

# JEWISH SOCIALIST

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85p



Uprooting in Zion

Iraqi Jews

FEMINISM ON FASCISM

Poetry FARRAKHAN Reviews



# JEWISH SOCIALIST

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## EDITORIAL

On the Left we treat the writings of past theorists with great reverence. A century after they were written — and in vastly different material circumstances — the words of Marx and Engels are frequently cited as a guide to present political action. And the revolutionary circumstances and demands of Tsarist Russia are often transplanted on to workers' struggles here some seven decades later. But our memory and reverence for historical writings is selective. Amid the welter of post-war literature about fascism, Katherine Burdekin's powerful and prophetic 1930s novel, *Swastika Night*, with its distinctive analysis of fascism's roots in patriarchy, remained until recently republished, a forgotten text. Yet as Julia Bard shows (p14) it is very relevant to the issues faced by fascism's targets in the 1980s.

The Jewish community, once called the "people of the book", shows, at least among its "official" leadership, contempt for theory, indeed for any independent thought. It continues though to be preoccupied with antisemitism. Yet one of the most thought-provoking, perceptive and challenging studies of antisemitism remains largely unknown to Anglo-Jewry. Tony Blend (p5) provides an insight into Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of antisemitism, published 40 years ago and once again stresses its vitality and relevance today.

Between the writing of Burdekin's novel and Sartre's study lies the Nazi holocaust of six million Jews. Antisemitism triumphed. The Left failed. The Jewish leadership failed. We believe that if the broader understanding of fascism and antisemitism offered in these articles is taken on, it will help to ensure that we do not fail again.

## WRITE ON

We are delighted that so many people send us contributions for *Jewish Socialist* and are gratified to have sparked off a desire to explore a whole range of ideas. Most of the manuscripts we receive are interesting and well-written, and though some are not suitable for this publication, others may simply be too long or in a style which is inaccessible to non-specialist readers.

So whatever you send in — whether it's a news item, graphic, photograph, feature article or an idea you'd like to see us cover — bear in mind that our readers may not be familiar with your field, they may not be Jewish and they may not be able to quote Marx. But they are intelligent, and willing to explore new and sometimes uncomfortable ideas. That's why they like *Jewish Socialist*!

Here are some guidelines for contribu-

ors. *Features* are generally 1,000-1,500 words long, and should be no longer than 2,000 words (though we occasionally publish longer pieces of *fiction*). *News items* should be between 100 and 250 words, apart from major stories which may run to 500 words, apart from major stories which may run to 500. If you can manage to supply *photos* with manuscripts, that's a great help — even better if they're black and white. *Book reviews* should be about 500 words long and should have the title, author, publisher and price at the top. *Cartoons* and *drawings* may have to be reduced in size so make sure they are clear.

Please type all manuscripts double-spaced on one side of the paper, with wide margins and enclose an *sae*.

We look forward to receiving all your contributions.

January 1987

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

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Photo: Morning Star  
Councillor Lesley Hilton, accompanied by Michael Safier of the Jewish Socialists' Group, lays a wreath at the cenotaph in memory of Shamira Kassam.

On 9 November, Remembrance Sunday, a group of JSG members joined Anti-Fascist Action's march in honour of those, past and present, who have died fighting racism and fascism. For many years the National Front have defiled this day by marching unopposed to the Cenotaph. AFA decided to organise a counter march. It was not intended to be confrontational, but rather a way of drawing people's attention to the fact that racism, fascism and antisemitism are all, unfortunately, alive and well 40 years after the war which was supposed to have been fought to defeat fascism.

The AFA march was scheduled to take a route parallel to Whitehall and to start off before the National Front, who were allowed to take their usual route to the Cenotaph. A small AFA contingent, including JSG National Secretary, Michael Safier, went ahead to lay wreaths at the Cenotaph. One of the wreaths was in memory of Shamira Kassam and her three sons, victims of an arson attack earlier this year; another remembered Blair Peach, killed during an anti-National Front demo in Southall in 1979.

