

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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85p

Fellow travellers



Gay Jews

Palestinian Interview

Yiddish Poet

After Farrakhan

Chief Rabbi

Irish Women

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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EDITORIAL

Socialism is about the majority taking the power denied them by the ruling minority. It is about them using the resources claimed as of right by that minority for the benefit of society as a whole.

But within that oppressed majority there are groups who face oppression both as victims of capitalism in general, but particularly from the chauvinisms which it gives birth to, encourages and perpetuates. From their special experiences, oppressed groups searched for, and found, ways to survive in the face of majority hostility, exploitation and persecution. They have developed a spirit of resistance and have been in the forefront of advancing progressive causes. But the socialist movement has not always reciprocated.

Minorities know that socialism is a necessary but not sufficient step to their liberation. We need a socialism that can genuinely respect and advance the needs of oppressed groups.

In this issue, we focus on the history and experience of those facing special forms of oppression — from gypsies (page 8) to Irish women (page 12) to gay Jews (page 18) — and we look at the way they are fighting back. Socialists should recognise the importance of these struggles if socialism is truly going to liberate all oppressed people.

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Jewish Socialist welcomes contributions from readers, but regrets that the editorial committee is not liable for the safe keeping of artwork, photographs and manuscripts. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope with any material submitted.

NEWS

ANNE FRANK EXHIBITION

One of the last pre-abolition acts of the GLC's Ethnic Minorities Unit was to assist in bringing the exhibition *Anne Frank in the World 1929-1945* to Britain. Not only does it depict the short and tragic life of Anne Frank but it shows, in detail and with clarity, fascism in its formative years.

Its central theme, though, is not past tragedy but a timeless warning against apathy and silence. It is aimed at those who would stay silent today — the "third party who are neither the racists nor their immediate victims. On their silence, fascism can triumph.

The exhibition was opened by former GLC leader Ken Livingstone who promised to write to Council leaders throughout the country to urge them to display the exhibition in their area. Joke Kniesmijer from the Anne Frank Foundation emphasised that "there is a generation growing up whose parents have not lived through the war. It is necessary to tell the story again for them. Books about the Second World War concentrate on the war, but 1932-39 was the most important time."

Livingstone added: "The vast bulk of people did nothing. Resistance was confined to 2 per cent of the population. In similar circumstances that would probably be the same in Britain." The opening was also addressed by Eva Schloss, a childhood friend of Anne Frank, and Lord Elwyn Jones who was a prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials. Poems by Holocaust survivor Michael Etkind were recited.

The opening was attended by representatives from many

JCARP EXHIBITION

anti-racist, Jewish and other minority organisations with the predictable exception of the Board of Deputies; they boycotted the event in protest at Ken Livingstone. The exhibition merits and needs a wide viewing. We urge *Jewish Socialist* readers to encourage their local council to host this important anti-fascist exhibition.

With the abolition of the GLC, the funding enjoyed by the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project came to an end. But JCARP will live on as a voluntary project and will continue to build on its achievements in developing an independent Jewish anti-racist focus. Its most recent publication — *From Awareness to Action* — countering racism and fascism — is being distributed nationally, and the exhibition, *The Aliens Act Revisited*, which has been touring libraries, community centres and conferences in London will now be on display in many cities elsewhere in Britain.

As the visitors' book testifies, on the whole it has been very well received.

"Very revealing and thought provoking."

"Very good — educational."

"An exhibition not to be missed."

"My grandparents walked through snow from Odessa to Bremen via cattle boats to sweatshops. My father fought Moseley in Cable Street. Anti-racism is a constant fight."

"I am pleased to see Jews counted as an ethnic minority."

"Take heart any and every immigrant — we can all live together."

"Should be a permanent display."

AN OPEN LETTER TO ANATOL SHARANSKY

Ha'aretz, 15.2.1986

May I welcome you, Mr Sharansky. Your arrival has been a blessing, not just to yourself, in that your suffering has ended and you have emerged victorious from your struggle, but also to us here. This country very badly needs fighters for liberty and human rights of your calibre.

I'll explain what I mean, at the risk of sounding rude: If you think that your trials are over, and that your landing at Lod airport marked the end of the road, you are mistaken. There is still a long road ahead of you. This is because you did not land in Sweden or Switzerland, but in Israel. You chose to make your home or, if you so wish, redeem your historic home in Israel. As in the Russian joke, I have good news and bad news for you. There is no point in my going into detail about the good news. I am sure those around you are giving you plenty of those already. However, I fear that the bad news may be hidden from you.

I shall start with the worst bit, and you may wish to draw your own comparisons with a situation you know much better than I do. So, then: In Israel, too, there are oppressors and oppressed. In Israel, too, people are 'jailed for long years for flying their national flag. In Israel, too, the authorities close down newspapers which displease them. In Israel, too, people are discriminated against, if not to say persecuted, for their religion or nationality. In Israel, too, there are those who refuse to recognise the existence of a people, or deny its right to self-determination, an identity and self-expression.

Let me put it another way. Despite all differences, such as a democratic regime, open

media, a free press, a stable and fair legal system etc., there is a basic similarity between your new and old homeland. Both are countries which want not only one's body but also one's soul. There, this is called "communism", and here it is simply called "redemption". There, one had better be a communist. Here, one had better be a Jew. Both there and here, everybody is equal, but some are more equal than others.

It will be almost impossible for you to remain aloof from the debate taking place here on the long run. Pressures on you will be great, for you are the moment's greatest political asset. You might be, dare I say it, even brainwashed. There they tried to subvert your character by brutal means, here they will try to do it with torrents of love. The huge skullcap that appeared on your head even before you had time to look around was just the beginning. Don't misunderstand me: if you wish to live as an observant Jew, you are free and welcome to do so. However, in Israel a skullcap, especially if it is large, black, white or knitted, does not just signify respect for the Lord, but also, and perhaps, primarily, certain political sentiments. And I am not denying that this open letter to you is also an attempt to draw you to one side and distance you from another.

Human liberty is not a matter of geography. And you, Mr Sharansky, who has so magnificently withstood your ordeal, proving that you would not allow any oppressor to oppress you, still have one more, albeit much easier, trial ahead of you: You will have to prove, mainly to yourself, that you did not wage your long and harsh struggle just in order to move from the camp of the oppressed to the camp of the oppressors.

Reprinted from *The Other Israel, Newsletter of the Israeli Palestinian Peace*

EUROFASCISM

Faced with the very real threat of the rise of neo-Fascism in European countries, some of the conclusions of a European Parliamentary enquiry seem desperately familiar, says Francesca Klug.

The European Parliament, the only institution of the EEC which is directly elected, provides an interesting opportunity to observe how the Ultra Right operates in a democratic institution. 16 Extreme Right MEPs were elected to the Parliament in 1984 — 10 from the French Front National, 5 from the MSI (Italian Social Movement National Right Party) and one from the Greek pro-colonels group, EPEN. Together they have formed what they call the Group of the European Right.

One of the founders of MSI, Giorgio Almirante, is currently under investigation by the Italian legal authorities for reforming the disbanded Italian Fascist Party when he set up MSI in 1948. The Front National openly campaigns on a platform of repatriation of 'immigrants'. Yet the aim of these groups is respectability.

So they give away a colour brochure with a photo of FN leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, being greeted by the Pope and they take out court cases against anyone who accuses them of fascism. Their latest target is the Committee of Enquiry into the Rise of Fascism and Racism in Europe whose report was all but unanimously adopted by the European Parliament in January. The Enquiry was initiated by Labour MEP for Manchester East, Glyn Ford, in response to the meteoric rise of the FN. The Group of the European Right boycotted the proceedings and are currently taking the Enquiry to the European Court for discriminating against them. The Report did indeed provide some interesting insights into the real nature of the Ultra Right in Europe. For example, according to one witness, a founder member of

the FN, Pierre Bousquet, was a former Waffen SS member (he has since left the Front) and Le Pen himself has been prosecuted under French anti-fascist laws for selling recordings of Nazi songs and speeches.

But all this is dismissed by Le Pen who insists that "the old fascism is dead" and "the only danger to Europe is Communism". Unfortunately he received some support for this thesis from a number of Conservatives and Christian Democrats who tried to obstruct the Enquiry on several occasions arguing that the threat from the Left was greater than that of the Right.

This thesis is reflected in the conclusions of the Report which are vague and contradictory. But this still wasn't enough to satisfy Derek Prag, Conservative MEP for Hatfield and the only other British representative on the Enquiry. In the Parliamentary debate on the Report he slammed Glyn Ford for making political capital out of it. Speaking as a Jew he claimed that British Jewry was "more worried about the left, and that includes the Labour left", than about "so-called fascism".

Perhaps Mr Prag should read his own Report which describes in graphic detail the antisemitic nature of the ultra right in Europe. And hopefully the Jewish establishment as a whole will note the words of Theo Klein, Chair of the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France (CRIF) who is quoted as saying: "Once attitudes of discrimination, contempt or even hate come to be adopted towards one section of the population, other sections are threatened. In this respect there is solidarity between us Jews and the Arab immigrants."

"How did we break out of our ghettos and enter the mainstream of society and its privileges? . . . not by riots and demonstrations, by violence and protest marches . . . We channelled the ambition of our youngsters to academic excellence, not flashy cars."

Rabbi becomes Chief Tebbit — shock

The Chief Rabbi has been pouring out his thoughts on the inner cities. Here, Jewish Socialists' Group members reply.

"Even more important for the recovery of health of our inner cities than the building and renovation of housing projects is the repair of home life as the inner fortress of love, care, decency and every social virtue."

There was a time, not so very long ago, when liberal-minded Jews used to complain that our religious leaders did not speak out on social evils and the threat of war, but were too pre-occupied with ritual and trivia, or warnings against "reform" and "assimilation". Where were our Donald Sopers, Canon Collins, or Bruce Kents, these socially-conscious Jews asked themselves? Well, there are a couple of people who, in their limited way, dare to differ a bit from the reactionary norm — Julia Neuberger on family morality say, or David Goldberg on Middle East peace.

But as for the Chief Rabbi — I think those who used to say he should speak on the Big Issues are now wishing he'd stuck to *pilpul* on matters of interest to the Orthodox few. On people, he's not so hot. After the Church of England — long decried as "the Tory party at prayer" — had roused Tory MPs to denounce its Bishops as "Marxists" for what they said about the Inner City, Jacobovits ventured his own views. People in the inner city slums should stop moaning, and work harder, to help themselves (and not in the way the Brixton rioters were doing either!) The gospel according not to the Hebrew prophets of old, but of Norman Tebbit and the Chicago school monetarists.

We shouldn't be too surprised. Although it got less publicity, his message last year to JONAH, claiming that nuclear disarmament was really immoral, was a classic. His performance over that PLO meeting with Howe that wasn't, was pathetic. In fact, his one-time reputation as a liberal among the rabbis (he once dared suggest peace was more important than territory for Israel, and that Arabs might have rights — in an after-dinner chat with Israeli journalists, who promptly blew it all up into a sensation) says something about the others! Still, who knows, at this rate maybe Maggie Thatcher can make him Archbishop of Canterbury!

Apart from showing his ignorance about what Black people in the inner cities are doing, their educational efforts for instance, the learned Rabbi has also fed the minority of Black antisemites with valuable material, as well as the Tories. He's also prompted some Jews, like social historian Raphael Samuel, to ask where Jewish socialists are today, (we've written to tell him) and to remind us of some of the less glamourised facts of Jewish social history in the inner city.

But as Labour MP Leo Abse pointed out, the Chief Rabbi is only echoing what his worthy predecessors in the 19th century told Jewish workers demanding their rights to a decent life. They too had to work harder, not demand too much, not listen to socialist agitators and so on. As it happened, they not only rejected this advice, but marched on his synagogue, with the result that police were called out and a riot ensued!

"We never learnt that in Kheder!" No, we didn't, did we? But next time anyone talks of Black people having to learn from the Jews, we'll have to say, "— some things, maybe". Only not from the sweatshop capitalists or those who still idealise their "self-help" and call it religious morality.

Charlie Pottins

"We did not gate-crash into our gentile environment. We made ourselves highly acceptable and indispensable by our industrial, intellectual and moral contribution to society."

Since the Chief Rabbi has allowed himself to offer an unresearched view on various matters and has betrayed a certain degree of simplicity in anti-union and pro-Conservative bias, perhaps a trade unionist who has been elected three years in succession by a branch of some 650 low paid workers, might be allowed to offer his thoughts on a solution to Britain's political and social crisis. I cannot claim great Jewish education, nor to be a practising Jew, but I can speak from experience in the trade union and labour movement.

How are "religious leaders" to address themselves to grave social problems? Is his article a promotion of justice and fairness in social relations and are the biblical views expressed setting timeless moral imperatives?

In his sweep of European history he totally ignores the disruptive effects of imperialism on local populations and their descendants of many former colonial tracts of the world. Even today they are constrained by neo-colonialism in the industries their "benefactors" have permitted/encouraged to develop. Populations have been systematically enslaved, imbued in a foreign religion, language and laws and have had to accept the superimposition, at worst, or engrafting, at best, of foreign mores and European oriented laws.

Today some do not even possess one passport or peaceful input into the running of the land of their birth. Others possess all such rights and some are free to choose or enjoy several passports simultaneously.

I understand that it was Jewish women who ensured that Hebrew slaves never succumbed to despair. What would have been the case had Jews like American slaves, been forced to endure a system under which the person, the spouse and the children of the slave and not merely their labour were the property of the master to dispose of at their will? What would concepts of family life be like after centuries of such treatment?

So the Black immigrants were not of a British cultural and educational heritage and were not as amenable to acculturation and integration in Britain as Jews? Why then are West Indians so frequently Christian? Why have

they received such a traditional British old fashioned education in the West Indies?

"... we cultivated trust in and respect for the police, realising that our security as a minority depended on law and order being maintained."

The Chief Rabbi refers to antisemitism and fascist thugs and the need for law and order, but the real Jewish response was a recognition that the law itself required amendment. And whose law and order is referred to? That of Lord Wolfson who offered his Jewish cabinet-maker outworkers a slight reduction in the price per goods bargained and agreed if they required cash late on Fridays as they invariably did? "Not by riot and demonstration, violence and protest marches," says the Rabbi. What does he imagine the mass Jewish marches in the early years of this century in London, against Tsarist pogroms were, if not exercises in the "power" of an ethnic minority?

Today rabble rousers are permitted and demagogues tolerated and applauded provided such arousal is in the name of unthinking support of Zionism and a determination to justify every last action of the Israeli Government.

How do we channel youngsters' ambition into academic excellence? How can we hallow home life when the family is split over thousands of miles or when the overtime necessary disrupts any hope of a family life? Maybe the Chief Rabbi doesn't know when Bank Holidays came into existence, or why. Where does he see the evidence that Jews rooted out crime and violence from their midst? In many parts of the East End, in the last century, including the Jewish areas, the police would proceed and patrol only in groups.

