw a Hassid on TV who said that Jewish women who don't have children are giving Hitler a posthumous victory. How true! We

have only five children (our last was born in June), and I have been unable to fall pregnant since. Each night I urge my husband on, as I remind him of our race against time (I'm nearly 23). But, in spite of my efforts, he fails to achieve sexual intercourse. What do you advise?

THE RABBI REPLIES

I must commend you both. I wish all Jewish couples would remember how sexual intercourse is a necessary means of survival against secularism and marrying out. However, the Talmud recognises that we are human and weak. Your husband is not a machine. He should be coaxed and encouraged. Tonight, as you embrace, caress him gently and, at the moment of arousal, whisper in his ear: 'Remember the Holocaust'.

Song of the Old Communist

Leon Rosselson

1

He was one of those dogged old men who live in the past
telling stories you don't want to know
About how it was then, the hunger, the hardship, the hopes
and the struggles of so long ago
And we must have looked bored for like sparks from the cinders
his eyes glowed with anger, his words seemed to burn
He said, I will be heard for my life is not over,
I've something to say yet, you've something to learn.
He said, You who have nothing at all to believe in,
You whose motto is — Money comes first
Who are you to tell us that our lives have been wasted
and all that we fought for has turned into dust?

2

I was only a lad when we read that in Russia
the workers, the Soviets had taken all power
And the man they called Lenin who led them was our inspiration
his triumph was our finest hour.
And I'll always remember how fear shook the wealthy
like thieves who have just been caught out in their crime.
But we who had known only war and the workhouse
rejoiced that a new world was born at that time.
You can't know what it meant and the pride that we felt
to know working people, people like us,
Could shake off the shackles, could topple the palaces,
remake the world without ruler or boss.

3

It was this kept us going, this dream of a new world
through all those dark years of defeat and despair
When we who were proud to proclaim ourselves Communists
fought for that world free from hunger and fear.
It was, Down with the Means Test, no cuts in our wages,
we want three pounds a week and the seven hour day.
And there wasn't a thing that we got but we fought for it —
Don't you know bosses give nothing away?
And the strikes and the marches, the battles to beat off
the bailiffs and coppers when hope was still young
Hot heads and hot hearts as we tested our power,
the workers triumphant, yes, that was our song.

4

For a time he was silent and lost in his memories,
then, but more softly, his words came again.
Perhaps we hoped for too much, perhaps the cost was too much,
there are things I know now that I couldn't know then.
We believed revolution was just round the corner
and we were the vanguard to bring it about
And the other left parties we classed as class traitors,
bourgeois, social fascists, of that we'd no doubt.
But then the times changed, we campaigned for the Popular Front,
the old line might never have been.
Still we led the workers in combating fascism,
Mosley in London and Franco in Spain.

5

We believed we were history's chosen, and Soviet Russia,
our future, our heart and our soul,
And the Five Year Plan was a vision of plenty
for us who'd lived half our lives on the dole.
We knew of the trials, the purges, of course,
and were shocked when we heard those old Comrades confess
But, yes, we defended the first workers' state
in the face of the slander and lies of the press.
And you who have nothing at all to believe in,
you whose motto is — Money comes first,
Who are you to tell us that our lives have been wasted
and all that we fought for has turned into dust?

6

You may think we were duped, well we paid for our dreams,
broken lives, broken marriages, jobs lost and jail.
Some lost heart and left, some betrayed us for medals,
there are always some turncoats whose souls are for sale.
But the best of us never surrendered our vision
and we kept the faith through the bleakest defeat.
Do you think that was easy, surrounded by hatred,
the sneer of indifference, the hurt of deceit?
But our lives were made rich by the cause that we fought for,
the friendship, the fellowship, sharing one aim —
To transform society, end exploitation,
and that day will come yet though not in my time.

7

And again he was silent. And what could we tell him?
That the world now was different? That he'd had his day?
That an old man's dreams were not our concern?
But still there was something he wanted to say:
Now when I look back, I see what we fought against,
homelessness, hunger, injustice and war.
But what did we fight for? What dreams did we strive for?
I used to know once, now I'm no longer sure.
But you who have nothing at all to believe in,
you whose motto is — Money comes first,
Who are you to tell us that our lives have been wasted
and all that we fought for has turned into dust?