The march itself, several thousand strong, set off down Northumberland Avenue, breaking up twice as people ran in panic when an army of fascist thugs came hurtling down a side street.

We finally made it along the Embankment, over Westminster Bridge, and to the Imperial War Museum, an ironic place to end.

The day after the march the *Daily Mail* contained venomous articles attacking AFA for "defiling the precincts of the Cenotaph" and "desecra-

ting a day held sacred by the overwhelming mass of the British people." The National Front were dismissed simply as "swaggering", their presence seen as inevitable but somehow nothing to worry about. But AFA are "the loony left... a band of anarchists, Communists, homosexuals and students" (clearly derogatory terms in *Mail*-speak) who have hijacked the day for their own political ends. According to the *Mail*, the wreath commemorating Blair Peach had no right to be there, as he was simply a "left wing activist who died in a riot... death by misadventure".

It was a shame that the march seemed to consist mainly of "hard core" activists (although it was good to see UJS and YPZ out at last). But where were the trade union banners? Where were the Labour Party banners? Where were the concerned middle classes who would turn out in force for a CND demo? Don't these people care about the growth of racism, fascism and antisemitism? Perhaps next year the event will be better publicised, and perhaps eventually we will get the fascists (and the *Daily Mail*) off the streets.

### STALL THE FASCISTS

Since 1978 Tower Hamlets Trade Council have been holding an anti-racist stall on Brick Lane every Sunday morning.

Their money has now run out. If you feel that this symbol of anti-racism should continue then Tower Hamlets Trade Council would welcome donations, however small. To be sent to: Tower Hamlets Trade Council, 53 Globe Rd, London E2.

### JEWS AGAINST APARTHEID COMMITTEE FORMED

Jews Against Apartheid (JAA) held its first Annual General Meeting on Sunday November 23rd and is now a fully constituted organisation affiliated to the Anti-Apartheid Movement. A committee was formed made up of people who are active in a number of Jewish organisations including Jewish Socialists' Group members Shalom Charikar (Chair) and Adrienne Wallman (General Secretary) and members of Mapam, the Jewish Council for Community Relations, Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, and the Association for Jewish Youth.

JAA seeks to heighten awareness throughout the Jewish community about apartheid in South Africa and Namibia and to mobilise the community to participate local, national, and international action to bring the system of apartheid to an end. JAA will also make contact and work with other Jewish groups fighting apartheid in various countries. One of the first activities will be to prepare a report on Israel's links with South Africa.

For information on membership and future activities, please write to Jews Against Apartheid, BM JAA, London WC1N 3XX.

### PEACE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Further news from the Foundation for Jewish/Palestinian dialogue in Holland, reported on in *Jewish Socialist* 6/7. Just out is the first issue of *The Bridge*, a newsletter on Jewish/Palestinian dialogue. It contains a full report of the seminar in May 1986. A follow-up seminar is planned for 13-15 March 1987, again in Saarn in Holland. It also welcomes written contributions for *The Bridge*. Full details from the Foundation for Jewish/Palestinian Dialogue, c/o v.Lennepkade 105-3, 1054 ZJ Amsterdam-W, the Netherlands.

### JEWISH FEMINIST REVIVAL

The Jewish Feminist Group has recently rescued itself from the doldrums and has a varied and exciting series of meetings scheduled for this year. The first four are:

- \* 25 January — Drama Workshop
- \* 22 February — How to deal with "disguised" antisemitism
- \* 15 March — Purim social
- \* 26 April — Ashkenazi and Sephardi women

The venues of all these are to be decided. For further information write to the JFG Box 39, Sisterwrite, 190 Upper St. London N1 or phone Karen on 01-579 4293.

The Jewish Feminist Newsletter is also starting up again and will be produced quarterly. You can receive it by sending £2 to the JFG address as above.