"No work is too menial to compromise human dignity and self-respect . . . idleness is an even greater evil than unemployment, especially in a welfare state which maintains every citizen above subsistence level . . . cheap labour is more dignified than a free dole."

Continued on page 16

FARRAKHAN :

Black American demagogue Louis Farrakhan, whose viciously anti-Jewish harangues have brought him fame in the capitalist press, but were disowned by previous associate Jesse Jackson, has received a boost in Britain. Under the sensationalist headline: Louis Farrakhan — The White Man's Devil, the widely circulated *Caribbean Times* (22.10.85) gave him front-page star treatment, quoting his anti-Jewish outbursts with relish.

"Farrakhan's main enemy are the Jews of America who 'monopolise the economic power' in the USA and have 'sabotaged the growth of Black businesses'... They in turn have branded him a devil in the columns of Jewish owned publications."

Referring to a Farrakhan speech in Madison Square Gardens, it quotes: "We will never have economic independence and influence unless we hold on to the socio-political gains of the 1960s. Those gains are about to be eradicated by a new wave of violence from the Jewish organisations who control the economic as well as the political life of the USA."

Clearly, unlike "his good friend Jesse Jackson" — as *Caribbean Times* calls him — Farrakhan has no wish to acknowledge the part played by Jews in the fight for those socio-political gains. Jackson made a point of this when he recalled three civil rights workers, two of them Jewish, murdered in Mississippi by white racists, in a recent speech.

Farrakhan does not want his Black bourgeois chauvinism sullied by such alliances, not that the elements represented by him are opposed to alliances of a different kind. In the 1970s, Republican politicians and big business foundations, some associated with the CIA, cultivated Black business and selected political groups to contain and divert Black anger. John Farmer's CORE, having moved from civil rights to a Black nationalist stance, picking up a Ford Foundation grant along the way, ended up recruiting Black Vietnam veterans as CIA mercenaries in Angola. Farrakhan's Nation of Islam went further right for allies. In the name of their segregationism, Black Muslim delegates were on show at rallies of Rockwell's American Nazi Party. This is not mentioned in the *Caribbean Times* article which also covers up Farrakhan's real record in the Nation of Islam movement. It has him mention the great leaders of the 1960s such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, who were murdered, implicitly comparing himself with them. Of course King was completely opposed to, and by,

The Jewish Socialists' Group supports and unites with all who campaign against racism, fascism and economic exploitation, and for self-expression and equal treatment of all minorities. On this basis we demand mutual support and respect for Jews as an ethnic group. We reject anyone preaching or practising antisemitism under any conditions.

As socialists we oppose the general and unrestricted use of the State's power to ban or restrict entry of individuals or groups into Britain. And we place no faith in the State to counter racism on our behalf. But we support the use of bans on people promoting ideas and practices directly threatening ethnic minorities and other oppressed groups. We absolutely condemn invitations to racists, fascists and antisemites.

The JSG supports the general movement for economic emancipation promoted within the Black communities in America and Britain, in which Farrakhan is a participant. Equally we see the need for a radical political militancy against pervasive racism, especially when racism is being reinforced by State and government institutions. But we cannot tolerate the clearly articulated, openly avowed attacks on Jews, Judaism and Jewish groups made by Farrakhan. We must oppose his antisemitism especially when it scapegoats Jews as maintaining the conditions of discrimination and subordination suffered by Black people. And we cannot ignore the material support his movement has accepted from far-right sources and the positive welcome his ideas enjoy in the American and British fascist press.

Whether or not he comes to Britain, he has succeeded in injecting a divisive influence between Black and Jewish communities, resulting in open or covert hostilities on both sides, the basis of which we entirely reject. A clear and united opposition to antisemitism and racism — whoever promotes it — can start to repair the damage.

Repairing the Damage

chauvinists like Farrakhan.

As for Malcolm X, his turn away from narrow nationalism towards a broader militant espousal of the oppressed, against US capitalism, was what made him dangerous. But it wasn't just white racists who were out to get Malcolm X. A little known figure in the Nation of Islam movement publicly attacked Malcolm X as a traitor and called for him to be struck down. That incitor was Louis Farrakhan.

Today, Farrakhan makes speeches attacking Judaism and Jews, throws in choice references to Hitler and gas ovens and takes money from Ku Klux Klan leaders. The white capitalist media, excited by the prospect of Blacks being racist, love it. Farrakhan knows it and feeds them more. 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 and for a few publicity-seeking careerists here too, Farrakhan's bogeyman image in the white media suggests he can't be all that bad.

So who invited Farrakhan to Britain and who would benefit from his activities?

This leading spokesperson for antisemitism and capitalism among Black people, the darling of the KKK and American Nazis, was actually invited here by Lester Lewis, a Labour councillor in Hackney of all places. There are of course some Jews who as businessmen, landlords, property speculators and Tory ministers, are responsible for some of the poverty and oppression in Hackney (and other Jews are often on the receiving end, even if in lesser numbers than Blacks). There are, of course, also many non-Jews engaged in such activity, and even a few Blacks. All Farrakhan proposes is to increase the number of the latter. But if you're going to try and channel Black anger so that it doesn't really threaten the system, what better than to focus on a small section of the exploiters and identify them not by class but by race or religion. It also helps to conceal your own class differences with those you're purporting to lead and speak for.

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 real beneficiaries of a free-for-all fight between Jews, Blacks and Asians.

"DON'T BAN THE PREACHER" screamed the headline of the *Caribbean Times* in January. The preacher was Louis Farrakhan, notorious for his antisemitic comments lapped up at huge rallies in America. The *Caribbean Times* assured us that such comments were all taken out of context, that his real message was Black economic independence and that his dispute with Jews was on abstract theological grounds.

It is all a rather charitable interpretation to put on statements such as: "Hitler was a great man . . . Jews are the bloodsuckers of the poor . . . the skunks of the planet Earth", which would surely not fool genuine anti-racists. Given that the invitation came from Hackney Black People's Association — a group operating in a borough with large Jewish and Black populations, both subject to increasingly vicious racist attacks, the imperatives for anti-racists were clear: to vigorously denounce Farrakhan's divisive and diversionary message and take the opportunity to strengthen unity among Black and Jewish people against racism and antisemitism. Only things did not work out so simply.

While anti-racists agonised over the finer distinctions between opportunist Black antisemites and opportunist white antisemites, and the *Evening Standard* stoked up the issue with helpful headlines such as: "Jew baiter invited by Labour Group", "Jews and Blacks fall out in Hackney", the British/Israel Parliamentary Group lobbied the Home Secretary to ban the preacher. Treating the banning of Black people as one more routine task, the Home Secretary duly obliged, probably under the misapprehension that Farrakhan was a Black Marxist or revolutionary. For all the wrong reasons the right result nevertheless prevailed and Farrakhan was prevented from spreading his poisonous message and from further inflaming Black/Jewish tensions encouraged by the invitation.

But with the state intervening, it was the ban rather than the invitation that falsely became the central issue. Black newspapers such as *The Voice* and *Caribbean Times* strongly attacked

the ban. For three weeks it was their main story. Their attack was two-pronged: firstly an assertion of free speech for Black people; secondly a protest against what was variously called the Jewish/British-Israel/Zionist lobby which it blamed for the ban. *The Voice* did a small-scale survey in London's Black localities. In answer to a question about why the Home Office banned the preacher, "the strong Jewish lobby" was claimed the most popular of their four pre-suggested answers. Those who really believe there is a strong Jewish lobby should ask themselves why the state continues to tolerate Italian fascist terrorists aiding the British far right in its anti-Jewish and anti-Black activities, and why the State has allowed in various neo-Nazis to speak in England over the years, bringing their virulently antisemitic messages. Anyway, against a background of patently antisemitic assumptions and assertions, both papers denied that Farrakhan was anti-Jewish.

The free speech argument surprisingly won the support of the Labour Party Black Sections. They attacked the hypocrisy of the State which plays host to Botha and the KKK but bars the likes of Kwame Ture and Farrakhan. Of course the State is hypocritical; it's racist too, but that is not an excuse for demanding free speech for racists of Farrakhan's ilk. *Searchlight* recalled how anti-racists won the free-speech argument in the 1970s against the idea that people had the right to hear racist views and decide for themselves. Those "opposing the Farrakhan ban . . . sell the pass on the 'free speech' argument," it claimed.

No socialist can welcome the State flexing its banning muscles, but what if it did cave in to pressure from anti-racists? What if our demonstrations had resulted in Botha being excluded? My regret is that the demand for Farrakhan's ban came not from massed ranks of anti-racists but instead from a grouping whose principal concern is defending Israel's image abroad and who like to confuse the interests of Israel and the diaspora.

Those who take a purist line against all bans are often those who do not have to suffer the consequences. And standing on this holier-than-thou "principled" position neatly side steps the real issue of the invitation by Lester Lewis, a socialist councillor, to an antisemite. In an article which treated antisemitism as a trifling side issue, *Socialist Worker* attacked Farrakhan's Black capitalism ideology and claimed that through the ban, "the Tories have once

again silenced their opponents". It would be very nice if everyone who was on the wrong end of Tory policy was intrinsically revolutionary but I'm afraid it is not the case. I still do not know in which sense the preacher is an opponent of the Tories. *Socialist Action*, meanwhile, demanded: "End the ban on Farrakhan. Defend Lester Lewis" while of course criticising Farrakhan's wrong and dangerous politics.

To their credit *Socialist Worker* printed a Jewish Socialists' Group letter in response but, no doubt for reasons of space, omitted our essential political point that if we do not recognise and confront problems of our own making — like when a socialist councillor invites an antisemite — then we are in no position to tackle the State's racism. If we don't want to have to wrench concessions from the racist state, then we don't have to welcome antisemites.

Back in Hackney, the Labour Group with the exception of Councillor Lewis voted to bar Farrakhan from council premises should he come, and the racists wrote letters to the local papers telling Lester Lewis: "you would not be sorely missed should you decide to leave this country." The whole episode was a shambles from the point of view of the anti-racist movement and there were worrying developments.

There is no doubt that much of the comment in the Black press on this issue must be described as antisemitic. Their anger was fuelled by the ignorant and untimely intervention of the Chief Rabbi on inner-city matters. *The Voice* condemned the "recent attacks by certain prominent Jews in the banning of Louis Farrakhan and the chastising by Rabbi Jakobovits." In fact the two do go together but not as *The Voice* saw them — worthy representatives of their communities — but as the opposite, unrepresentative elements making a unique contribution to damaging Black/Jewish relations. But antisemitic comments appeared before the rabbi's intervention, so where do they come from? There is no tradition of antisemitism in Britain's Black communities and it probably tells us as much about the general climate in Britain of antisemitism as it does about Blacks and Jews. But without respected Black radicals coming forward to vigorously denounce Farrakhan or antisemitic comments in the Black press, the net effect of the Farrakhan episode will not be to diminish antisemitism among sections of Blacks, nor racism among sections of Jews.

GYPSIES AND JEWS

Donald Kenrick writes
of the long history of the Gypsy or Romani people,
and of the links, many tragic, with Jewish history,

There have always been connections between Jews and Gypsies. The first one is shared persecution. Queen Elizabeth I introduced the death penalty for Gypsies at about the same time as she executed her Jewish doctor. In Spain, the Jews, the Arabs and the Gypsies were all issued with orders of expulsion within about three years. This shared history of persecution as a minority culminated in the Nazi holocaust. On the lighter side Gypsies, particularly in Eastern Europe, have had a share of music. Klezmer bands (the Eastern European traditional Jewish bands) have often interchanged tunes and personnel with Gypsy orchestras, so you had Gypsies playing in Jewish bands and Jews playing in Gypsy bands. When I was in Paris at a Gypsy wedding about three years back the band were an Israeli band and the first tune they struck up was "Khosn kale, mazltov" (a Jewish traditional song) which was quite surprising to find in the middle of a Gypsy wedding. There is quite a lot of interchange culturally, not only on the music level, and and, in Eastern Europe, quite a lot of intermarriage. I was amazed, in the Nazi period at how many people were being persecuted because their mother was Jewish and their father was Gypsy. The history of the Gypsies under the Nazis was mainly written by Jews. Very few Gypsies on the Continent were literate, so when it came to writing up the story of what had happened to Gypsies in the Nazi period it was mostly Jewish ex-prisoners in the concentration camps, who began to write it down. Most famous, perhaps, is Miriam Novitch, who set up in Israel, in kibbutz Lohamei Ghettaoth, a special museum devoted to the Gypsies. She tours round Europe giving talks and collecting material.

Talking about intermarriage, one of the leading Gypsy writers and television stars of today in France, Mathieu Maximov is of mixed grandparentage; I think one Jewish grandparent and three Gypsy grandparents. He got compensation after the War as a Jew although he had originally been imprisoned as a Gypsy. He is translating the Old Testament into Romani, which is quite a big task. The Book of Ruth was chosen first because of its story of an outsider marrying in and the problems of intermarriage. It was felt that it was a good first book to publish because Gypsies are also faced with these problems of a non-Gypsy marrying in.

There are two to three thousand Gypsies in the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank. They are very well known

to European Gypsies who always stop and chat to them on their way through. They are not so well known to Israeli anthropologists. I met an Israeli anthropologist who came over to England to study the Gypsies, to write a thesis back in Jerusalem. I said to him "Well, how about the local Gypsies?" He said "Well, I would be a bit worried about spending a lot of time in the Old City". He thought it would be a bit dangerous talking to people.

The word "Gypsy" comes from "Egyptian". (Shakespeare always calls the Gypsies "Egyptians" and they are that in Queen Elizabeth's legislation. They were "Egyptians" because people thought they came from Egypt.) One can use the word "Gypsy" loosely to cover anyone who is travelling around in a caravan or living a "Gypsy way of life". In this country the word "Gypsy" covers a number of other groups. I use the word "Romani" to cover people who emigrated from India and who form the core of the Gypsy population of Europe. The word "Romani" probably comes from a Sanskrit word "Rom" meaning a man or a human being.

The Romanies are undoubtedly of Indian origin, from the Punjab. The language is such that it is possible to have a simple conversation if you know Romani and somebody else knows Punjabi. A husband and wife could talk,

get food and drink, or discuss the children by the Romani speaking Romani and the Indian speaking Punjabi. The Romanies originated in North West India. They moved from North West India to Afghanistan into Iran from the year 600 or so onwards. Many came to serve as mercenaries and to be policemen. Others came to be musicians and brought their families with them, particularly lute players. Another group came as captives after wars, and were put to work in the rather unpleasant parts of Iran, down by the marshes, in Mesopotamia and in the swamps. They were taken from India as peasants and were put in a number of towns throughout the Iranian and later the Muslim empire, as peasants.