8

He was one of those lonely old men who live in the past
telling stories you don't want to know
About how it was then, the hunger, the hardship, the hopes
and the struggles of so long ago...

The accidental life of an anarchist

Benjamin Franks, with the second article in our series Jewish Socialists in History, writes about Alexander Berkman

'Better to die on one's feet than to live on your knees' – Yiddish Proverb

In the State of Pennsylvania, in 1892, a 22-year-old Russian Jewish immigrant shot but failed to kill Henry C Frick, the chief manager of a steel plant. Frick, acting on the owner's instructions, had ceased to recognise the union negotiating for a new pay deal and locked the workers out. The workers subsequently declared a strike. Frick then hired Pinkerton guards to protect blacklegs.

Two weeks later a pitched battle between strikers and the armed guards broke out, resulting in the death of seven Pinkertons and nine workers. Frick's brutality was exemplified in his assertion that he would rather see every striker killed than concede a single demand. Regarding the workers' deaths as an outrage and hoping to scare other capitalists from employing similar tactics, the assailant, posing as a strike-breaker's agent, gained entrance to Frick's office and shot him three times. Seeing his victim still alive, the attacker drove a sharpened steel file into the victim's buttocks before being apprehended.

The would-be assassin was Alexander Berkman and one of his accomplices was his companion and comrade, Emma Goldman. This act of individual violence was part of the creed of the 19th century anarchism known as 'Propaganda by deed'. It was not expected to bring about the abolition of despotism or the cessation of capitalism, but was performed, according to Berkman, as 'a means of avenging a popular wrong, inspiring fear in the enemy, and calling attention to the evil against which the act of terror was directed.'

Berkman, the son of St Petersburg's small, Jewish professional élite, had the privilege to be educated at the classical gymnasium. As such he was in the milieu of the Russian nihilists, The People's Justice, Narodnaya Volya (The People's Will) and the revolutionary asceticism described in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel, *What Is To Be Done?* This mood was personified by Sergei Nechayev and his *Catechism of the Revolutionist*, where the absolute necessity of self-sacrifice in achieving revolutionary ends was stressed:

The revolutionary is a dedicated man. He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion – the revolution.

Berkman later rejected 'Propaganda by deed', as it was no longer an effective means of agitating and, under the influence of Goldman's more humane, emotive ideas, he proposed theories akin to those of Peter Kropotkin.

Intending to kill himself before arrest, Berkman survived because the police spied the capsule of explosive before he had the chance to use it. He defended his actions in court without any expectation of justice, and with good cause. At one stage, according to Goldman, the judge refused to let Berkman address the jury, insisting: 'The prisoner has said enough already.' The sentence was duly 22 years' imprisonment, 15 years longer than the usual maximum sentence for attempted manslaughter. In prison he was refused visitors, and faced brutality and solitary confinement.

On release from prison in 1906 he carried on his revolutionary activity. He took part in lecture tours and taught at the free Ferrer School in New York. At the outbreak of the First World War, Berkman started an anti-militarist campaign with Goldman which he publicised through his newspaper, *The Blast*. The campaign proved so successful that the authorities were forced to act. In 1917, Berkman and Goldman were arrested and charged with 'conspiring to prevent draft registration'. They received a two-year sentence and a \$10,000 fine.

After serving their sentence Goldman and Berkman were deported to Russia with several hundred other radicals.

Anarchists distrusted the Bolshevik method of reaching a liberated society through the centralised party, but on arriving in Russia Berkman hoped to be impressed by the revolution. Goldman had condemned the anarchist Yiddish weekly, *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, for criticising the Bolshevik revolution. On arrival in December 1919, they were welcomed as heroes, and Lenin, who had visited Jewish anarchist haunts while in Britain, asked Berkman to translate his *Left wing Communism: an infantile disorder*. Berkman refused because he disagreed with it.

By 1921, the civil war and the wars of intervention were over and the Russian peasantry and workers were growing weary of the rigours and injustices of 'War Communism'. Such unrest entered the political field in the programme of the Workers' Opposition. In Petrograd a protest meeting was crushed by the government and a

strike broke out as a result. The Petrograd strikers demanded the liberation of socialist and non-partisan workers, freedom of speech for workers and free elections for representatives of soviets and factory committees.