### ALL A QUESTION OF NUMBERS

The number of diaspora Jews will fall to eight million by the end of this century, warns the "wishful thinking" sorry, "demography" committee appointed by the World Zionist Organisation. The *Jewish Chronicle* (5/12/86) quotes figures given by the committee showing that in 1939 there were 16.5 million Jews worldwide. This dropped to 10.4 million by 1945 but rose again to today's figure of 14.5 million. There has, according to the report, been a marked decline over the last 15 years, however, and one reason given was the low birth rate of diaspora Jews. This analysis seems to come dangerously close to a "racial theory" of "the Jewish question", though it wouldn't be the first time women — Jewish or otherwise — have been exhorted to breed faster for their people's future.

### MAZELTOV!

Gaby Levy will be Barmitzvah in Oxford Synagogue on January 10. Thanks to all our friends for their love and support in the past 13 years. Lindsay.



## CABLE STREET CELEBRATED IN LONDON

The Cable Street commemoration started early in London. Already in September the Labour Party Young Socialists held a public meeting on fifty years of fighting fascism, and others soon followed. A Jewish Socialists' Group speaker joined Cable Street veteran Manny Weiss on the platform of a meeting organised on October 1 by the Redbridge Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, where 75% of the audience were people who were on the streets opposing the fascists in 1936, and they gave graphic descriptions of the day's events. The following night, Communist Party veterans, Solly Kaye and Max Levitas addressed a commemorative meeting in Stepney.

But the major event was held on the now legendary of October 4 itself, which coincided this year with *Rosh Hashana* (the Jewish New Year). Some 3,000 marchers from a wide range of anti-racist, anti-fascist, socialist and labour movement organisations marched from Gardiners Corner to a festival in Bigland Street (behind Cable Street). The march was led by a banner which had 'unity' inscribed in many languages including Yiddish and Hebrew. Among the banners that followed were those of the *Jewish Socialists' Group* and *Jewish Lesbians fight Racism*. At the festival the JSG stall found itself next to that of the *Morning Star* and our magazines and books did a roaring trade particularly among elderly Jewish communists who started out at the stall nextdoor!

Many Jews including some members of the JSG felt unable to attend the event on *Rosh Hashana*, while others thought it a very happy and appropriate coincidence. Certainly on the day many Jews, especially from the East End, participated, but recognising that some felt excluded, the JSG organised a well-attended public meeting on



October 16 with guest speaker Charlie Goodman — whose arrest at Cable Street in 1936 was captured by a press photographer and has since appeared in publications as diverse as the *Daily Telegraph* and *Jewish Socialist* (no 1).

Perhaps the most moving commemorative event was a play called *You Should Have Been There*, performed by a local youth theatre group in the small and now unused, haunting venue of Princelet St Synagogue, one of the oldest synagogues in the East End. The whole synagogue became the stage as the audience followed and mingled with the actors and their performance. The play recorded resistance to fascism from the 1930s to the 1980s and, by its venue as much as by its powerful content, it paid a fitting tribute to East End Jewry.

The tribute to the anti-fascists of the 1930s was completed on November 2 with a gathering of some 150 people, mostly Cable Street veterans, in front of the commemorative mural which had been recently defaced (again) by fascists. There were speeches from those whose lifetime of struggle began at Cable Street, and then we marched slowly along Cable Street to Dock Street where, with the help of a 300-foot red ribbon, we collectively unveiled a plaque saluting those who stopped Mosley. This was followed in the afternoon by a meeting organised by the Jewish East

End Museum, addressed by Bill Fishman.

Today the East End is once again besieged by rampant racism and fascist activism. The Cable Street veterans showed us that it can be fought and overcome. It is up to all of us to carry on that fight.

## AND IN NEWCASTLE

Henry Stewart writes... On 4 October 150 people in Newcastle-upon-Tyne celebrated *Rosh Hashana* and the 50th anniversary of Cable Street. It wasn't the traditional way to welcome the Jewish New Year but it was a huge success. The evening was a combination of entertainment, music and politics. It included Jinksi singing political ballads, the People's Choir and ended with a local band, Combo, to get people dancing. The evening closed with communal singing of Shalom Khavarim.

On arrival everybody was given some bread dipped in honey and wished a sweet year. Latkes, tzimmes, hoummous and Khallah were served in the interval and the significance of the festival was explained.