I compare it to the Indian population of London, though we are not talking about anything on the same scale. If one looks at the Indian population of London they came in all sorts of different ways — via East Africa, and some of them are now working in post offices. Some came from the Punjab and are working in paper mills, in Southall. Others came from Bangladesh and are working in clothes factories and so on. There are different ways in which Indians came here, but there is something which could be called an "Indian community" in London. In the same way in Iran in the 6th to 20th centuries you had something which could

be called an Indian community, people who had come in all sorts of different ways. They intermarried amongst themselves, rather than with Iranians or Arabs because they were close in religion and language.

Separate identities

Nevertheless there is not one Romani people — it would not be true to say that every single Romani is the same. When they later on moved from Iran into Europe, they still kept separate identities — you could still identify castes (although the word wasn't used). There are still in Europe very visibly spoonmakers, horse-dealers and carpet makers. There are groups which call themselves Kalo (the Indian word for black) or Sinti (because they came from Sind). So these emigrants from India have never welded themselves into one Gypsy or Romani people. It is the outsiders who have made them one by erecting a boundary against them all. It is other people saying "Well, you're a Gypsy like that fellow round the corner" which has made people feel "Well, perhaps I am a Gypsy like that fellow round the corner or Romani like that other tribe down there, though we don't in fact talk the same language and we won't marry our daughters to them".

So this amorphous group of Romanies in Iran, North Indians, moved from there into Europe, particularly as the Arabs invaded. They came into Europe round about 1350 and reached the British Isles round about 1500 (480 years ago). Compared to the Jews they were lucky, because they were too late to be accused of bringing the Black Death, though they were accused of spreading the bubonic plague in Italy.

Like the Jews, the Gypsies came too Europe too late to find any empty land, presuming they had wanted to. Previous migrants into Europe had just found a piece of empty land (the Bulgars in Bulgaria, or the Magyars in Hungary), took it over, and pushed the people out. Gypsies and Jews came in too small numbers and for a number of reasons they didn't do it anyway. Gypsies came as Christians; they had been converted by the Greeks in the period when they had moved across from Iran through Greece into Western Europe. They may just have been nominal Christians, but they were not Muslims or Hindus. So that would be a reason for them being more accepted than the Jews, because they had the same religion as the Western European population.

Pariahs

Nevertheless, within about 30 or 40 years of their arrival in Western Europe and to a lesser extent Eastern Europe they were suddenly turned into pariahs. With 30 to 40 years in every case the "powers that be" turned against them and started persecuting them. This was, I think, because they attracted the enmity of the three powerful forces in mediaeval

Europe — firstly the Church, because they represented, although they were Christians, in some way an alternative to the Church. We know that priests forbade people to go to the Gypsies and excommunicated people who had had their palms read.

The craft guilds were also against the Gypsies: the silversmiths, the copper-smiths, the tanners and the skinner. The Gypsies didn't go in for apprenticeships. So they could undercut the price of local

tradesmen, in baskets, copperware and hides. Therefore the local tradesmen were jealous and the guilds wanted the Gypsies out. And thirdly the state itself. The Gypsies didn't know when they were born, they didn't know what their family name was. If you decided you were going to collect a poll tax on the 2nd of April each year the Gypsies moved out on the 28th March to another village — which they could do because they were mobile, unlike the local population. So they got

We haven't got the problem....

We haven't got the problem, it's the non-Gypsies who have the problem; we are perfectly happy to pull where we have always pulled. There has been no legislation which has benefited Gypsies, from the Middle Ages onwards; the 1968 Caravan Sites Act benefited local authorities. It was hoped it would benefit Gypsies; "designation" was the carrot to persuade local authorities to build sites. If you get a certain number of pitches in your area you can apply for designation, that means you have no need to build any further sites there and you can remove from that area any Gypsies who pull in there whether they were born there or not. In that respect we say it is a form of apartheid. If I were to move from Peterborough (where I live) and I wished to come to a designated area in London, I would have to first find out if there was a site available in that area; if there wasn't I could not move. If there was, then I would have to go there and come onto that site. If I pulled anywhere else, then that would be a breach of the criminal law and I would be taken to the Magistrates Court where I could be fined every day the offence continued.

Peterborough is now a designated area. We have got families there who have lived in the area for at least 30 years; people who have been born there find out now that because they are not on the permanent site, the official site allocated by the local authority, they are in breach of the criminal law.

For every Gypsy on the road, near enough two live in houses. They have had to settle down. The only reason the majority take advantage of sites is because of the harassment with police. I know the Jewish people went through a similar situation in Germany where in the early hours of the morning they had police raids. We've been getting this in this country for generations. On a piece of ground, at maybe two or three in the morning, the police come down with headlights on, shining torches, demanding documents, asking for television licences. They will say "We will be back in half an hour and we will want to see your vehicle documents". Anybody who hasn't got

them is obviously going to be gone. There are all sorts of ways and means to make sure you don't settle in their area. They are perfectly happy for you to be in someone else's area, so long as you are not in their particular patch.

The Labour Party record regarding Gypsies is abysmal. If the Labour Party is in opposition they will support Gypsies and say what a terrible time Gypsies are having. When they are in power, they are more eager than the Conservatives to get rid of you. But our local Conservative MP (Brian Mawhinney) is the same.

You get in the rural areas, near Peterborough, where I work from, notices saying "No van dwellers", which means Gypsies. One can argue that quite a lot of non-Gypsy people live on mobile homes sites, and this should apply to them also. But it never does. It applies to Gypsy people. We have tried to bring cases to the Commission for Racial Equality. But although the CRE has teeth, they might as well leave them on the mantelpiece, because they never use them. They will take a case right up until it's ready to be presented in court. And if the publican turns round and says "I've changed my mind, I'll take the notice down" the case is gone. They don't say "The fact is that the person has done this, he has discriminated", they are happy when the discrimination from their point of view stops.

One of the biggest arguments against our community is the fact of rubbish. You've no doubt seen on television where there is a Gypsy site and the first thing you see is a big pile of scrap metal. Like with all television programmes, you get a television crew come down and they will film for maybe half an hour. They will film what you ask them to film plus what you don't ask them to film. When they make the programme the first thing you see is a big heap of scrap, and all the children with runny noses. This gives a bad light to people who are not Gypsies. But scrap to us is money — a living. A lot of the criticisms are very unfair.

Peter Mercer is the Secretary of the East Anglian Gypsy Council.



the antagonism of the state because they couldn't really fit into the system of feudal times.

Expulsions

So every country in Europe, with about two exceptions, tried to expel their Gypsies. There are laws for almost every European country from 1430 onward saying "Gypsies must leave within 30 days" or by next Easter, or be executed, have their heads shaved, or be sent to the galleys. The exceptions were Rumania and to some extent Poland, where they really needed the Gypsies as labour. In Rumania the Gypsies were forced into a sort of serfdom which some people compared to slavery because they didn't have the right of serfs. They could be sold by their masters, they couldn't marry without the permission of their masters; they were a little bit lower than serfs and had a different name in Rumanian. Other countries simply tried to expel them. They didn't succeed in expelling them for various reasons. The peasants on the whole were not against Gypsies (one looks at Sir Roger de Coverley who was always complaining about the servants and workers going off to the Gypsies instead of getting on with their work on the farm). The nobility also liked the Gypsies on their land as workers in the summer when they could use them as labour picking grapes and apples, and then forget about them in the winter and not have to pay them. The women could be called upon to dance or to serve at table when required. There are still in Essex Gypsies who are leading a very poor life on the land of rich farmers. They just get paid during the summer and then they turn them off to find their own living in the winter. So the nobles protected Gypsies against the state even at the risk of being fined, and there are a lot of examples of laws condemning nobles to fines for protecting Gypsies.

One finds that traditional Gypsy stopping places, where Gypsies put their tents and caravans, are very often on a boundary. There's Jenkins Lane, on the boundary of Newham and Redbridge. There's a lovely road on the boundary of Richmond and Surrey where Gypsies always stop. There's a "Gypsy corner" out on the North Circular Road, just on the corner of two boroughs. So if the police came from one area they just popped over the border and then went back when the police had gone. They still do this today. There are also parts that don't belong to anybody. You'll find Gypsies in Italy on dried river beds because the river beds are nobody's property.

There was no new migration until very recently. There was a second migration west from about 1850 onwards when slavery ended in Rumania. From about 1834 the Rumanians liberated the Gypsy slaves and large numbers took the opportunity to emigrate. There would have been more, possibly, in England had it

not been for the Aliens Act; it's a little known fact that the Aliens Act also affected Gypsies. Some of the MPs actually spoke in favour of it because it would keep the Gypsies (or "German coppersmiths" as they were called at the time) out of England. Any of these Rumanian Gypsies were very quickly put back on the next ship to Calais.

Gypsies in the USSR

I am going to jump to after 1918, when quite a few things happened — in particular in the Soviet Union there was a period when the Romani language and literature were fostered by Stalin. It was a very short period — from about 1929 to 1932, but during that period the Romani language was written down, dictionaries were produced, and the works of Lenin were translated into Romani. There were masses of little manuals about agriculture, there were films, usually called "The last camp" which showed Gypsies giving up their way of life, working happily on collective farms and singing away, with the dialogue in Romani. There were one or two quite good novels. There was even a magazine in Romani, called *Nevo Drom* (New Way) which had a chess column. Then in 1932 Stalin decided that the Romani language was not to be fostered. It was before the suppression of Yiddish, but it was for the same reason, I think, that they were worried about "internationalism" — Romanies in other countries, getting involved with Romanies in the USSR and corresponding and bringing in seditious literature and so on.

There was a big spin-off from this in Yugoslavia, Rumania and Czechoslovakia where cultural clubs were set up, and a paper in Yugoslavia. You got something

unheard of previously — Romani as a written language, and the Romanies seeing themselves as a nation. Most European countries previously had tried to pretend that Gypsies didn't exist, were drop-outs from society or were foreigners, but in the Soviet Union they had "Tziganin" written in their passport so they were recognised as a nationality. All this was stopped by the Holocaust.

Extermination

I don't want to say too much about the Holocaust — except that it happened. The details follow very much that of the Jewish holocaust; you have the same names turning up like Auschwitz or Buchenwald. In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws applied only to Jews and Gypsies — they couldn't be citizens of Germany and they were not allowed to intermarry with Germans. That is probably one reason why Jews and Gypsies married each other at different levels of society. At the musician level, Jews and Gypsies intermarried because they met each other; they weren't allowed to marry Germans and there was a limit to the number of marriage partners. The Gypsies were expelled from the schools. The teacher first made them sit in the corner, then they weren't allowed to come at all because they were a "disturbing influence" on the other children. The majority of Gypsies aged 40 to 60 in Germany can't read — those over 60 all can.

In 1939 all the Gypsies in Germany were to be deported to Poland — this was carried out from 1940 onwards and Eichmann was one of the people involved. As Germany occupied the other countries in Europe the Gypsies were the second groups to be persecuted — first the Jews

and then the Gypsies. They were put in camps, and killed. The few countries in which Gypsies survived were those which Germany took over later — for example Hungary. They were only just beginning on the persecution of the Gypsies when Hungary fell to Russian troops. It was similar in Rumania and Greece. So had the war gone on for longer, there is no doubt that all the Gypsies would have shared the fate of the Jews. As it is, Grattan Puxon and myself estimate that a quarter of a million Gypsies at least were killed. This would be the majority of the Gypsy population in the countries which were occupied by the Germans. All the Gypsies in Bohemia, Moravia, Germany, Austria, Swabia were, for practical purposes, wiped out. The Germans were aware that there were Gypsies in England and they were getting ready to deal with them. They were quite convinced that they were of Romani or Indian origin and needed to be eliminated.

I was recently at Belsen where Jews and Gypsies who had survived went back to Belsen. Simone Weil, who was President of the European Community, came specially to talk because she had been friends with Gypsies in the camp. So there was an awareness amongst the Jews who the Gypsies were and vice versa and comradeships in the camps and after.

No reparations

The Gypsies got no reparations. There has been no global payment, like there has been to Jews. In 1965, the German government said it would give a global payment to any recognised body, but they didn't consider that there was a recognised body to give it to. That was one of the reasons for forming an international Gypsy organisation, in order to be this recognised body. Nothing has happened and 20 years have passed. Individuals have had very little reparations; it takes a long time. People who were released from the camps in 1945 are still trying to get reparations on the grounds that they were in some way mistreated.

Romanestan

I don't want to get involved in the controversy about whether the Nazi holocaust gave a boost to Zionism or not, but I think it gave a boost to what we will call "Romani Zionism" or "Gypsy Zionism", the idea of "Romanestan". Romanestan was based on the idea of "Pakistan", and appeared first as an idea in 1937. Janusz Kwiek, a leader of the Gypsies in Poland, seeing possibly what might be coming, asked Mussolini if he would give the Gypsies territory in Somalia (which the Italians had taken) to be a Romani state. We haven't any information on what Mussolini thought; later on Mussolini did deport the Italian Gypsies to little islands off the coast. Janusz Kwiek came to London and spoke in Hyde Park, trying to get support for the idea that territory should be given to

Gypsies. Janusz Kwiek himself died in Auschwitz. In 1943-4 the idea came up again. There is sufficient evidence to convince me, although there is nothing in writing, that Tito promised the Gypsies that if they joined his partisans he would give them a territory in Yugoslavia, which would be their own territory after the War. Many living people have said this to us. Gypsies did join the partisans quite strongly, especially when they saw how their own people were being persecuted by the Germans. However, nothing came of the idea for a territory.

After 1945, some intellectuals were looking towards a return to India. A man called Vaida Vojvod wrote to the United Nations asking them to help him get a bit of land in India or Pakistan, to be a Romani state. He was about the last person who seriously talked about this. There has been some connection between Romanies and India; for example, one of Mrs Gandhi's last public appearances was to greet some Romanies who went over to India from different countries. So Indians have felt sympathetic towards the Romanies, though they have not actually wanted them back.

I think the mood of most Gypsies today is expressed by a Canadian Romani poet called Ronnie Lee (who actually came here and then went back to Canada) — "Romanestan is our freedom, to live as Gypsies under our own laws". He has said in another poem "Romanestan is where my two feet are, providing I'm free".

Ethnic minority

Readers of *Jewish Socialist* should be aware that in Europe the Gypsies are now seeing themselves as an ethnic group, just like the Basques, the Macedonians or the Kurds. We are talking of a population of something like two million Romanies spread out over Europe. You can go from Prague to Hungary, Rumania and the Black Sea and speak only Romani. You can find enough shops and people. There is a great movement in Europe to get recognition as an ethnic minority, currently strongest in Yugoslavia and Hungary.