Sympathy for the Petrograd workers came from the Kronstadt sailors who had been at the forefront of the October Revolution. They were angry that the Bolsheviks favoured the party members, army and navy over the peasantry and workers. The Kronstadt rebels demanded 'liberty of speech and of press to the workers and peasants, to the anarchists and the left socialist parties' and the abolition of the political police. This was a programme in line with Berkman's anarchism.

The Bolsheviks' first reaction was to denounce the Kronstadt revolt as 'counter-revolutionary' and claim that it was led by White Russians and antisemites. While Whites and liberals tried to use the revolt for their own ends, they neither influenced nor took part in the rebellion. The sailors always defended the October Revolution as even Lenin was forced to recognise.

The question of antisemitism is more complicated. Zinoviev (who claimed that the rebels would be 'shot like partridges') and Trotsky were both Jewish, and White Russians used this as a pretext for spreading antisemitic propaganda. But as Nicholas Walter points out, except for one sailor's prejudicial rantings and the story of one Kronstadt rebel telling his captors to 'join us and beat the Jews', there was no other evidence of antisemitism.

On 5 March, the Jews Berkman and Goldman attempted to mediate between the authorities and the rebels, indicating that the accusation of antisemitism was a political slur. Rather than arbitrate, Trotsky preferred to attack. The first attack proved unsuccessful, as soldiers defected to the rebel side. A second major assault planned by Trotsky employed 50,000 troops against a garrison of 15,000 mutineers. The fortress fell on 17 March, leaving 1,500 dead rebels. Thirteen obscure sailors were chosen as ringleaders and shot after a secret trial.

In a last attempt to alert the international labour movement and the world in general, Berkman and Goldman signed a lengthy document detailing the persecution of the anarchists by the Bolshevik government. It was sent to Lenin, the Communist Party, the Communist International, the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions and other organisations in July 1921. It had no effect. Berkman, having witnessed the gathering terror and despotism in Russia and hearing of arrests of anarchist comrades, fled Russia and illegally entered Germany.

Prohibited from returning to America, he settled in Paris, where he wrote about the events he'd witnessed in Russia in *The Bolshevik Myth*. He also took part in setting up committees for helping political prisoners in Russia. His efforts were not

just for his political comrades, but also other revolutionaries imprisoned by the Bolsheviks such as the Left Social Revolutionary, Maria Spiridonovna.

In 1929 Berkman wrote what George Woodcock described as a minor classic of libertarian literature: *What is Communist Anarchism?* It was reprinted by *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, the press that Goldman had earlier criticised, under the better-known title, *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*. The book contains one of the most sympathetic and coherent exegeses of anarchist theory and describes the advantages of a society based on free exchange over one based on capitalist or Marxist economics. It maintains that rather than economic efficiency or party discipline, freedom must remain the overriding social value:

Only liberty can make the social revolution effective and wholesome. It alone can pave the way to greater heights and prepare a society where well-being and joy shall be the heritage of all. Then will dawn the day when man shall for the first time have full opportunity to grow and expand in the free and generous sunshine of anarchy.



His optimism that an emancipated society of free, productive creativity would dawn was in contrast to the clinical depression which affected Berkman since leaving prison in 1906.

Despondent that only tyranny and dictatorship lay ahead and that there was no one to replace the anarchist old guard, on 28 June 1936 Berkman picked up his revolver and shot himself, thereby succeeding in the suicide he had first attempted in Frick's office over 40 years earlier. Ironically, had he lived just a few weeks longer, he would not have been so distressed. In July that year the Spanish anarchists (and later *los amigos de Durruti*) took up the challenge against Franco and his fascist forces.



LETTERS

LIFE BEYOND LONDON

As a lefty secular Jew in my 'angst-ridden thirties' feeling cut off from my culture, I was pleased to find that Reuben Hood has got my number sussed! (JS24) I quite agree that there is a need for the Jewish Socialists' Group to draw in Jews like myself who live outside London. In turn, we have much to offer as Jews and socialists both in confronting anti-semitism and Zionism, and in keeping alive our Jewish traditions.

I would, however, take issue with Reuben Hood's closing remarks which imply that somehow we 'provincials' are bound to stray from the 'true path' without a firm hand from our leaders in the capital. I find this attitude very patronising. Yes, it would be great for our comrades in London to share some of their experience and engage in debate, but I assure you that Leicester is just as capable of being a hotbed of radicalism as Hackney or Stoke Newington.