Len Edmundson, a veteran of the anti-fascist struggles of the '30s, took us back to those dark days when fascism was on the march throughout Europe. Cable Street was a turning point in Britain and one of the largest demonstrations of people's power ever seen in this country.

The fascists also tried to

establish a base on Tyneside in the thirties. But they got the same reception as in London. When William Joyce (later better known as Lord Haw-Haw) came to address a meeting on the town moor he was shouted down and the meeting was stopped.

The Battle of Cable Street, in the East End of London, may seem an odd thing to be celebrating on Tyneside but it was an event that struck a chord with a wide range of people. It was a proud moment in this country's people's history. And as one person commented, "it's great to be commemorating a victory for a change".

However combining a Cable Street celebration with *Rosh Hashana* was not popular with everyone. Some sections of the Jewish community expressed dismay, and even outrage, at the event. For those of us in the Newcastle Jewish Socialist Group, who first suggested the commemoration, it seemed an ideal opportunity. *Rosh Hashana*, we thought, was an appropriate day to celebrate the unity of people of different cultures and the strength that those people can have when they are united.

And in personal terms it meant a lot to be welcoming the Jewish New Year with so many supportive non-Jews. The JCARP (Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project) statement explains how racism must be combated not by assimilation by minority groups but by acceptance of all cultures. For dozens of non-Jews the celebration opened up a small insight into Jewish culture. Positive cultural images like that can help to combat racist feelings.

Still my self-doubt about being open about my culture rose to the surface. Had we gone too far, emphasised *Rosh Hashana* too much? As I was thinking this, someone (a non-Jew) came up to me to tell me what a great time they'd had. "But it would have been great if there had been more Jewish culture." Perhaps we didn't go far enough.

# ZIONISM & ANTI-ZIONISM

## BEYOND THE SLOGANS

ZIONISM

Roberto Sussman takes a close look at different sorts of Zionism and anti-Zionism and shows how they have been confused through being used in different contexts.

The Zionism vs. anti-Zionism debate can often become a sterile exercise in dogmatic apologetics and polemics. At the crudest level deep feelings of hostility against the 'enemy' are expressed as racist stereotypes. Part of the problem is that there are many types of 'Zionists' and 'anti-Zionists', supporting or opposing Zionism on different grounds and in different contexts.

Ideologies are never absolute and static and their implementation through political practice is a complex and ever-changing process. So it is unavoidable that people will use similar ideological labels to represent different policies, strategies, tactics and priorities. In the case of Zionism, nationalist ideology, this confusion is aggravated by the fact that it originated in Central and Eastern Europe as a reaction to specific political circumstances, but was implemented in the totally different context of Palestine. This distinguishes Zionism from other nationalisms, therefore the reaction against it, loosely called 'anti-Zionism' presents the same confusion between labels, slogans and policies due to the context in which it opposes Zionism.

## EUROPEAN ORIGINS

Certain basic ideas are shared by all the different elements within the Zionist movement, but Zionism in practice has largely been dictated by specific conditions in which Zionists operated. In Central and Eastern Europe the Zionist movement did not oppress any group, but instead aimed to represent the interests of an oppressed national minority. The separatist option offered by Zionism was not perceived as adequate by the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe; this can be gleaned from the fact that the majority of Jewish workers supported parties opposed to Zionism, such as the Bund or non-Jewish Socialist and Communist Parties. A consequence of the Holocaust was that most European non-Jews felt genuine revulsion towards any party which openly espoused antisemitism. With the disappearance of the Bund and other Jewish anti-Zionist (mainly religious) parties from the European scene together with the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe; in the eyes of sympathetic Europeans and surviving Jews the Zionist movement seemed to be the most important representative of Jewish interests.