Meanwhile back in the United Kingdom, there are 16,000 families, 8,000 in caravans, 8,000 in houses. The problem for those who are in caravans is somewhere to stop. There isn't really a Gypsy problem but a "gajo" problem, to use a Romani word (meaning non-Gypsy — I don't think "gajo" is etymologically the same as "goy", but Gypsies use "gajo" as Jews use "goy"), that non-Gypsies won't let Gypsies put their caravans anywhere. The 1968 Caravan Sites Act said that every local council should provide sites for Gypsies. If they did this they would have extra powers. It hasn't worked very well. The Conservative Government is not wildly interested in Gypsies and I can't say local Labour councils are always pro-Gypsy. In fact some have been very hostile.

Donald Kenrick is the author (with Grattan Puxon) of *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (Heinemann, 1972).



IRISH WOMEN

Brid Boland traces the history of Ireland and Irish women and shows how they have faced discrimination because of their nationality and their gender.

It is estimated that there are 24 million Irish people living around the world but only 4 million of them live in Ireland.

The story begins in the 12th century. At that time Gaelic Ireland used the legislature known as the Brehon Laws – where women were not quite equal to men but almost. Ireland had its own vernacular – the Irish language – in which law tracts, medical books and other documents were written. The English language at that time had not been developed enough and most parts of Europe, (including England), used Latin. The first invaders of Ireland intermarried and settled down with the native Irish, adopting their customs and language. However during the centuries that followed and further invasions took place this Gaelic system was to become more eroded and replaced by one which disinherited and dispossessed Irish women. This culminated in the Great Famine and the situation today where part of Ireland is still under British rule and millions of Irish women are scattered all over the globe.

British Imperial conceit has been fostered for over 8 centuries by writers such as Gerald of Wales, the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser, the poet John Milton, the philosopher John Hume, writers Thomas Carlyle and Charles Kingsley and even Shakespeare himself. It was during these early years as well that the basis for future repressive legislation was laid in the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366). These included laws which forbade settlers to adopt customs of the Irish, speak the language, intermarry or host Irish entertainers.

During succeeding centuries the relationship between the English ruling class and the Irish remained the same – the Irish resisted whilst the English tried to subjugate Ireland.

Plantation

The reconquest of Ireland began with the Tudors in the 16th Century where English Nationalism, as we today know it, was born. In Mary Tudor's reign

England adopted a policy known as "plantation" which involved driving the Irish from their land and replacing them with English settlers. The English were enticed by being told that houses in Ireland cost £50 to keep as opposed to £200 in England. During this time there ensued a ferocious and continuous war – brutal to the extreme. All 600 natives of Rathin Island were slaughtered as were the men, women and children in Munster.

During the reign of Elizabeth I began England's involvement in colonising America and the slave trade. By the end of her reign the "plantation" of Ulster was complete and by the end of 17th Century 14% of the land was left in natives' hands. This was also largely due to Cromwell who thought he was sent by God to civilise the Irish. In Drogheda 3000 people were slaughtered, in Wexford 2000. Ten thousand were captured to be sent as slaves to the Caribbean.

Oliver Cromwell's son justified the seizure of 1000 women by saying that "although we must use force in taking them up yet it was so much for their own good and likely to be of great advantage

to the public". (Oliver Cromwell's own name is imprinted on the collective memory of the Irish – the order "to Hell or to Connaught" was his when anyone found on the east side of the Shannon after 6th December 1654 would be slain.)

There followed the Penal Laws which forbade women and men to own land, practise their religion, own a horse of greater value than £2, or speak their language.

Immigration and prejudice

The Great Famine of the 1840s was a direct result of economic exploitation of Ireland. Thousands of pounds worth of grain were sent from Ireland to pay exorbitant rents to absentee landlords whilst the Irish starved. A million and a half people emigrated while a million died of hunger. The image comes to mind of a woman, having safely made it in the "coffin" ship to Liverpool writing home to tell her loved ones left

that her sisters and friends died on the boat before reaching land but that she had found domestic service. Or an image

of groups of women walking for the boat or train to go "tatie-hoking" in Scotland and England. Or of the thousands of Irish women who took up street trading in London's East End and the subsequent anti-Irish riots in Shoreditch and the Balls Pond Road. An image of a girl waiting in line at a hiring fair in Strabane for a farmer to pick her out for work. Or "The Rat Pit" in Glasgow – a hostel for homeless women, the majority of whom were Irish – they were the ones who didn't return home from the "tatie-hoking". Their poverty and destitution is described by Patrick McGill in his writing at the turn of this century. Images of women looking at the signs "No Coloured, No Irish, No Dogs" – an image which is in the living memory of many thousands of Irish women living here today.

It is the anti-Irish joke which shows us how deeply embedded in British culture anti-Irish prejudice has become. The anti-Irish joke has always been a powerful weapon of the establishment as there is no access to answer back. Cartoons have been amongst the most vicious of anti-Irish propaganda. These forms which present the English as civilised and non-violent represent a gigantic exercise in self-delusion since the British have one of the most violent and uncivilised histories of any European country. These jokes/cartoons are often sexist as well as racist.

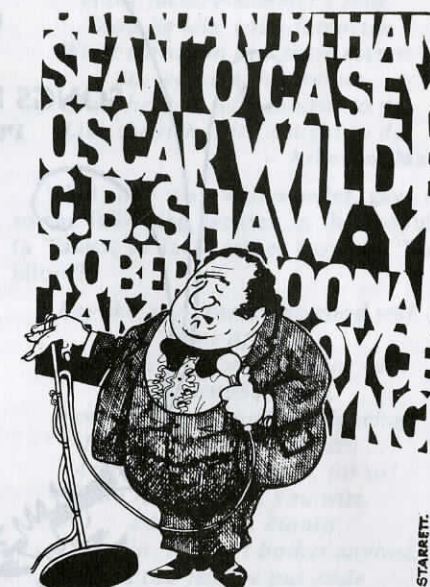
The task of transmitting culture from one generation to the next most often falls to the mother. Considering the total exclusion of any Irish material in the educational system, the exclusion/distortion in the media, and the 800 years of negative stereotyping it is difficult for women to pass onto their children this culture. Feeling proud of it alienates and isolates one from the native population who either don't realise it exists or despise it.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was brought in in 1974, is a direct result of the war in the North. It is designed to silence the Irish community here from becoming politically active around the role of Britain in Ireland.

When held under this act women face the added humiliation of being strip-searched such as the two women Ella O Dwyer and Martina Anderson, held at present in Brixton prison. Every Irish woman is aware that whenever she speaks about our situation here or Britain in Ireland, she is liable as a target for arrest – and possible exclusion from this country even though she may have lived here for up to 20 years.

Women in Irish society

Earlier I mentioned that 52% of the Irish community here were women: this pattern is untypical amongst immigrant groups: and there are reasons as to why this happened. Most of this emigration has been from the rural



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MORDECAI GEBIRTIG:

Yiddish Folk Poet

Chaim Neslen writes about one of the great folk poets of the Yiddish language, Mordecai Gebirtig.

If history books retell the lies and fantasies of the victors, if newspapers reek of sycophancy and political bias, if memory is faulty, egocentric and partisan, then a truer voice, often a cri de coeur, rattles down to us in the shaky, purist voice of the folk singer and in the song. If it is a Jewish Truth you seek, ask for the songs which your mother's mother, or father's father sang to them as children. "But," you will say, "they were all in Yiddish." So they were.

There is a good chance that some of the 'folk songs' you would hear were written by Mordecai Gebirtig. If you heard them and understood them, you would pick them out immediately. His voice is so unique and the songs so painfully typical, that their veracity glows across the years like a four-day old,

warmed-over bagel, at once familiar, and appealing to the depths of folk-consciousness and identity, for Gebirtig was a man of the people, and of history.

The facts of his life are not dramatic, except perhaps for his death. Yet they were acted out before an historical tapestry of change and turmoil of which books will continue to be written. Mordecai Gebirtig (nee Bertig) was born on the 4th of April 1877 in the West Galician city of Cracow, of poor parents — this despite the blanket of affluence which had warmed the Jewish burghers since the 1867 Constitution which awarded them full residential and commercial rights in the City of Cracow (at that time still part of Austria). He was a carpenter by trade and a folk-singer by compulsion, although he never learned to read or to write music. His own songs were created while he worked, and were sung to the streets where they were picked up like gold nuggets and carried off to distant hearts.

He married and had three daughters, all of whom received some musical tuition. It was they who wrote down the music notation for the songs he created at his bench, singing them again and again as he refined and smoothed them with his ear. He invested them with an incredible fluidity of text and music which is instantly appreciated by anyone who begins to sing them. In short, they scan, absolutely.

Moderate success (though little reward) came from the few critiques he wrote and songs which were published in the journal *Social Democrat* in 1906. In 1920, *Folkstumlech (Folk Idiom)* published some songs, but the first real publishing came in 1936 with *Mayne Lider (My Songs)*.

In 1940, Gebirtig, his wife and daughters were sent to the concentration camp at Lakievniki, and in 1941, they were transferred to the Cracow Ghetto. On the 4th June, 1942 they were exterminated along with the thousands of others in the Cracow Final Solution.

SONGS BY MORDECAI GEBIRTIG

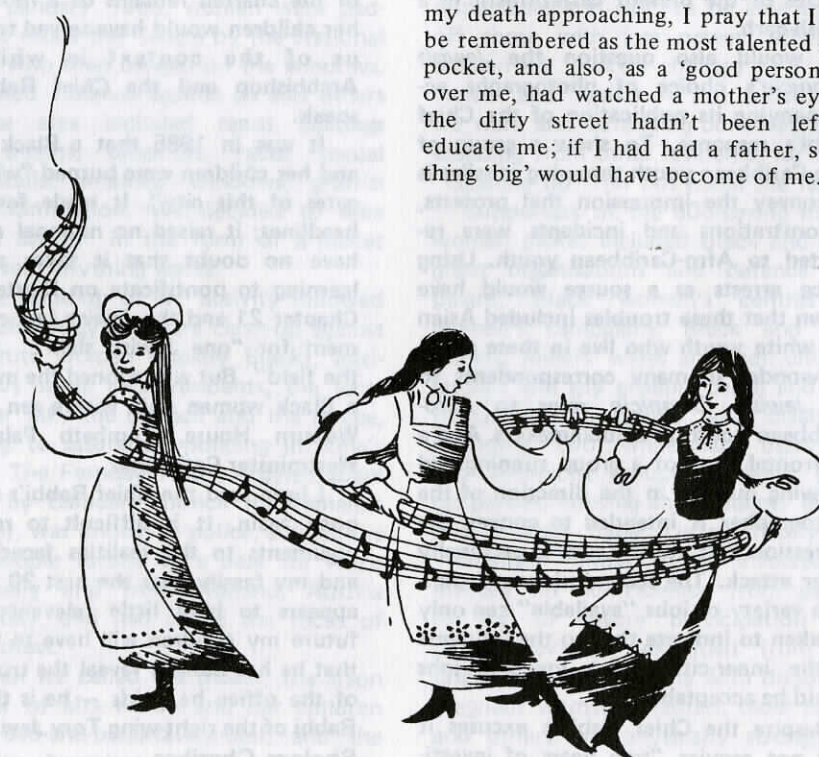
לידער פון מרדכי געבירטיג



Gebirtig, according to those who knew him, was a self effacing person. He reflected the world of common people in his songs, tapping the same universal layers of common experience which enshrine Sholem Aleichem and Mark Twain, yet with a far greater empathy than either. There is little sentimentality in his songs, though by some means, they produce a tremendous emotional response in the listener, and a choking effect on the singer.

If one adopts a rationalist, analytical approach to his work, various patterns do emerge which clearly relate to the events in his life: a number of songs express the perspectives of children (himself, or perhaps his own) in and about the Jewish world they inhabited; skiving off cheder (Jewish elementary religious school ('Avremele un Yosele'); first love ('Reyzele'); survival ('Avremel der Marvikher' — the Pickpocket); rebellion ('Motele'). Parenthood provided motivation for 'Noch a Glezele Tey' (the problems of naming a child), lullabies ('Yankele'), and eventually, losing the children to marriage ('Di Dray Tekhter'), and the loneliness of age ('Dos Alte Porfolk' — The Old Couple).

He wrote about the socio-economic turmoil about him ('Arbetslos March' — March of the Unemployed), and the emergence of a liberated worker mentality ('Khanele un Yosele'). And then there were the songs of the Pogroms and the Ghetto, in two keys: soft nostalgia ('Moyshle Mayn Fraynd'); and resistance ('Minutn fun Bitokhn'). He always wrote simply, of human values and of optimism, often with humour and a subtle sense of irony.



One Two, Three, Four,
Unemployed are we, and poor.
Silent now for months, so long,
Is the factory-hammer's song.
Tools lie idle, cold, forgotten
While corrosion eats them rotten.
So, we walk the avenue
Like the rich, with nought to do.
Like the rich, with nought to do.
— Arbetslos March

What, one may well wonder, gave rise to the following, written in the 'popular' (a Tango, in fact) rather than the 'Folk' idiom?

Leybke, my dearest, no good will
come of this!
You sorely try my patience with
your stubbornness.
You must come practice dancing,
I swear by both our lives . . .
And if not, it's all over, for us!
So remain what you wist,
a hot-baked Zionist
A Bundist, it won't bother anyone.
All the 'ists' be put aside
Even those Aguda layt*
And come dance Tango and Charleston.
— Come, Leybke, Dance

The quality of Gebirtig's writing in Yiddish cannot easily be translated into English. However, the quality of his insights are as relevant today as when written. In 'Avremel der Marvikher' for instance, a young pickpocket, barely thirteen, reminisces the starving need which began his career, and led to his first of many prison scars. "I begged bread but only the poor shared their crust. I pride myself on (my perceived) higher values of only robbing the rich magnates. The street taught me Life, and now, as the prison beatings take their toll and I feel my death approaching, I pray that I shall be remembered as the most talented pickpocket, and also, as a 'good person'. If, over me, had watched a mother's eyes, if the dirty street hadn't been left to educate me; if I had had a father, something 'big' would have become of me."

One of Gebirtig's most famous songs was written in response to the pogrom of 1938 in the Polish village of Ptshik, a precursor of the conflagration to follow. He wrote an accusing song, 'Es Brent' (It Is Burning), with the following chorus:

And you stand and gaze about you,
Hands crossed o'er your chest.
And you stand, and gaze about you
While our village burns.

The prophetic statement foresaw the impotent, passive inactivity of the world Jewish community as it indeed was, or became within a few endless years. He finished the song:

Oyb dos lebn iz aykh tayer
Khapt di keylim. Lesht dos fayer!
Lesht mit ayer eygn blut,
Bavayzt az ir dos kent . . .
If this Life is dear to you
Take up buckets. Douse the fire!
Drown it with your own blood.
Show the world that you
have it within you.