Helen Pearson
Leicester

ON REACHING THE PARTS

Adam Lenti's suggestion (JS24) that the Jewish Socialists' Group promotes its views to a wider audience is admirable but the tone and style of his article are likely to alienate the very people with whom he wishes to make contact.

He is right to say that the Group should be reaching out to those Jews within the community who are disaffected with the inertia and conservatism of the establishment and to those on the margins of, or outside, the community altogether.

But he seems to think that in doing so there will be a hidden agenda: to recruit people for the project of revolutionary socialism and anti-Zionism. This makes me wonder if he and I are talking about the same group. What I like about the JSJ is that it is a broad church. You can be a member if you support the Labour Party, the Green Party, the Socialist Workers' Party, or no political party at all, so long as you support the specific policies of the Group as laid out in its manifesto. You don't even have to

have heard of Gramsci or understand what hegemony means. Neither my best friends nor my worst enemies would call me a revolutionary socialist, yet I have an accepted place in the Group and on the National Committee, as do other non-revolutionaries.

As for anti-Zionism, the JSJ supports Israel's right to exist and holds a two-states position on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I would define myself as a non-Zionist, as would many other members of the Group. Some, like Adam, see themselves as anti-Zionists. Equally there are members of the JSJ who are Zionists but are critical of Israeli state policies.

So what should we be offering in reaching out to progressive Jews? It is certainly important to have a programme of events that balances serious political discussion with cultural and social events. It is also important that we allow people to debate with us. If we cannot allow people to be Jewish Socialists in their own way; if our agenda is to turn out political clones, then we may be able to draw in a wider group of people for short periods. But in the end they will drift away and we will be left with a hard core of people already involved in left politics. Is this really what we want?

Myra Woolfson
Nottingham

NEW LIGHT ON ERLICH

I refer to Majer Bogdanski's article on Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter (JS24).

We know that Stalin was antisemitic and couldn't tolerate any political opposition. But this does not explain why he executed these popular Bund leaders at the time when Hitler's armies were approaching Moscow, when he needed all the help he could get. It doesn't make sense. Nevertheless, a picture can be built up.

In May 1941 Heinz Epe, better known as Walter Held, a German Trotskyist with Norwegian citizenship, made a desperate attempt to reach the USA from Sweden via the Soviet Union. Arrested en route and accused of espionage, he shared a cell in Saratov for two weeks with Erlich. Upon his release in September 1941 Erlich immediately wrote to the

Norwegian legation, which took up the case of Held with the Soviet authorities while refusing to disclose the source of the information. It would appear that the Soviet authorities, on discovering that Held and Erlich had shared a cell, realised the identity of the informant and decided to take their revenge upon Erlich and, for good measure, Alter. It is hoped that the facts, or some of them, will be found in the NKVD archives that are being opened up.

Such was Stalin's hatred of Trotskyism that it made him destroy anybody either associated with it or who helped a Trotskyist, even though such actions actually weakened the Soviet Union. Stalin no doubt saw a conspiracy running from Trotsky through Held, Erlich and Alter to the Bund. Aware of the 'Clemenceau theory', by which the best time to expose and replace a government is when the enemy is at the gates, the paranoid dictator decided to execute them before they could cause any mischief. Most of the surviving oppositionists in the prison camps were exterminated at the time of the German invasion, though they had pledged to defend the Soviet Union.

Erlich must have been aware of the terrible danger he courted by taking up Held's case. Whatever political differences one may have with the Bund, his courageous and selfless action must be applauded by all socialists.

This information comes from the article, 'The Walter Held File', in *Revolutionary History*, vol 1, no 4, Winter 1988-89, which also reproduces documents, including a translation of Erlich's letter to the Norwegian consulate.

Paul Flowers
Kingston-upon-Thames

RIGHT AND WRONGS IN CROATIA

When are you going to lay into the antisemitic bunch in charge of Croatia? To me, and I'm sure to many other people who take a more 'European' line (that is, it is not a 'far off country of which we know nothing'), Croatia is the first country in post-war Europe to have the extreme right in power. The official left, like the media in general, seems to regard them as 'heroic' fighters against the Serbian 'communists'. But the scum now running the country are steeped in antisemitic ideas. Paradoxically, the very Christian fundamentalists who normally back Israel are behind the Croatian armed forces.