If in the European context, the role

of Zionism was a peculiar form of nationalism of an oppressed national minority; its role in the Middle East cannot be separated from the fact that Palestine was already inhabited. Obviously these inhabitants opposed a plan to build a nation which, if it were successful would lead to their dispossession. The responsibility of the Zionist movement for turning the Palestinian Arabs into homeless refugees cannot be ignored. However, there were important factors which made Zionism unique. Instead of being citizens of a powerful colonial state, the Jews were a fragile group, lacking not only political power in Europe, but also facing increasingly virulent persecution. This led to the idea of Palestine as a 'national shelter'. The implications of this have to be taken into consideration, but not to the point of denying that the national aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs were thwarted by the establishment of a Jewish state. Thus, it is legitimate to say that, as far as the Palestinian Arabs are concerned, Zionism did have a colonialist aspect. This has always been perceived in the Middle East and, surprisingly, in Israel itself, but it has taken decades for it to be even discussed in the West. Among Jewish communities it remains a sort of ideological taboo. Those who break this taboo risk being politically ostracised.

## NEW LEFT

Familiarity with the oppression of the Jews made it very difficult for the 'old' European left to come to terms during the late forties and fifties with the colonialist side of Zionism in the Middle East. Opposition to Zionist ideology was brought to Europe and North America during the late sixties and early seventies by the so-called 'new' left. This new left mystified and glamourised third world liberation struggles, including that of the Palestinians. Therefore it brought into the European context ideas and tactics which only understood the colonial aspect of Zionism. However, outside the Middle East, this colonialist aspect of Zionism is not self evident. Zionist European Jews are not 'colonialist settlers' and the states in which they live do not discriminate in their favour and against European non Jews. Therefore, the denunciation of Zionism by the new left in this context failed because it clashed with the experience the European public had had of the Jews in their midst. Something like this has happened when Americans or Europeans try to

make people in the Middle East more sympathetic to Zionism by emphasizing its role in Europe and playing down its colonialist side, of which they have direct experience. Just as an analysis of the Zionist movement which ignores or plays down its role in the Middle East can be used to justify anti-Palestinian or anti-Arab hostility, an analysis which ignores or plays down its role and the causes of its emergence in Europe can be used to justify antisemitism. Just as Europeans or North Americans trivialising the oppression of the Palestinians are bound to express their hostility by using racist stereotypes of Arabs which are a product of European colonialism, a similar trivialisation of the historical oppression of the Jews is bound to be expressed in antisemitic terms.

There are fortunately few instances when the anti-Zionist language of Western Western European radical groups becomes so hostile to Jews as a group that it deserves to be called antisemitic. With the exception of overtly fascist groups who openly acknowledge their antisemitism, it would be an exaggeration to say that the excesses of an often crude and dogmatic form of left-wing anti-Zionism represent a danger to the lives and property of European and American Jews. However accepting that in most cases left-wing anti-Zionism discourse is not meant to be antisemitic, most Jews in Europe feel alienated and in some cases threatened by it. The main reason for this situation is that left-wing radical anti-Zionism talks in terms of vaguely defined possible 'Socialist' solutions for the Middle East and has nothing to say to most Jews outside the Middle East who adhere to 'Zionism' because it is the only form of Jewish identity they know besides Jewish religion. Therefore, most anti-Zionists cannot relate to those issues which are important to the Jews they come across without pressing these Jews into subordinating their experience to the context of the Middle East. Since 'Jewish identity' is regarded by many anti-Zionists as inherently reactionary (if it is 'religious' it must be 'obscurantist', if it is 'Zionist' it must be 'racist'), it has no place in the future socialist world conceived by these anti-Zionists.

## ALTERNATIVES

If the point of opposing Zionism is to make Zionist Jews aware of the reality of the Israel-Palestine conflict and so make them critical of their blind support for the State of Israel, then these dogmatic attitudes must be rejected and creative