It is now almost a cliché to talk about the impossibility to conceive of normal life within the Nazi ghettos, so stark and basic were the wages of survival. Surely, it is stretching credulity to its maximum to grasp that within the ambit of that purgatory, a creative surge produced music, poetry, art and theatre of a standard near the vanguard of the times. Escapism? Blocking? Neurotic fantasies? Desperate, raging inspiration? Perhaps, but hundreds of songs and works of all descriptions have survived to attest to the Tsaytgayst. Tens of times that number did not survive, and are yet buried beneath the phoenix metropolist which marks the graves.

Let those who have nightmares of the docile Jew, walking freely into the gas chambers and ovens, take comfort from one of Gebirtig's last songs, 'Minutn fun Bitokhn' (Moments of Confidence):

Traybt undz fun di dires.
Shnayt undz op di bord.
Yidn, zol zayn freylech,
Mir hobn zey in drerd.
Hound us from the houses.
Cut our beards from us.
Yidn, let us be happy.
We will yet bury them.

He believed to the last in the deliverance of the Jewish people, not in the fortuitous arrival of the cavalry, but in the ultimate victory of Justice. It may yet be too early to see the reality of his last prophecy, but we shall have to be patient a while longer.

*Aguday layt: orthodox Jews

Continued from page 5

The Chief Rabbi claims that no work is too menial to compromise human dignity and self respect, and it is good to eat the labour of your hands. But how far are several people eating the labour of *others'* hands? As for cheap labour being more dignified than the "free" dole; has he experience of this? Maybe he has been listening too hard to the unelected Mr Young or reading the *Telegraph* or the *Jewish Chronicle* supplements too closely, but as a trade unionist I can assure him that a "low level employment" will not "counteract a flagging economy". Perhaps the Chief Rabbi's experience of trade unions is confined to the time he spoke to dockers holding up Pesach imports.

Dave Shepherd

"We never demanded that . . . British society at large ought to change its character and assume a new multi-ethnic form . . . We were quite content to remain 'ethnocentrically' British."

I am appalled by the Chief Rabbi's response to the Archbishop's *Faith in the City*. His "innocence" of economic and social thought compels him to rely on the psalms and advance philosophies of a feudal and pre-feudal era as a cure for today's problems. Aside from the lip-service his followers are bound to pay, who in Britain now accepts his quote: "more than the wealthy man gives to the poor the poor gives to the wealthy".

In spite of his self-confessed lack of "expertise" he can repeat all the arguments of the present-day Government as regards strikes bringing industries to a halt and causes of lower efficiency and industrial stagnation. Is it just a coincidence that like the Government he welcomes the supply of cheap labour and then justifies it by calling it dignified?

The Archbishop's report states: "The present culture presupposes a close connection between employment and status". In such a society cheap labour can never be dignified. And what purpose does it serve to quote the psalmist to three and a half million unemployed and add further insult to injury by telling them that their idleness is a greater evil?

There is no attempt to understand that the youth he talks of are not "new immigrants" but a generation born and brought up in this country; who have been through the education system and the employment market and witnessed what society is prepared to offer them. Discrimination has long exploded the myth of belonging. There can be no understanding of our situation unless it is first accepted that it is the socio-

economic system to which the residents of inner-cities are subjected that has led to dissatisfaction, frustration and alienation. It is this society, its structures and value judgements that have to change. We can do little about the pigmentation of our skins.

The Chief Rabbi can be self-congratulatory of his soliloquy in New York and his patronising dialogues with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. No doubt sections of our community agree with him and are proud of their "achievements" (yuppies in Stanmore and yobs in Edgware?) but let him not say that the "Jews have transformed the ghettos of old". All that happened in New York and London was that Jews — or rather such of them as could — fled, and left their ghettos and its problems to others.

The one lesson that the Black community can learn from the Jewish community is that the fault does not lie with people — Black and white including Jews — who are condemned to eke out their lives in such ghettos. It is not they who are the "problem". The blame surely rests with the system which creates and perpetuates social and economic injustices on grounds of race, religion and ethnic origins, and on this Government, and previous governments, which have done little to eradicate this problem.

I do not believe that the Archbishop's report has found all the answers, but at least it has attempted to listen to those who feel oppressed. It has attempted to reflect our perception of our situation. All the Chief Rabbi has done is clothe the policies of the present Government in a Jewish garb.

I would also question the *Jewish Chronicle's* choice of photographs accompanying its publication of the Chief Rabbi's response. To show a group of Afro-Caribbean youth throwing missiles is to convey the impression that protests, demonstrations and incidents were restricted to Afro-Caribbean youth. Using police arrests as a source would have shown that these troubles included Asian and white youth who live in these areas. No wonder so many correspondents to the *Jewish Chronicle* refer to Afro-Caribbean youth as troublemakers. And a full-frontal view of a group running and throwing missiles in the direction of the photographer is intended to convey the impression that every viewer is personally under attack. The second picture depicting a variety of jobs "available" can only be taken to indicate that to the residents of the inner-cities these low-paid jobs should be acceptable.

Despite the Chief Rabbi's excuses it does not require "two years of investi-

gation" or "submission of 300 experts" to know the truth about inner-city life. A modest perusal of some recent reports could have provided the Rabbi and his advisers with a deeper insight. The Institute of Housing report talks of nearly one and a half million sub-standard housing units with features such as "walls steaming with water" and "mould and fungus on walls and furniture". The 14% national unemployment figure conceals the 70% unemployed in some urban areas. The very least that should have been done is to read the latest report of the CRE, ten years after Parliament passed the Race Relations Act.

It is easy to remember violent eruption, Black youth running down the streets of their neighbourhood, petrol bombs and burning cars. It is not so easy to recall the events of the years immediately preceding these events; years of dreams and hopes, promises and pious platitudes. These were years of failure, neglect, threats, continuous harassment — including assaults by the police — and despair. That was the period when the Archbishop, the Chief Rabbi and all of us were silent.

The photographs printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* depict one set of incidents and do not tell the full story. Perhaps we should have seen the National Front mob rampaging through the streets of Southall with their Union Jacks, smashing shops and terrorising women and children. Perhaps a close-up of swollen black-eyed faces smashed by anonymous policemen, or a photograph of a pig's head nailed to a mosque door, or the charred remains of a mother and her children would have served to remind us of the context in which the Archbishop and the Chief Rabbi now speak.

It was in 1985 that a Black mother and her children were burned "within the gates of this city". It made few media headlines; it raised no national outcry. I have no doubt that it takes a lot of learning to pontificate on Deuteronomy Chapter 21 and the Jewish law of atonement for "one Jewish slain . . . lying in the field". But who atoned the murder of a Black woman slain within ten miles of Woburn House, Lambeth Palace and Westminster Cathedral?

I have read the Chief Rabbi's response once again. It is difficult to relate his arguments to the realities faced by me and my family over the past 20 years. It appears to have little relevance to the future my children will have to face. All that he has done is reveal the true nature of the office he holds — he is the Chief Rabbi of the right-wing Tory Jew.

Shalom Charikar

KING'S CROSS: Women are angry

Claire Glasman, of WinVisible (Women with Visible and Invisible Disabilities) describes how the King's Cross Women's Centre won its fight for police protection against fascist attacks.

The King's Cross Women's Centre in London, which is used by a wide cross-section of women and women's organisations, has for many years been a target of fascists. Last year we were subjected to two major attacks. How we responded, where we got our support, the demands we made, and what we were therefore able to win, established crucial precedents in ways of successfully fighting racism.

Ours is a centre where Black and white women, some of whom are Jewish, work together. We are also immigrant and non-immigrant, younger and older, lesbian and straight, prostitute and non-prostitute, women with and without visible disabilities. So many sectors gathered together make for strength in defending ourselves and the work that we do. It is also one reason why we are under attack. Another is that we have campaigned against racist violence and against rape and then put the two together in *Ask Any Woman* (Falling Wall Press), a survey of London women by Women Against Rape, which published the first ever figures on "racist sexual assault".

In January 1985, women were padlocked inside the Centre by the National Front who then banged on the windows. Increased violence against us and others in the area included racist beatings and threats, break-ins, racist sexual phonecalls, smashed windows, graffiti and intimidation. We decided to take public action in the form of a picket to prevent anything worse.

The build-up of NF activity followed the 1983 Argyle Square clean-up against prostitute women (mostly Black), initiated by some local residents, the local Labour MP, the council and the police, leading to saturation policing in King's Cross. The Ferndale Hotel, Argyle Square (used by Camden Council for homeless people), was known to police, councillors and people locally as a base for Nazis nationally and from Holland, Austria and Italy, and had to be the focus of our protest.

When we called the picket, the arson murder of Mrs Karim and her children in a bed-and-breakfast hotel, and the resulting homeless families occupation



of Camden Town Hall which highlighted council racist housing practices, were recent events.

Our picket was endorsed by 86 organisations in the borough, London-wide and nationally. We made an appeal to all forces of anti-racism, anti-fascism and anti-sectarianism because the State, including police and fascists, relies on divisions between sectors, between respectable and not, to be able to pick off those with less power. When the women-led picket chanted: "Arrest racists and rapists — not prostitutes", we were also defending ourselves against scabbing from other residents, for whom "cleaning up" did not mean the fascists.

Supporters of the 500-strong mainly-women picket included Black and immigrant organisations and defence campaigns; Black women's centres and women's campaigns; Black and white miners, miners' wives and their children; lesbian and gay groups; peace and prostitute women; people with disabilities including two wheelchair users; left and anti-racist groups; students; political parties; housing and residents' groups; and a brass band. Unfortunately, few "feminists" chose to be involved. We insisted on non-violence from pickets, to try to ensure participation from those previously excluded from anti-fascist actions — people with disabilities, pregnant women, children, older people, and others not physically strong. This new initiative was accepted by almost

everybody. It prevented the provocation of violence which could have diverted us from the issue, putting the onus on the police: they would have to answer for any violence against us. Their surprise at our numbers — they were prepared for 100 at most — and the fact that we were a women's centre with visible wheelchair users, kept them (and the Nazis watching from the windows of the Ferndale) restrained at this particular picket.

Our demands concentrated on pressuring councils and police to take our safety seriously — to stop policing the Black, immigrant and mining communities, prostitute women, lesbian women and gay men, and police those who attack us instead. At the rally afterwards, with power differences out in the open, there was respect and unity across many sectors, and common experience acknowledged. Following the picket, Camden Council stopped using the Ferndale, and we won that round.

By July 1985, the threat was even more severe. The English Collective of Prostitutes, based at the Women's Centre, received a letter (headed with a swastika and rifle) from a fascist organisation, the Secret Organisation for National Recovery, threatening to burn down the Centre if all the women did not get out. It was signed "The Exterminator". Via our solicitor we asked the police for 24-hour protection. They refused, offering inadequate hourly

checks. The Fire Brigade visited us immediately and agreed this was serious. During the week that we were pressing for protection, the Kassam family were burned to death in Seven Kinds and the Camden Anti-Apartheid offices were firebombed.

The day after getting the letter, we moved to the Town Hall, setting up the Women's Centre in the Members' Room. Whatever the council thought, they could not comfortably evict us. We carried on our work, and called the press and our network to lobby the police, who received phonecalls and a stack of letters and international telegrams from our supporters. A daily picket outside the Town Hall increased public interest. Placards said: "Our lives are as important as the Queen's". After a week of intense campaigning and a deputation to the police of council

members, local organisations and King's Cross Women's Centre groups, the police finally agreed to 24-hour protection, which continued for months until the security measures won from the council were complete.

We demanded protection, not out of naivety but because we couldn't afford not to. We haven't got the time or resources to do it ourselves. Therefore we are determined to make the police do it. Demanding police protection is self-defence: challenging the basis of policing with its racism and illegality — establishing the right of people like us to protection. Demanding a uniformed officer limited harassment of others. But winning police protection also meant resisting its use against us. Police called unexpectedly; were able to monitor people going in and out; occasionally stared in our windows; took car numbers and

towed a car away. Some women may have been discouraged from visiting — but we chose that over no centre at all and possible loss of life. This must be compared with the period during the clean-up when the police, uninvited, parked outside the Centre, asking every woman as she entered if she was a prostitute. Our stronger position in 1985 diminished their licence to harass, which is governed by how powerful we are, not whether we have asked them to be there.

For anyone interested in our continuing activities around policing, racist assault and women's safety, or details of how we organised against attacks, information including press cuttings, day-to-day press releases, photos and leaflets is available from the King's Cross Women's Centre, 71 Tonbridge St, London WC1H 9DZ, tel. 01 837 7509.

STAR AND TRIANGLE

From Dachau to Stonewall gay Jews are fighting back. James Baaden traces their path to self-awareness.

In the museum on the site of Dachau concentration camp, there is a large diagram illustrating the various symbols worn by prisoners. In the middle there is a star made up of a gold triangle superimposed on it. This was the badge of the inmates who were both Jewish and gay. Evocative of brutality and suffering as it is, it also serves as an emblem of solidarity uniting gay Jews of today with those who once wore it.

The emergence of a present-day gay/lesbian Jewish consciousness, however, began in 1969 when police routinely raided the Stonewall, a gay bar in Greenwich Village and gay people, for the first time, fought back. The ensuing melee served notice that gay men and lesbians would no longer endure the oppression and harassment they had had for so long. Ever since, gay people everywhere annually commemorate the Stonewall uprising at the end of June as a turning-point; our Bastille Day.

Many of the leaders of the resulting Gay Liberation movement were Jews, and, before long, lesbian and gay Jewish groups began to be formed. Here in Britain, the Jewish Gay Group (based in London), traces its origins to a meeting in 1972. Today, in 1986, there are groups in existence not only throughout the USA and in Britain, but also in Canada, Belgium, Israel, France, Australia and the Netherlands. They are linked

together by the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organisations, which sponsors an international conference every two years.

Forbears

In developing a gay/lesbian Jewish consciousness, it is possible to discern forbears, such as Gertrude Stein and Marcel Proust, or the great medieval Hebrew poet Judah Halevi, who wrote powerfully erotic love lyrics addressed to males. Retrospectively defining their "sexual orientation" is unimportant; it is facts — such as Judah Halevi's poems, or the relationship between Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, which hold an inspiring and enduring significance for us today. We are Jews like other Jews and not the confused victims of some malign *goyish* influence. The celebrated English pre-Raphaelite painter Simeon Solomon (1840-1903) was the youngest artist ever (at 18) to exhibit at the Royal Academy but saw his career shattered in an 1873 "scandal" which sent him to prison — a fate shared 20 years later by Oscar Wilde. The remarkable German scholar and reformer Magnus Hirschfeld, born in 1869, launched numerous efforts to secure the repeal of the law in Germany which prohibited all sexual contact between men, and also campaigned for the reform of the abortion and contraception laws. When the Nazis came to power in 1933,

they destroyed the renowned Institute for the Sciences of Sexuality which he had founded, burnt his books and drove him into exile in France where he died in 1935.