Andrew Coates
Ipswich, Suffolk

Nuclear family secrets

Under protest, most of the world's governments and peoples have had to put up with the bomb and swallow the comfortable assumption that it is safe in the hands of the five nuclear weapons states, including the UK. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 remains, precariously, in place, yet there is a growing club of threshold nuclear states. To do much damage you also have to have delivery systems, and there are 30 states with ballistic missile technology. The break-up of the Soviet Union means that we have four nuclear weapons states for the price of one, until Yeltsin can make a deal with Byelorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Capability is only a few months away from utility in some tense regions like the Indian sub-continent, Korea, and South America, though Argentina and Brazil have agreed to desist. The spread of civil nuclear power extends the potential for military proliferation. Fifty-four countries now have 1,300 nuclear reactors, all possible threshold nuclear states because they have the ability to enrich uranium or produce weapons-grade plutonium.

Under Article VI of the NPT, the parties undertake 'to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament...'. The five nuclear weapons states have not delivered, so the threshold nuclear states are bound to ask: 'Why should we pull back?' Yet there is no longer any serious contest between the former Soviet Union and the USA. The minor players like the UK and France persist in their delusions of grandeur, while China surreptitiously recruits to the club. The Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START I) may cut the strategic nuclear weapons of the USA and former USSR by 30%, but the UK is going ahead with Trident in obvious breach of the NPT.

No matter, Iraq is the 'great Satan' of the western press. A rotten regime, indeed, but have we all not been fed with the impression that if the noble USA, under the cloak of the United Nations, had not destroyed its children, peoples and infrastructure, it would have joined in the nuclear game within a couple of years? Yet, after all the investigations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is still clear that Iraq could not have used nuclear weapons until the next century.

One country armed to its nuclear teeth is never mentioned by western politicians: Israel. *The Samson Option* breaks the silence. The title is graphic. If threatened or attacked, we shall destroy you and, if necessary, ourselves; a lesson from the Old Testament. This squares with the nuclear deterrence theory of the five nuclear weapons states, exploded in the Gulf War, and their original philosophy which was Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

But why pick on Israel as Seymour Hersh does? There are three very good reasons. The first is because Israel has been an unadmitted and unacknowledged nuclear weapons state for a very long time. The second is because this has been and remains a major obstacle to finding peace in the Middle East. The third is that Israel's achievement, which, indeed, it is, has involved connivance and Nelsonian ignorance on the part of nations which have helped, like France, and nations whose duty it was to restrain, like the USA.

Hersh's account exposes every possible conspiracy theory and every aspect of the corruption which is the hallmark of national and international politics.

Is it credible? I am not sure. In relation to the role of Robert Maxwell in the kidnapping of Mordecai Vanunu, as the *Sunday Times* put it: 'Author hoaxed over Maxwell Mossad link'. Hersh is quoted as admitting this. This is important because the book ends on

this note. Yet, even with this dented credibility, I still feel inclined to think that the rest of the book is as near the truth as we are likely to get about an amazing story of intrigue which goes back several decades.

In the last analysis one thing is clear. Israel is a significant nuclear weapons power. That being so, it is strange (though there is an explanation in the book) that it did not use its nuclear capability for deterrence or attack when Iraq lobbed a few Scud missiles.

Recent developments are sketchily described, but the process of Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons, which started in the 1950s, is totally absorbing. If one can accept that the USA had a right to impose the non-proliferation philosophy, as I think it did, the account of how Israel got round this is fascinating and often amusing.

In fact, US analysts and Israeli defectors told successive US administrations what was happening and, for various pragmatic political reasons, they were ignored. More US presidents were theoretically committed to stopping proliferation, including Israel's, but none had the guts to do anything about it when they were confronted with the facts. Israel's target was the Soviet Union. This was also an insurance policy to deal with any threat that might have emerged from the Arab states or Iran.

On a sour note, the nuclear weapons collaboration and testing between two settler dominated states, Israel and South Africa, strikes me as nothing less than obscene.

Anyone in the United States who knew what was happening and opposed it was rubbished and demoted. Some of these were Jews. Many within Israel opposed it. The programme was grossly expensive, provocative, and militarily useless. But the book begins to explore, without reaching any conclusions, the question of dual loyalties and perceptions of national interests. Individual Jews within the American

The Samson Option - Israel, America and the Bomb
by Seymour M Hersh
(Faber & Faber, £15.99)

administration were put under suspicion, though the political compromises were not to do with Jewishness, but the political and economic clout of the pro-Israel lobby.