alternatives sought. For example, it must be accepted that it is perfectly legitimate for Jews outside Israel to both support Palestinian national rights and be concerned about the fate of the Israeli Jews. After all, many Jews, whatever their attitude towards Zionism, have relatives living in Israel and feel some form of emotional attachment to and cultural affinity with that country. In addition, an acceptance of Zionism's colonialist role as regards the Palestinian people does not mean uncritical support for any political arrangement which claims to reverse this injustice. In many cases, Jews who become aware of the Palestinian predicament feel alienated by the fact that the only fate for Israeli Jews which seems to be acceptable to many anti-Zionists is that of late sixties Palestinian nationalism: citizens of the Secular Democratic State of Palestine of the Mosaic persuasion. When these Jews reject this and insist on Israel's right to exist they are expressing legitimate concern for the fate of Israeli Jews. Although 'Israel's right to exist' is posed by many Jews in a rhetorical manner which ignores the political constraints within which Palestinian organisations work, it is an issue which must be discussed and not dismissed simply as a 'Zionist argument'. Part of the problem is that many Jews, before committing themselves to support Palestinian national rights wish to be certain that support for the Palestinian cause should be helpful in reaching an agreement which is not detrimental to either of the two peoples. That Israeli Jews have national (as opposed to purely 'human') rights, whilst not denying that they oppress the Palestinians, is gaining ground among anti-Zionists. However it is still not accepted by all anti-Zionist groups, especially some in the Middle East who insist on seeing Israeli Jews as similar to the Druze or the Maronites. It is worth pointing out that many Jews who define themselves as Zionists are unaware that Zionist thought categorically rejects an Israeli state which represents only the interests of Israeli citizens. This would apply even if such a state was 'Jewish' in the sense that the majority of its population would define itself as Jewish in one way or another.

#### PUBLIC RELATIONS

Today more Jews leave Israel than go there. Most Jewish communities are reasonably comfortable and well integrated into their respective societies. The 'shelter' role of Zionism has been abandoned, even though lip service is still paid to it. Zionist ideas have been adopted by the establishment in different Jewish communities worldwide. However this 'Zionism', which has degenerated into a

## I was a teenage Zionist

David Rosenberg looks back at his political adolescence.

At the age of seven I went to school in the "Middle East" of Hackney, wearing a blazer with a Zionist symbol on its chest pocket. At 17 I came home from Zionist youth meetings to torment my parents: "How can you call yourself Jews and carry on living in Ilford?" I asked. Israel, after all, was our true destiny. At 27, I was old enough to know better. I wrote articles and spoke at meetings of the Jewish Socialists' Group in which I vehemently rejected Zionist solutions to Jewish issues. My destiny now was neither Ilford nor Israel, but the *heymishe* security of being a non-Zionist, neo-Bundist, polycentrist Jewish Socialist Londoner. Here to stay.

In the meantime though, I had been called a Zionist by anti-Zionists, an anti-Zionist by Zionists and even an antisemite

public relations exercise of giving unlimited and uncritical 'support' to the State of Israel is quite at home with the type of dogmatic anti-Zionism mentioned above. This is not surprising, this 'public relations Zionism' as opposed to that which advocates immigration requires the Jewish establishment to constantly convince Jewish communities of the existence of a powerful 'enemy'. This enemy is a modern version of the antisemitic movements of the past, now using anti-Zionism as its rationale. Obviously every instance of antisemitism being expressed as opposition to Zionism conforms this conspiratorial view. However the failure of dogmatic and crude (but not antisemitic) anti-Zionists to appreciate Jewish issues unconstructed by their ideological straitjackets reinforces this view.

The 'public relations' type Zionism of the Jewish establishment does not further the economic interests of the Jewish bourgeoisie or of Jewish capitalists. In fact, 'support for Israel' is not necessarily a profitable enterprise. Rather, it is an ideological support similar to the support of the Soviet Union by Communist parties during the Stalin era. As in the case of Stalinism, this type of Zionism requires a rigid control of individuals and groups who go beyond the limits of a certain tacit consensus so they are denied access to communal institutions to voice their opposition. This type of Zionism also transforms mainstream Zionist organisations and pro-Israel lobbies from means to an end into bodies whose end is their own preservation. It is no exaggeration to suggest that Palestinians like Issam Sartawi or Said Hammami who

by less thinking Zionists. Apparently it is easier to throw labels around than discuss the issues. And that applies both within the Jewish community and the Left. I recall many occasions when constructive discussions couldn't even start because of a qualified or "wrong" answer to the drably inevitable first question. "Are you a Zionist?" I suspect that people who ask that question are mainly interested in dismissing, rather than engaging, other people and their ideas.