Hirschfeld and many of his allies were Jews and in the Nazis' eyes their reforming campaigns were an evil conspiracy of Jewish "perverts" to destroy the wholesome fibre of the German nation. Under Hitler Germany's anti-gay legislation was intensified and, after 1935, many thousands of gay men were arrested and sent to concentration camps. This particular law remained on West Germany's statute-books until 1969, with the authorities steadfastly refusing to allow gay victims of Nazism a penny of compensation. The official silence surrounding "the men with the pink triangle" was not finally broken until last year when President Richard von Weizsaecker, in a speech commemorating the end of the war and the fall of the Third Reich, specifically cited "homosexuals" as one of the groups persecuted by the Nazis. Gay Jews, committed to remembering the six million Jewish dead, are also determined to honour the memory of those, Jewish or not, who were persecuted specifically because they were gay. Alas, we often find it necessary to confront deluded assertions along the lines of "lots of Nazis were gay, weren't they?" — a

pernicious notion which can be traced to the ugly figure of Ernst Roehm, one of Hitler's Nazi colleagues, who was indeed gay and who was for that reason murdered on Hitler's orders during the very early days of the Third Reich. It is sad that this bizarre episode from the beginning of the Nazi era remains well-known, whilst the subject of the systematic (and well-documented) persecution of gay men under Nazism remains cloaked in silence and ignorance.

Parallels

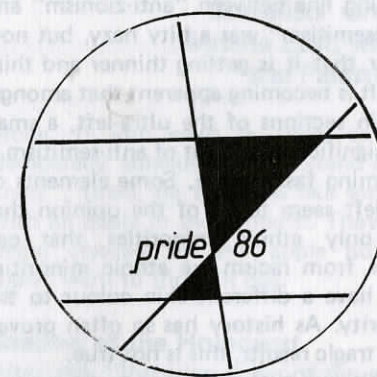
The striking parallels between anti-Semitism and homophobia, the hatred and fear of gay people, are evident today too. Recent eruptions of homophobia occasioned by "AIDS hysteria" resemble attempts in history to blame various diseases and misfortunes on Jews; gays and Jews make popular scapegoats. Measures proposed by politicians of the right as a "response" to the AIDS crisis have included internment, castration and outright extermination (seriously suggested in the mayoral election campaign in Houston) — all immediately bringing to mind the Nazis' final solution. One of the few organisations to speak out against obscenities of this sort is the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the federation of Reform synagogues which accounts for somewhat less than half of America's synagogue-affiliated Jews. The UAHC in fact includes many gay/lesbian congregations, since the American Jewish gay and lesbian groups tend to constitute themselves along the lines of standard synagogue congregations, rather than functioning as largely secular associations, like most of the groups outside of the US. There are already several gay and lesbian rabbis. Here in Britain too, and in the Netherlands, relations with the Liberal and Reform traditions are generally friendly.

"Orthodox" sources, on the other hand, are wont to intone pontifically that Judaism "condemns homosexuality", basing this on a sentence from Leviticus which says a man should not lie with a man as with a woman. However the words themselves and the historical evidence both suggest that the passage, occurring in a section dealing with the idolatrous Moloch cult, refers to the transvestite prostitutes who plied their trade at the cult's temples. In any event, modern-day Jewish gay men, who are neither transvestite temple prostitutes, nor Moloch-worshippers, nor interested in pretending to be women, do not feel themselves addressed by this *mitzvah*. Moreover there are 612 *mitzvot* besides many dealing with the treatment of slaves, election of kings, ritual sacrifice, etc — and the majority are undoubtedly disregarded entirely by at least 90% of world Jewry. This only emphasises, therefore, the bigoted selectivity of those (not necessarily Orthodox) who pick out and interpret one precept

from 613 in order to browbeat their gay fellow-Jews.

Gay men and lesbians

The degree to which Jewish gay men and lesbians can or do collaborate varies greatly from place to place. There are groups where the gender balance is about 50-50, and the interaction between men and women is warm and productive. Elsewhere, things may be different. Jewish gay men, like other males, can in certain situations exhibit sexist attitudes and assumptions and they may be loath to relinquish privileges granted by maleness. Some Jewish lesbians, meanwhile, prefer to keep to strictly women-only environments. My own observations at last summer's conference in Washington suggested to me, at any rate, that after a time of separations, a new "growing together" in solidarity is making itself felt. Gay men who once ignored women now listen attentively to feminist speakers; lesbians who once preferred women-only settings now work together with men. For many, the bond which



has transcended ideological and gender differences has been the fact of shared Jewishness. At the same time, perhaps, gay men and lesbians have until recently not given much attention specifically to their relations with each other, and are now discovering that in fact they have more in common than they once supposed. The blinding reflections radiated by the heterosexual model of male-female relations are so dazzling that it is not always easy for gay men and lesbians to find a workable alternative basis for their relations. One American Jewish lesbian I know was for many years a committed separatist and eschewed all contact with men of any kind. She is now extensively involved in AIDS crisis counselling as a result of an emotional and intellectual catharsis which overtook her when she chanced

to hear that a Jewish gay man she had once known had AIDS. Without these years of separatism, she stresses, she could not have reached the point she is at today. We all have our own individual journeys but in my experience it is entirely possible for gay men and lesbians, especially when linked by common Jewishness, to meet and travel at least part of the way together.

Self-awareness

The AIDS problem itself has had the effect, of course, of obliging gay men and lesbians alike to perceive the continuing depth and violence of homophobic feeling. The disease itself affects only a minuscule fraction of the gay male population, and moreover, many of the afflicted are not gay at all (the majority of AIDS cases in Belgium, for instance, are non-gay). Within the gay male community an intensive programme of self-education has already long been underway and men are making the simple and minor adjustments in their sex lives which radically reduce the risk of infection or illness. The projected rates of increase in numbers of cases have failed to materialise and the frequency of various venereal infections in gay men has already been seen to fall sharply. There is no room for complacency but the gay community can justifiably claim that it has recognised the problem and tackled it resourcefully and vigorously — with next to no help from the surrounding general population, which has preferred to manipulate the problem as an excuse for diverse explosions of pathological gloating and homophobic hysteria.

Gay people have thus been obliged to see that in certain respects they are on their own, and can not necessarily always look elsewhere for support. Jews too, encountering antisemitism in hitherto "friendly" progressive circles where they least expected it, have often found a similar heightened form of communal self-awareness thrust upon them. Like other Jews, we who are gay and lesbian run up against anti-Jewish sentiment in our various environments — unions, political parties, colleges, the women's movement — and we have found ourselves challenged to determine where we stand, forced to assess what our Jewishness means to us. Many gay and lesbian Jews, of course, remain totally uninterested in their Jewishness and feel entirely capable of living in the "general community", swimming with the mainstream. Yet lesbians and gay men imbibe the same prejudices as others and antisemitism has a way of revealing itself in gay settings as elsewhere. Some of us have known what it is to be rejected both as a gay person within the Jewish community and as a Jew within the gay community.

Many of us continue to place our faith in the thinking and aspirations of the Left, but we have learnt to be

cautious. The Russian Revolution repealed the Tsarist anti-gay laws; Stalin reinstated them and they remain in force today. The regimes of Cuba and Romania, for instance, are infamous bastions of homophobia, and even here in Britain, the Labour Party could never bring itself to endorse the repeal of the law banning sex between men.

When a partial reform came before Parliament in 1967, many Labour MPs voted against the bill; Margaret Thatcher voted in favour. It has taken the Labour Party a further 20 years nearly to conclude that gay people are fellow-citizens whose civil and human rights are deserving of protection and even this mild proposition was vigorously denounced

by at least one speaker at last year's party conference. Both as Jews and as gay men and lesbians we have learnt that "acceptance" is not enough. *James Baaden is a member of the Jewish Gay Group and co-chair of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre. The Jewish Gay Group can be contacted at BM JGG, London WC1N 3XX.*

LETTERS...

THE SEVEN

Most of you are no doubt aware of the activities of a certain Mr Louis Farrakhan, in particular his antisemitic pronouncements, apart from his attacks on other organised religions.

A short time ago a Labour Hackney councillor Mr Lester Lewis extended an invitation to Farrakhan to visit Hackney and to speak to members of the Black Peoples Alliance. When Lester Lewis was reminded of Farrakhan's somewhat extreme racist views by fellow councillors he proceeded to defend Farrakhan and his views, the Labour group on the Council informed Lewis that there would be no platform available for Farrakhan or any other racist. It was about this time that the Home Secretary stepped in to ban Farrakhan from this country as not conducive to the public good. A short time later Lewis made a statement (attributed to him) about "the power of the Jews" in stopping the visit of Farrakhan to this country.

The following week we had in Leabridge Ward Labour Party our selection conference. Lester Lewis was standing as an incumbent Labour councillor. At the meeting Lewis continued to defend Louis Farrakhan and even went on to add that he (Farrakhan) spoke against not only Judaism, but against Islam and Christianity. He repeated the lie that Farrakhan did not call Judaism a "gutter religion". When confronted with the evidence he did not answer it. He did not even deny his statement to the press, vis-a-vis the power of the Jews. When we came to ballot Lewis could only scrape 7 out of 36 votes. This compared to his near landslide in a by-election selection in late 1984.

The point that I am making is after all that transpired since Lewis made his initial invitation to Farrakhan to Hackney, and all his pronouncements since, seven comrades thought fit to support his candidature at the following council elections with all the resultant effect that would have on race relations in Hackney.

I have noticed in the past that the dividing line between "anti-zionism" and "antisemitism" was a bit hazy, but now I fear that it is getting thinner and thinner. It is becoming apparent that amongst certain sections of the ultra-left, a small but significant amount of anti-semitism is becoming fashionable. Some elements of the left seem to be of the opinion that the only ethnic minorities that can suffer from racism are ethnic minorities that have a different skin colour to the majority. As history has so often proven with tragic results, this is not true.

This was brought home to me when I visited the "Anne Frank" exhibition in the Mall Gallery. As one would expect it dealt with the fate suffered by European Jewry at the hands of the Nazis between 1933-1945 but it also touched on racial harassment suffered by other minorities in Western Europe since the war, such as the Turkish "guest workers" in West Germany today. There is a separate section presented by the GLC of posters and photographs of "Anti-Racist Year 1984" it dealt with racism suffered by such ethnic minorities as, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Blacks in South Africa, the Irish, and yet the Holocaust did not even rate a mention, as if it never took place. The question that arises is why?

Barry King
London E5

RACISM, RACIALISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Naomi Dale in her arrogant *ex cathedra* piece (JS4) misunderstands many of the points Black people are making.

Firstly racism is not, as she asserts so confidently, about the oppression of one group by another but of oppression by the state. Secondly my reading of A. Sivanandan tells me that Black interests have to be the same as that of the Black working class. For him Black is not (as it has recently been interpreted by the Black middle class) a matter of skin colour but of "political colour". Hence politics ceases to be Black when it no longer includes a Black working class consciousness. Thirdly Black is not the sole political category to mobilise anti-racism, for that would be to preclude any white anti-racist struggle.

Dale writes of a "scapegoat" type of racism and a racism which can be experienced by minorities which are predominantly middle class when her only example is that of the Jews. If she means Jews then she should say so upfront. I believe that it is precisely because she knows how unpopular such a "competition in oppression" is with black people that she has resorted to a "theoretical" subterfuge.

Lastly, Dale fails to distinguish between racism which refers to structures and institutions with power to discriminate and racialism which means interpersonal prejudice. Sivanandan has never denied the existence of racialism or antisemitism (as she implies) but has always distinguished such phenomena from state racism. He has not written his articles (and I urge Ms Dale to look at all his earlier pieces which make the distinction) in order to set himself up as the theoretician with the last word on racism, Marxism or whatever — but out of a desire and commitment to speak to immediate problems facing Black struggle. To criticise him for not tackling fascism or other matters is not to understand his role as a pamphleteer who is called upon to intervene on important aspects of on-going struggle.

Olive Lloyd
London E8

Take a hotel, in a secluded woodland setting near the Dutch town of Amersfoort. Take a number of Israelis who are members of the "peace camp". Take an equal number of Palestinians. Finally, take a larger number of well-meaning representatives of a variety of Dutch and European peace organisations, as well as a number of Palestinian groups and Jewish "peace-niks" (such as the JSG). Can you get Middle East peace from these ingredients? That must have been the question on everyone's lips as they assembled on 14th February earlier this year.

The conference was called by Pax Christi Holland, to bring together Israelis willing to talk to the PLO, PLO supporters willing to talk to Israelis as well as asking whether there was a role for the European peace movement. As has been previously reported (*Jewish Socialist* 3) the conference was due to have been held in July last year. However, it was called off when the Israeli dovish forces, learning that there would be high-level PLO representation at the conference, as it were, "flew away". At Amersfoort, this problem was got round by the fact that none of the Israeli or Palestinian protagonists were representing anyone but themselves. However, it must be said that all the Palestinian participants were seen as being close to the PLO leadership. They included, for instance, Afif Safieh, a former member of Arafat's private office. A number of the Israelis present were members of or close to forces such as Mapam, including Chaim Shur, editor of "New Outlook".

Two state solution

It is notable that the preparatory commission had taken great care at the outset to indicate its support for a number of basic conditions for the achievement of Middle East peace. These included recognition of the right to statehood and self-determination of both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. They went on to call for the convening of an international peace conference attended by, among others, Israel, the PLO, Arab states party to the conflict, the United States and the Soviet Union. So almost without exception, all participants were committed to some variant of what is known as the "two state solution".

Ziad Abu Zayyad, the keynote Palestinian speaker (see interview with him below) placed this in context. He spoke of the PLO's willingness to accept a state on the West Bank and Gaza but posed a stark choice for Israel. "If you want to be a Jewish state, leave us alone. Sign an agreement with the Palestinians, with guarantees and we will leave you

Dutch doubles in



the peace game

Michael Heiser represented the Jewish Socialists' Group at a conference on the Middle East, which brought together Israelis and Palestinians. This is his report.

alone. If you want to claim to be a democracy annexe us and extend democracy". Israel, he said, was like someone with an apple in their mouth. They were being choked by the apple but still didn't want to throw it out.

Shadow of the Holocaust

After this "throwing down of the gauntlet" the speech of Israeli professor Asa Kasher, which followed, came as a bit of a disappointment. He felt bound, he said to represent the views of the "vast majority" of Israelis. He himself and other members of the Israeli peace camp were the "nice-guys". But it was not them the Palestinians have to convince but Israeli public opinion as a whole.