I hope the book will put Israel in the dock where it deserves to be, alongside the UK, France and China.

One final point; almost everyone in this story is portrayed as

incompetent, immoral or subversive. Only one person emerges with flying colours. He is Mordecai Vanunu, who exposed the whole can of worms. He is now in solitary confinement, serving a very long prison sentence in Israel, having been subject to a criminal kidnap by Mossad.

Read the book. Draw your con-

clusions. Help rescue Mordecai Vanunu. He is a symbol of heroism and humanity in the nuclear age.

TONY SMYTHE

The author is director of Medical Action for Global Security (MEDACT), 601 Holloway Road, London N19 4DJ. For information on the campaign to free Mordecai Vanunu, contact the Vanunu Trust, PO Box 1328, London NW6.

CITY LIMITS



It's 11 o'clock at night and we're cruising the streets of north London in a police car. Our courier is PC Steve Longhorn, community officer at Stoke Newington Police Station (where, the teenagers on the street joke, you go in on your feet and come out in a coffin). 'On our left is Yesodey Hatorah School - the locals call it yesterday and tomorrow.' He has a soft spot for the ultra-orthodox Hassidic Jews on his patch, and flourishes his expert knowledge. 'It's an isolated community. Often they're closer to their relatives in other countries than to the community around them... For them the future is irrelevant except in that the Messiah is coming. This leads to a different slant on things.' In a nutshell, he says, it's an 18th century community with some 20th century characteristics.

The most articulate spokesperson for the community is Abraham Pinter, headteacher of Yesodey Hatorah and known for having his finger in many local pies. A bridge between the Hassidim and the surrounding community, he liaises with the police and argues on committees for his people's social and cultural

needs to be addressed. He plays the *shlemiel*, larks around making jokes about skullcaps but, like a circus clown, has the audience - or at least the film makers - in the palm of his hand.

So does Ya'akov Wise, a Hassidic Billy Bunter, filmed canvassing for the LibDems in the local election: a poor Jew asks for help in getting his benefit; a Hassid with an Irish accent complains about holes in the road. Wise, who was a marketing and PR manager before he met a rabbi 'who literally saved my soul', sees his community as the torchbearers of Jewish existence, and breeding as the means to a Jewish future. 'Women are designed to be fertile from quite a young age,' he says, explaining that if they have careers they will bypass the safest and healthiest time to start having babies. 'We need to recreate families because the chain of Jewish life that was snapped in the Nazi period survived only by a thin thread.' A failure to build up the Jewish community again, he says, would be to give Hitler a posthumous victory.

Shoshana, embarking on an arranged marriage, says she wants a husband who is cleverer than she is, who can make decisions for her so together they can 'build a faithful and true house in Israel.' Her house, though, is in Stamford Hill. Whether it is faithful we do not know, for, though walls have ears, they keep their beliefs to themselves.

Zalmie, the used car salesman who wanders round his potholed yard talking incessantly into a mobile phone, has 10 children,

'keneynehoreh'. Then the phone rings again, releasing him from the domestic scene.

An inkling of the pain and humiliation which keeps the women under control shows through at the hairdresser. A woman who has worn a *sheytl* (wig) for 34 years says: 'Now they are very beautiful and much easier to wear. At the beginning they were not so nice. I used to get headaches. I slowly got used to it because I had to wear it. The law says that married women should cover their hair as a sign of modesty. The husband wishes it and I think every young girl likes to please her husband.'

The film makers negotiated for four years before they were allowed to bring in their cameras on the community leaders' terms. They put serious criticism off limits. The director agreed not to interview people who had left the community. As they were filming, a case of child sexual abuse which was widely reported in the national press 'threatened to sabotage the whole project'. They decided to leave it out.

Volvo City showed the Hassidic community as its leaders wish it to be seen. If that had been explicit, it would have been as valid as a commissioned portrait which gives an insight into the subject even though it flatters them. But full-page adverts in the national press trailed this documentary as exposing to scrutiny, after four years' investigation, a hitherto inaccessible community. That would have rattled some of the rabbis. This, unfortunately didn't.