Fortunately, with the help of the JSG, I have found enough space to develop my views in the light of experience, other peoples' perceptions and growing awareness and understanding of historical and current circumstances. My views changed, but the process of change can be painful. Zionism, anti-Zionism, antisemitism. . . these are all highly charged emotionally. I know many people open enough to grapple with these issues. I hope that

wished to remove the 'danger' feeding this bureaucracy were a real threat to many Zionist apparatchiks. They would prefer to 'play it safe' with the familiar types of anti-Zionist. Although there is a symmetry between the dogmatic 'Zionism' of the Jewish establishment and the dogmatic 'anti-Zionism' of many pro-Palestinian support groups, and both dogmatisms feed each other, this symmetry does not exist in terms of resources and political influence. The Palestinians as a group are much weaker in the West than the pro-Israel lobby, and they often have to promote their cause through pressure groups which have an extremely narrow outlook.

The behaviour of the Jewish establishment is closely connected with the crisis in modern Jewish identity and has implications which go beyond Jewish communities. However, these implications are complex and have not been properly researched. Yet the rigid political control exerted by the Jewish establishment on Jewish individuals or groups which challenge the established 'truth' cannot be maintained for ever. In the case of Stalinism, the facts from the Gulags forced Communist parties outside the Soviet Union to re-examine their uncritical support for the policies of the Soviet state. If the state of Israel becomes an apartheid state through the continuous occupation of Palestinian territories, the Jewish establishment will have to face up to its responsibility for having contributed to such a horrible (but possible) outcome through blind support for policies. □

this personal account will engage those people and encourage others who can identify themselves as moving in a similar direction.

I suppose it all began at primary school — Clapton Jewish Day School — where, together with the usual subjects, including four English lessons a week, we had five Hebrew lessons a week. I left Clapton with a positive feeling towards Hebrew culture and to a country called Israel, though I had not been there and had only met a handful of its people. I also left with a view of being Jewish which saw Jewishness, religion, Israel and Hebrew as necessarily bound up with each other. It was only later that these different elements began to disentangle themselves.

While I found meaning and vitality in Jewish festivals and ritual, I found the belief part of the religion increasingly banal. I don't ever remember believing in God, so I began searching for a more real Jewish identity. Meanwhile my general political views were becoming articulated in a more soundly based socialism but the more I read up on classical socialism, the greater became my sense of unease about class. Most Jews I knew were not well off but nor poor either. But by my mid teens, my father had become his own boss, buying a chemist shop in Dagenham. Socialism and business were hard to reconcile.

And then came Israel. At 17 I made my first trip to Israel on an Association of Jewish Youth (AJY) tour. I went anticipating good things and I came back with these expectations fulfilled. I spent the next two summers on Kibbutz with a Zionist youth movement. I had discovered socialist Zionism. I avidly read Borochov, Moses Hess, A D Gordon. . . and assimilated their views of Jews in the diaspora always being at the mercy of "inevitable" antisemitism, and, by their "unhealthy" and "abnormal" middling class position, as much threatened by revolution from the left as reaction from the right. Their solution was for Jews to have their own land where they could "normalise" themselves and become the working class. Together with these views, I assimilated their blindness to the existence of another people on the very land in which the Jews would prepare their national base for socialism.

I spent the next two summers after that on a very different Kibbutz, called Yad Hanna, with a history of communist activism externally as well as internally (but that's another story). By now I was a non-Zionist, but it wasn't the summers that changed me — although in these last two visits I was able to see something of Israel-the-reality behind Israel-the-dream, and I met with Palestinians denied an

equal share in the land of their birth and history.

It was events in Britain that prompted the essential questions. In 1975, together with other comrades from the Zionist youth movement I went to my first anti-fascist demonstration. We shouted at the tops of our voices our protest at the National Front as they came marching down the Strand towards Trafalgar Square, and we endured the brutality of the police as they reserved the Square for the Neo-Nazis and the (British?) pigeons. I felt a strong sense of Jewish outrage, yet most of the people protesting with me were non-Jews. I felt a twinge then that they had no Israel to go to if the fascists did get strong.