He pointed to a very real obstacle which stood in the way of the European peace movement involving itself in the Middle East. Most Israelis, he said, still saw Europe as an arena of persecution. The Jews were still under the shadow of the Holocaust. However, in a form of ghastly symmetry, Afif Safieh pointed to Palestinian suffering and dispossession, calling the Palestinians the "indirect victims of Hitler".

The conference seemed tense, as if it was unable to come to terms with the spectres of the past conjured up.

The atmosphere was lightened by

Sami Mari, a Palestinian professor at Haifa University and a member of the Progressive List for Peace, who describes himself as an "Israeli Palestinian". He felt that it was impossible to hide painful history. Participants in dialogue had to come to terms with both their own and the other partners' past and present. But collective memories, however painful, should not be used by either side to justify present injustices.

A dialogue for peace?

The following day the conference divided into three workshops. At the one on "International proposals for a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian Arab conflict" Ze'ev Sternhell took up the challenge of Ziad Abu Zayyad. He ruled out annexation with full citizenship because it would mean the end of the "Zionist dream" of a Jewish state living at peace with other states. He therefore saw Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and from Gaza as a necessity. But he pointed to the need for security guarantees. No Israeli government, he said, could accept guns or heavy artillery on the West Bank. He supported a Jordanian/Palestinian confederation, feeling that an independent Palestinian state was unacceptable to the vast majority of Israelis at present. However, he did not rule this out as part of a general settlement in the future.

A fascinating duologue now developed between Sternhell and Afif Safieh. The latter stated that he would be prepared to accept a Jordanian/Palestinian confederation, with mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. Jerusalem could be ruled by some form of consortium, whilst remaining the capital of both Israel and the Palestinian sector of the confederation. He would be prepared to accept the demilitarisation of the West Bank and Gaza and the presence of United Nations troops there on condition that they would only leave by *unanimous* vote of the Security Council.

"If Afif's last statement was signed by the PLO", replied Sternhell, "12 Knesset members, maybe even ministers, would participate in starting an official peace process." Safieh replied that such messages had reached the Israelis through diplomatic channels. But Adam Keller, of the Paris-based magazine *Israel and Palestine* pointed to the need for the PLO to channel its communications to the "right address". Sadat, he said, had channelled messages to the Israeli leadership for years. But the Israeli

public only got the message when he came to Jerusalem.

Safieh made it clear that he was committing himself alone. He said he was not double-tongued. "But our authority is the PLO and its leader is Arafat." Any official peace initiative should go to that address.

For a moment the other participants in the workshop felt like spectators. Perhaps here was real history in the making. True, both were speaking as individuals. But both would report back to their respective national authorities, and then perhaps . . .

The moment passed. Back in the final plenary session Gail Pressburg for the preparatory commission enumerated a series of more mundane initiatives; a study tour here, a letter of protest there, the process of prodding and pushing as opposed to the grand gesture. The opinion of many participants seemed to be that if there was a role for the European peace movement in achieving a Middle East settlement it would be in terms of creating the conditions for dialogue, such as at this conference.

But although I was impressed with the genuine commitment to peace of both Palestinians and Israelis, no-one should underestimate the very real obstacles that remain. In his opening address, Harvard professor Everett Mendelsohn's message to the Israeli peace camp and to the PLO was that "they should dig themselves in for a long haul".

Afif Safieh called on the Israelis: "We want to share our dream with you. But don't let us both share our common nightmare". And the "in-joke" of the conference, taken from a position paper by Safieh, goes as follows: Reagan and Gorbachov go to God and ask him "Will there ever be true detente and peace between the superpowers?" "Yes, of course", answers God, "But not in your lifetime". Both go away dejected. The following day Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat (you can see this is fiction) go to God and ask him "Will there ever be peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians?" "Yes there will be", answers God, "but not in my lifetime!"

Palestinian occupation and they would start to fight again against the Palestinian government. So, in short, a war against Israel and the defeat of Israel would only change the suffering from one side to the other.

Therefore there should be something in between; something that can give the Palestinians the right to self-determination within the borders of the old state and give the Jews the same right. This "something in between" is, in my opinion, based on the mutual recognition and mutual respect of both communities and dividing the country into two states. We, the Palestinians, suggested a democratic state to the Jews, but they refused this; they want a purely Jewish state. So if they want this, we must separate them from the Arabs. So the Arabs would have their own state and the Jews would have their own state.

JS: How do you see the best way of getting to this situation? A number of people have talked in terms of a simultaneous declaration of mutual recognition . . .

ZAZ: I think the only way is by talking, by negotiation, one with the other without preconditions. Therefore I think there is a need to call upon all parties to come to an international conference sponsored by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, to bring them all together, to make them discuss the problem and come to an agreement.

JS: About a month ago I heard Yossi Sarid say that he would regard a PLO acceptance of resolution 242 as tantamount to a recognition of Israel by the PLO. Do you think that would be a way forward?

ZAZ: The PLO has made it clear all the time that 242 has nothing to do with the Palestinian problem and that it doesn't relate to the Palestinian cause, because it deals only with the results of the 1967 war. To ask the PLO to accept 242 alone is not fair, because the PLO have already said that it will accept all United Nations resolutions, not just 242, but those that recognise the national rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore I think an obstacle should not be placed in front of the PLO to stop it from attending a peace conference by demanding a prior acceptance of 242 or anything else. What should be done is to call all parties to a peace conference and start negotiations. Through the negotiations each party

will demand the conditions which will secure their own existence.

JS: Could you say a few words about the peace camp in Israel?

ZAZ: The main power in the peace camp is Peace Now, which does not have a very clear understanding of peace; they are a movement to put pressure on the government. So sometimes they are not clear or do not take the steps that they should take.

JS: There are other groups that are not affiliated to Peace Now, like the Progressive List for Peace, for example.

ZAZ: The Progressive List are represented in parliament. There are others like the Committee for Solidarity with Birzeit and the Committee against the War in Lebanon, and Yesh G'vul. These organisations really are movements of peace but, as someone living there I notice that they have almost all the same people, the same members, who appear under different titles. However, I respect them and hope that they will be able to mobilise more of the population to come with them, which seems to me to be something which up to the moment is not happening.

JS: Would you be willing to suggest a strategy as to how they might do this? Some people, for instance, have suggested that their appeal is still to an Ashkenazi "elite" and what they must do is break through to the Sephardi/Oriental working class.

ZAZ: I think that this problem the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi, should not be an obstacle to enforcing the strength of the peace groups inside Israel. They should be open to members and supporters from all directions.

JS: How do you see things developing in the next few years. It looks like Mr Peres will be replaced by Mr Shamir. What do you think the difference will be?

ZAZ: Let me take the question in a different way, apart from the question of Mr Shamir or Mr Peres. I think that if Israel continues to go in the same direction, we are going to get to a situation which is very similar to the situation in South Africa, where a state is ruling another group of people depriving them of their basic rights and running two legal systems; where you find laws that protect the Jews and give them all kinds of rights and laws, but that prevent the Arabs from exercising their basic rights.

JS: If you were talking to people in England who are part of the socialist or progressive movement, never mind whether they were Jews or Arabs or neither, what would you be asking them to do to support the struggle for peace as you see it?

ZAZ: I would ask them first to pay more attention to what is going on in the Middle East. I would ask them to collect more facts about the violation of human rights in the occupied territories and bring pressure to bear on their own government and on the Israeli government to end these violations of human rights. At the same time I would encourage them to approach the PLO, to encourage their government to recognise the PLO to open the way for the PLO to participate in the peace process as an equal partner with all other countries.

JS: How do you see the Jewish communities of, say, England or France? What sort of image do you have of them?

ZAZ: I don't have one particular image of them, but I think those communities should understand one basic fact, that every criticism of the Israeli government does not mean that this is a criticism of the Jewish people,

therefore they must differentiate between themselves as Jews, Israel as a political identity and the policy of Israel. Therefore they should be open to criticism and they themselves should criticise the policies of Israel. It is in the interests of the Jewish people and the interests of Israel to save the Israelis from the Israelis, to save the Israeli people from the policy of their own government which will lead, sooner or later, to a disaster for all parties in the Middle East, (and maybe it will also lead to an international crisis), and to make them put pressure on Israel to stop its current policy and to turn its face towards peace.

JS: To go back to the Middle East directly, a number of people, for instance Meron Benvinisti, have said that the occupation is now irreversible, and we must now look at other solutions.

ZAZ: Only death and time are irreversible. I think the situation in the territories could be reversed, and a Palestinian state established and the problem solved on the basis of two states for the two peoples.

JS: How would you see the future of Jerusalem in a settlement?

ZAZ: The Jews love Jerusalem and have their own links with Jerusalem,

JS: Perhaps you could start by describing the current situation in East Jerusalem.

ZAZ: Generally, the situation in East Jerusalem, and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, is as any situation under an occupation. East Jerusalem is described by the Israelis as part of Israel, because it was annexed by Israel but generally the military authorities are the main source of taking decisions. Life under occupation is life without freedom and life with oppression, which tries to stop people from practising their basic rights, in all different aspects of life. There is nothing called liberal occupation; liberalism conflicts with occupation. Every people under occupation tries to regain its freedom and to get rid of the occupation. The occupation tries all the time to defend its own existence by practising more and more oppression against the population to prevent it from changing the situation.

JS: Turning now to solutions as you would see them . . .

ZAZ: I believe that force is not the only means of changing the situation. There are in Palestine four million Jews and it is impossible to ignore the existence of this population. Even if the Palestinian Arabs were to succeed in defeating Israel on the battlefield, this would not help change the situation because those Jews would then be under

Ziad Abu Zayyad, a Palestinian lawyer, is the director of the Arab Council for Public Affairs in Jerusalem and a former editor of the English edition of the newspaper Al Fajr. He was interviewed in Amersfoort for Jewish Socialist by Michael Heiser.



Ziad Abu Zayyad (left) with Asa photo: Elly Vos Kasher

as do the Moslems and as do the Christians. I do not think that it is fair that one party should claim Jerusalem all for itself and ignore the rights and the links of the other parties to Jerusalem. We love Jerusalem, but we must respect the feelings of others towards Jerusalem. We must try to find a formula which gives every party its rights in Jerusalem, a feeling that they have their own Holy Places. I think Jerusalem should be united physically, open to all religions and that there should be freedom of movement for all. At the same time the sovereignty of Jerusalem could be divided between the Palestinian state and the Israeli state. West Jerusalem could be the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem

the capital of the Palestinian state. There would be no border dividing Jerusalem; there could be two municipalities in the two sectors of the city, and one co-ordinating municipality for both. If there is goodwill and a real wish to achieve peace all kinds of agreements could be worked out. Each party could achieve their rights and feel that they were practising their rights.

JS: Turning now to how to involve the Palestinian people in dialogue, could I ask you for your opinion of the United States initiative, which seems to be willing to recognise a Palestinian presence but not a PLO presence?

ZAZ: Nothing will work out. There must

be a clear participation of the PLO. There is no Palestinian body which can claim to represent the Palestinian people. If anyone wants to make peace with the Palestinian people it must be with the PLO.

JS: Would you like to comment on the talks in Britain in October being called off at the last moment?

ZAZ: This is an old issue, but I think the British were under pressure from the United States and from the Jewish community inside Britain and they wanted to find an excuse to cancel the meeting and not to cause themselves embarrassment.

ZIONIST LEFT: Right-on or Right wing?

Gideon Spiro poses some hard questions for the Left in Israel to tackle.

Tehiya and Kach contributed, each in their own way, to rallying public support for General Mordechai. Of course their support is natural and can be taken for granted.

But the real surprise came from the left. Kibbutz Sa'asa' of Hashomer Hatzair (Mapam party) decided unanimously to stand behind General Mordechai. MK Ran Cohen (of the Citizen's Right Movement) and former MK Meir Pa'il (formerly of the Sheli party), both reserve colonels, came out in his defence without reservation and thus produced around him a strange band of national unity.

The support by Pa'il and Cohen for General Mordechai is a good example of the paradox which distinguishes the Israeli Zionist left since the beginning of the occupation in 1967. The attempt to be both patriot and socialist in the midst of the occupation and oppression of the liberties of another people is like being unacceptably androgynous, one is neither this nor that. In opposition to a clearly

defined right stands a stuttering and confused left who have been cowed in the wake of the right and have adopted some of its viewpoints and interests.

MK Yossi Sarid provided us with a good example of such confusion. In one of his statements he referred to the bus hijackers as the "scum of the earth", and added that the scum of the earth should be tried according to law. It was too much to believe.

The "scum of the earth" is a very strong phrase which if used at all, should be used with extreme caution. This is an appellation which should be used only in regard to a very specific group of people, such as Nazi war criminals. If the Palestinian enemy is the "scum of the earth" to Sarid, then he finds himself in the same boat with the "drugged cockroaches" of Rafael Eitan, who is also one of Lebanon's war criminals, and the "two-legged animals" of Begin, who justly sentenced himself to house arrest. These are terms whose purpose is to

convince the public of the dehumanization of the enemy, namely transforming him into a subhuman with no rights. Whoever then takes part in the killing of the "scum of the earth" is considered good and will come out innocent as did General Yitzhak Mordechai.

The tragedy of the Zionist left is that since 1967 it has been an active partner in the maintenance of the occupation and in the oppressive means which have been employed against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The first 10 years of occupation, in which Mapam and a considerable part of the Citizen's Rights Movement participated in governments that produced settlements, have brought to us the scourge of Gush Emunim and produced the collective punishment (demolition of houses, curfews, administrative detentions and expulsions) and transformed the Israeli army into an occupying army. The Israeli labour movement, both the left and the right in it, produced the infrastructure for the Israeli rejectionist policy towards peace.

The Zionist left, even today as it is joining the opposition, continues to use the terminology which the national religious right has dictated. They speak about "Judea and Samaria" and the Gaza Strip, the "Israel defence army", "terror organisations", "the terrorists", "the inciters and rioters", and the "elimination and extermination of the terrorists". These are terms directly derived from the dictionary of the colonialist Israeli society.

The Zionist left should apply to the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation the same system of principles and terms which guided the Jewish underground in its struggle against the British occupation. In the occupied territories a military dictatorship is prevailing. The Palestinian people are under occupation facing suppression and the denial of their civil and elementary national rights. The left must refrain from speaking about this Palestinian land as "Judea and Samaria" which conjures up in the mind of an outsider the pastoral valleys of biblical Israel, but refer to them in terminology which reflects the real situation in the area: occupied territories.

Whoever lives under occupation and oppression, whoever had their rights trampled upon, and whoever is subject to the rule of military tyranny such as that of Israel in the occupied territories against the Palestinian people has the right to struggle against it. The left should say then: not "terrorists", but Palestinian resistance fighters or Palestinian guerrillas.