JULIA BARD

Ingathering of the exiles

This is a huge, fascinating, tantalising and enjoyable book. I wanted to quarrel with its principles of selection, and its structure, but in the end surrendered to the idiosyncrasies of the editors and was impressed by the symphonic quality of all those voices. Across a long range of history and geography, and of warring conventions from official records to pamphlets, ballads, jingles and jokes, the tone was recognisable: jeering, indignant, bitter, witty or irreverent, above all defiant, if not always so sanguine as this: 'He who wishes well to the cause of Liberty let him repair to the chapel field at Five O'clock this afternoon, to begin a glorious Revolution' (1793).

I especially liked the richness and variety of the ballads - some familiar, like *Pie in the Sky* by Joe Hill, others reprinted for the first time in the anthology. Drawn mainly from a British tradition, from medieval times to contemporary black British, they illustrate the live and popular quality of a convention too often corralled into the academic field of 'folk'. The inclusion of play-

ground rhymes and pop lyrics (like *Tramp the Dirt Down*, Elvis Costello's vicious song about Margaret Thatcher) expands the range of the popular in illuminating ways. But I missed a more international flavour here. Christy Moore (to venture only across the water) has used the traditional ballad form to lacerate the complacencies of contemporary Ireland, as well as to comment on events from Soweto to Nicaragua. The calypso is another form of protest song which is relatively accessible in Britain.

The core of the book is solidly English, with an emphasis on the history of class struggle. This in itself is acceptable: a timely project to bolster flagging class morale by illustrating a brave and defiant history. But some references, like *Opening the Gates: a century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Virago), give an inkling of a larger and more ambitious project.

The introduction confines 'dissent' to that 'questioning the given rules of those who govern society'. The editors define two areas which this definition reasonably excludes - right wing

dissent internal to the governing classes, and utopian writing. What is not so reasonable, in my view, is the exclusion of dissent on the left - between socialists, feminists and anti-racists. Perhaps our own orthodoxies, rather than 'theirs', are too fragile to mock. But I would have expected a writer of Rosen's irreverence (so admirably shown in his poetry) to spare no 'sacred cows'. I am surprised to find, for example, no reference, from any source, to the Rushdie Affair. The multi-racial coalition, Voices for Rushdie, taking its distance from both western liberal complacency and Muslim and other fundamentalists, drew on traditions of dissent from many sources, some well-represented in this book, and others almost absent - from oppositional movements in such places as Palestine, Israel, India, Iran and Turkey. In the interests of creating a common future in which no voices will be silenced, we cannot afford to hold anything - least of all our own orthodoxies - too sacred for challenge.

CLARA CONNOLLY

The Chatto Book of Dissent
Edited by Michael Rosen and David Widgery (Chatto and Windus, £14.99)

Cops and bobbies

Making or hailing films which reduce Jewish orientation to a beleaguered mentality should be a capital offence. Even one which starts and ends with a siege.

Sunday Telegraph reviewer, Christopher Tookey, acclaimed this movie as a work of genius, worth repeated viewing. Tookey should be detained and compelled to watch the police for an indefinite period - until he realises the director's lethal irresponsibility.

American celluloid profiteers cannot be expected to put ethnic harmony before cash rewards gained from sustaining an audience craving for tales about drugs and killing. Those, however, behind

the Jewish film festival on London's South Bank, who declared that its content helps us understand ourselves, should be ashamed of themselves. The season opened with a production whose leading cop found his identity alongside Jews using violence both against anti-semites and against Palestinians opposed to Israel's occupation. Hawkish Zionists must have rejoiced when this film launched the Jerusalem Film Festival.

Reaction might be cooler in areas such as Brooklyn, similar to the film's setting, where Jewish-black relations are undermined by aggression from bodies like the Board of Deputies' OJ youth heavies.

Mamet dare not complain about harsh judgment, since his stage and screen reputation is based on sensitivity as much as suspense. And, besides the marginal women characters, he will escape charges of misogyny only by citing realism as grounds for constant references to 'bitch' and 'motherfucker'. Secularists may not forgive a script in which detective Bobby Gold (the wasted Joe Mantegna) finds his Jewishness questioned because he fails to distinguish between Hebrew and Yiddish.

Some enthusiasts who, literally, ran to catch the preview screening limped from the cinema, struggling to match the hype with their disappointment.

Homicide? I could have murdered a matzo fry.

PAUL COLLINS

Homicide, dir David Mamet, 1991

Volvo City, dir Roy Ackerman, 1991

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