The Zionist left is mistaken when it equates the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation with Kahane. This is false symmetry. There is no equating the Israeli occupation with the Palestinian resistance. The Zionist left should adopt a clear-cut approach which clarifies the settlements as illegitimate areas not to

be viewed as quiet civilian settlements but as occupation strongholds built on stolen Palestinian land. These strongholds must be disbanded and their inhabitants brought back inside the borders of the state of Israel. There should be an end to the talk of Palestinian "terrorist organisations" and an exchange with the phrase PLO. The PLO which is the political representative of the Palestinian people must be talked to, face-to-face, about the future of the two peoples.

There should be an end to the talk about a "Jewish state" as a reason for returning territories. Whoever emphasizes that the territories must be returned only in order for Israel to remain a Jewish state (views heard in Peace Now, Mapam, etc.) are contaminated by some of Kahane's rhetoric. Kahane wants a Jewish state and therefore he wants to expel the Arabs. These leftists want a Jewish state; therefore they want to expel the territories in which there are Arabs and to annex the territories which are now evacuated of Arabs like the Jordan Valley and Golan Heights. Instead

the left should adopt a position which says that a democratic state in which Arabs and Jews live together is the best solution in line with the humanist, socialist and liberal principles. However, considering the existing situation of the two peoples, the Palestinians and the Israelis, it is necessary to find first a separate national existence before the integration stage can be discussed.

The left must oppose the occupation not only because of "what this does to us", an interpretation which is heard from the Zionist left, but to the same extent, because of what this does to "them", to the Palestinians.

The sensitivity to grievance and injustice done to other people should not melt away only because "my people" are the actors. The universal principles of freedom, justice and equality are as beautiful for the Palestinians as they are for the Israelis, and this should be clarified everywhere. Consequently, the people of the left who are of draft age (regular and reserve) should declare that they won't take part in the suppression of the population of another people. The protection of the state of Israel, to which they have sworn, does not mean the demolition of houses of innocent people, a curfew on villages and towns which resist occupation, the administrative detentions of hundreds, the expulsions of many, the abuses and the beating, the torture, the harassment that occurs. The participation in the suppression of a civilian population contradicts all international conventions to which Israel is a signatory as well as contradicting the principles of the independence declaration. Therefore, it is the duty of every humanist, socialist or liberal to refuse to take part in such a suppressive system which Israel developed over the last 19 years.

The Zionist left must stop speaking about "harming Israeli army norms." Nineteen years of occupation have established the norms of an occupation army within the Israeli army. These norms manifested themselves in the last elections. The Israeli right and its various stalwarts captured a decisive majority of votes in the army. Were the Israeli Knesset composed in accordance to army election results, "Defence Minister Kahane" wouldn't be a nightmare but a concrete reality. Whoever wants to alter the norms that have been current in the Israeli army must fight for the withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, borders, and must also, of course, fight for putting Sharon and Rafel Eitan on trial for war crimes. The fact that these two have continued to enjoy respect and honor prove more than anything else the terrible erosion that has taken place in Israeli society.

The ideas and manner of operation which have existed thus far, which can be added to, if adopted by the Zionist left, will perhaps succeed in halting the process in which Israeli society finds itself which, if it continues, may culminate in national suicide and even regional suicide. After saying this, the left must let the right know that if Meron Benvenisti's forecasts turn out to be correct and the situation in the occupied territories is revealed to be irreversible, the left will have to change its objectives and struggle for the establishment of a secular democratic state, the granting of full civil rights to the Palestinians, and the formulation of a constitution which would express the new state of affairs. The present situation of ever-increasing apartheid in the occupied territories cannot be allowed to continue without limit.

And finally, another point that the Zionist and non-Zionist left has not grappled with: Israel's nuclear arsenal. The thought that Kahane, Geula Cohen, Rabbi Levinger, Sharon Eitan and others like them may attain power and be able to pull Israel's nuclear trigger is enough to give anyone who desires peace — whether in Israel or the world at large — nightmares. For this reason, the left must demand that Israel signs the international accord for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, agree to international supervision of its atomic reactors and thus free the region of the arms race. If war cannot be prevented, it would be better if it was fought with conventional weapons. If Israel continues its present policy, there will be nothing to prevent a series of wars which will reduce us all to dust and ash.

Gideon Spiro is the former spokesperson of the Committee in Solidarity with Bir Zeit University. A longer version of this article first appeared in Al Fajr, the Jerusalem Palestinian weekly.

PATRIOTS

or

TRAITORS

Naomi Dale reports on a new play, *Traitors* by
Melanie Phillips, which opened at the Drill Hall,
London in January 1986

Was the hot summer of 1982 a turning point for British Jewry — publicly entering into political discussions as Jews? Numbers, some highly successful and well-known, crawled out of the closet and let it be known: they as Jews were appalled and shocked by Israel's actions in Lebanon. They signed declarations of outrage and printed them in *The Guardian*. Agitation and public breast-beating reached a peak as the world grew to hear of the Sabra and Chatilla massacres. Who were these Jews, why did they speak out — and where are they now?

Melanie Phillips' first play, *Traitors* gives us insight into some of them, but if her interpretations and positions are representative, Jewish socialists have reason to feel despondent. The play focusses on the sudden identity crisis of Harriet Goldsmith, a highly successful and competent journalist on a reputable liberal magazine, *New Liberty*. Her complacent, smooth-running world is shaken irreversibly by the Lebanese invasion, both because of what it means to her that Israel has carried out such aggression and because of the latent antisemitism in her journalist colleagues that surfaces.

But it is at home that we really catch a first glimpse of Harriet's Jewish identity. Reports of the events in Beirut flash onto the News. Harriet is dismayed, to the utter surprise of her unperturbed Jewish husband, Julian. Why, we are British! he claims, and you aren't a Zionist or religious (ah, the commonly accepted duality of Jewish identity today). But Harriet remains unsatisfied with this dismissal — and gives an alternative national view of identity: I feel it because I'm a Jew, because of my German and Polish background, the Holocaust, pogroms. In other words, it seems because of a sense of continuity and identity with Jews past and present, our history of oppression and persecution, our national identity. An identity that crosses nation state boundaries and links her to her family in Germany and Poland, not all of whom survived the Second World War. How different from her husband's family — a highly assimilated, well-

heeled Anglo-Jewish family with centuries of assimilation and identification with Britain. So much so, that Julian cannot see Britain as anything but "one of the most civilised and humane countries in the world". The ripples caused by the Lebanese invasion leave him untouched: except delaying his dinner.

Harriet meets Ya'acov, a journalist from Israel. The two political correspondents are about to be interviewed on TV to comment on Israel's politics and they talk beforehand together. Ya'acov is furious about the degree of criticism of Israel by *New Liberty*, Harriet's magazine, and is dumbfounded that there are Jews on the staff. He is angry too about British Jewry's indifference to Israel. But he doesn't feel any better about Israel and feels morally outraged at its actions in Lebanon. Yet Ya'acov is a committed Zionist. He upholds the traditional Zionist ideology of the survival of nationhood. Faith and religion are but a liberty. "My country right and wrong — that does not mean I have to agree with everything my country does," he declares. In Israel, Ya'acov is leftist and openly disclaims the Lebanese invasion, yet he still believes that Diaspora Jewry should believe in the dream of Israel.

Harriet now openly rejects a *New Liberty* decision to print an article on Israel which links the Israeli invasion to international Jewish finance and compares it to Nazi genocide. It calls on all Jews to renounce Israel. Her other colleagues and the editor support the content of the article, but Harriet is

appalled. She detects all the familiar and ancient antisemitic accusations of international finance, conspiracy, and denial of persecution leading up to the creation of Israel. Her editor is amazed — surely it is not antisemitic because it is critical of Israel. Harriet argues that it is racist — but now the editor himself becomes angry and retorts that the Israeli Law of Return is also racist. He cannot restrain himself from commenting on the Jewish vulgarity of making money, and the tendency to rise to the top in Britain and elsewhere. It is not comfortable to have Jews in the media or Cabinet. Harriet now begins to see through the veneer of impartiality of the liberal magazine, and interprets it as a refusal to take a position of morality and to stick up for what is right and wrong.

From now on, the drama intensifies. Harriet resigns, because the magazine goes ahead and publishes the article on Israel. Action takes over. Harriet is arrested, demonstrating against the Foreign Office for its anti-Israeli sentiments and hitting a policeman. Her colleagues, of course, see it as exhibitionism (there is no Jewish taint that Harriet is apparently free of). The last view of Harriet is sitting with her husband, poor Julian who is beginning to wonder what has hit his steady boat. Harriet is pondering on whether to go to Israel. But her husband remains unconvinced. The play ends.

Traitors is undoubtedly a very political play about contemporary Jewish identity and nationality in Britain — and this alone is refreshing and welcome. Melanie Phillips clearly has a well-attuned ear to the kind of comments,

dialogues and arguments that raged between many Jews, Jews and Gentiles, Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel in 1982 and subsequently. Many of the comments and issues are familiar to us; some of the arguments painful and unresolved. Antisemitism has surfaced in Britain over the last few years, gaining a new respectability in both right-wing and some left-wing circles. Jews, including radical ones, have been grappling with this at the same time as trying to resolve their own reactions (often horrified) to the recent aggressions of Israel. Dealing with both is difficult, uncomfortable and at times paradoxical, as the play so clearly shows.

But the politics of the play, as they become apparent in the mouthpieces taken by Harriet Goldsmith, Ya'acov and Julian Goldsmith, rested on certain potential and actual positions that are unsatisfactory. Melanie Phillips shows unresolved contradictions and complex issues without coming down on one particular side. Yet the play is selective in the arguments that it puts in the mouths of its various protagonists. Harriet and Ya'acov are fully aware of being Jewish and the difficulties this poses in life in Britain. In both cases (for different reasons, perhaps) aliya (immigration) to Israel seems the only viable solution. We don't know if Harriet opts for this in the end — but she does not offer any other kind of possibility, except living as a rejected outsider in a Britain riddled with antisemitism. Julian has one other solution — believe in the fairness and decency of Britain, behave well, achieve well, and keep Jewishness out of sight in heaven or over the sea in Israel (he would make a good candidate for the Board of Deputies of British Jews, but maybe even this would compromise his perfect assimilation...).

Harriet has a strongly liberal view of Britain as ultimately a benign state, with democracy, free speech, and individual freedom, and any corruption operating at the level of individual morality (or lack of it). So if there is antisemitism in Britain, hypocrisy by the Tory government, distortions in the media, it is because of the lack of individual people's sense of right and wrong.

See too her liberal view on Israel. Israel has a right to exist, to carry out a selective Law of Return to all Jews (and not to other groups) and is a benign state. If it shows irrational actions of aggression in Lebanon, it is because of the loss of individual morality of Jews. Harriet feels moral outrage at this loss of values. But in both her views, there is no political analysis of either Britain's

or Israel's relations to its own minority groups (Jews or others), or of the politics of racism and antisemitism, or of the relations of individual prejudice to institutionalised racism or antisemitism, or of the politics of nationalism as practised by the state. No links are drawn between the experiences of Black and other minority groups in Britain and the experiences, past and present, of Jews in Britain. Ultimately, identifying with the State of Israel means that it is not possible to take further any discussion about majoritarian and nation states and the problems for minority groups in these states (whether Jews in Britain or Palestinians in Israel). There is no discussion about national conflict in Britain or Israel — and so no further light offered to the challenges and difficulties of being a British Jew. In the end, it comes down to that it is not comfortable to live in Britain openly as Jew (which is undoubtedly the case), but the play does not go on to explore what this means for the politics of Britain as a multi-racial society (or for Israel).

The paucity of analysis of the politics of racism and antisemitism become more apparent by the lumping together of upper-class antisemitism and resentment of *New Liberty's* Oxbridge editor, the antisemitic views of the working class journalist, and the fascist thuggery of the National Front. How dangerous to thrust them all together — it boils down to the old Zionist view that antisemitism is epidemic, irrational and incurable (so the only solution is to retreat into our own homeland). This position is untenable for any socialist Jews who are committed to pursuing anti-racist politics in Britain today, here and now. That is trying to understand the different kinds of racism and antisemitism and their relations to politics, and to develop links between Black people, and Jewish experiences and strategies for working towards a British state that has equal and just policies for the autonomy and self-determination of its minority groups. No attempt is made in the play to suggest any links between different kinds of oppression and marginalisation — the working class and feminist journalists are inexplicably caricatured as monotonous, foolish posturing, with only Harriet's form of oppression and marginalisation treated with dignity and fervour.

The play does, however, have one political case to make and this is shown clearly — the implication of class. Harriet and her husband are middle class, professional people, with prestigious careers

and status. Although Julian feels well defended in his bastion of the Home Office, no less, Harriet is adamant that whatever one's position in Britain one will not be safe in the end (as the lessons in Germany taught us too). Melanie Phillips, herself News Editor on the *Guardian*, is obviously aware of the personal challenges of being Jewish in Britain whatever one's class position (although how many, like Julian, have understandably but short-sightedly opted for acceptance first and hiding one's Jewishness in the garden hut...).

Lack of analysis of the politics of Britain and Israel and the lumping together of different kinds of antisemitism in the play do make it difficult to disentangle criticisms of Israel from antisemitism itself. Many of us have become very sensitive and attuned to some of the overtones of antisemitism in the voices of some of Israel's critics, yet also accept certain political criticisms of Israel's politics and relations to the Palestinians. Doing this is far from easy — sometimes we are silenced, abused, asked to make blanket renunciations of Israel, having to make our views on Israel known before being allowed to speak as British Jews. Regrettably, some of this comes from other left-wing and feminist comrades, some from other Jews. Sometimes our differences stem from hearing the ancient, familiar themes of antisemitism in their arguments, other times because we disagree on their particular left-wing analysis of Israel and Middle Eastern politics. One thing certainly does not help this conflict — and that is linking all Jews in Britain with Israel (and so preventing us from being able to hold a separate position on British Jewish life, being able to have independent critical views on Israel's politics, and also holding us responsible for a politics in Israel we are not party to and have no influence over). The Zionist position, exemplified by Ya'acov, did not bring with it any discussion of the complexities and contradictions of Zionism for Jews living in the Diaspora.

Commitment to anti-racist politics in Britain as Jews, criticisms of racist policies by Israel, demands for the resolution of the national conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and assertion of the value and importance of Diaspora Jewry are the kind of positions which the Jewish Socialists' Group would take. Yet none of them are expressed (even superficially) in the play. For this reason, it remains disappointing. For those of us who claim, assert, and fight for, our right to be British Jews, the play is ultimately unhelpful.

WHERE WE STAND

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

In Britain in 1986 our Jewish establishment actively oppose progressive causes; many Jews have enjoyed considerable social and economic mobility; and the general image held of the Jewish community, apparently confirmed by its institutions, is one of relative comfort and security.

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

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

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

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

JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP NOW
WRITE TO: MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, JSG, BM 3725 LONDON WC1N 3XX

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