The fight against racism and fascism dominated my life in the late 1970s, only to be interrupted every so often by the painful debates at my university campus over Zionism. The orthodox anti-Zionists claimed that Zionism was racism, that all Zionists were racists and could never fight racism. I knew this was untrue — I was living proof and I wasn't the only one — and yet I witnessed the feet-dragging by other Zionists who seemed to place rigid loyalty to Zionism above all other concerns. And when a mass anti-fascist movement — the Anti Nazi League (ANL) was formed, I saw the appalling cynicism of the Jewish establishment come to the surface. They refused to support the ANL because some of its leaders were anti-Zionists. Meanwhile the fascists were terrorising minority communities including Jews. I knew from the countless anti-fascist demonstrations I went on in that period that my most trusted comrades were not from the Jewish Student Society — they were barely interested — but in the Left groups who shared an instinctive and uncompromising anti-fascism. But as we demonstrated in the heart of Bradford, Batley, Leeds, Manchester, Leicester. . . a deeper question arose. What was my solution for the targets of racism and fascism? Was I to suggest to them that they leave England to be safer in their countries of origin? Wasn't that what the fascists wanted? Here to stay, here to fight, was the response of the black communities and it made a profound impact on me. How could I fight racism and fascism in Britain unless I had a vision of a Britain in which I and they would be free of racism and fascism? Zionism told me that my only future was in Israel. It was when I decided that my future as a Jew physically and emotionally would be in Britain where I would fight racism, not run away from it, that I broke with Zionism. And it was when I broke with Zionism on those grounds with its denial of my reality as a Jew in Britain that I was able, ironically,

to achieve a deeper and more objective insight into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I read Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine*, and in the aftermath of the Lebanon war I was one of the organisers of a public meeting in London at which Israeli peacenik Uri Avnery shared a platform with top PLO man Issam Sartawi, six weeks before his death. I was fortunate enough to meet with Sartawi and I learned from his words and Said's writing about what Zionism has meant *in practice* for the Palestinians — how it has denied and oppressed them.

I now know how important these words *in practice* are for this whole debate. What made it so hard to break through the Zionist/anti-Zionist stalemate on campus, what entrenched people's positions, was that the debate operated almost purely at the level of *ideology*, quite divorced from material reality. It was almost as if people were more concerned to oppose the ideology than the reality itself. It was through being drawn to the material reality that I began to understand Zionism in the Jewish community and how it affected Jewish life politically, economically, culturally and institutionally. I started to locate Zionism in its time, place and context and learn of the rest of Jewish history that it has tried to extinguish including the history of the Bund — the mass Jewish workers movement that opposed Zionism from a Jewish and socialist perspective (and, incidentally, opposed cultural chauvinism within the socialist movement). I began to learn Yiddish, their language, and also the language of left-wing Zionists in the 1930s, but which Zionists in power suppressed in Israel and worked to suppress elsewhere.

And I can now see the pillar of Zionist ideology, the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, for the propaganda it is: a denial of the reality and validity of Jewish life outside Israel and a subordination of the needs and interests of diaspora communities to those of the Israeli state. As a Jew in Britain I no longer feel the need to emigrate 2,000 miles away in order to be a "real" Jew, a "normal" and "healthy" Jew. Indeed far from the lives of diaspora Jews being abnormal and unhealthy, it is the current distorted relationship of Israel to the diaspora that merits these derogatory descriptions. *Doikayt* ("hereness") is now my guiding principle. There are many centres. Here is my centre. If we adopt a polycentric perspective and see Israel's Jewish community as one important Jewish community among others in the world, each with equal claims, then we can get a better view of our needs and our future as Jews. □



# THE NON-JEWISH QUESTION

Sartre's penetrating analysis of antisemitism, written soon after the Holocaust, still offers hope for us today, says Tony Blend.

What have American comedian Groucho Marx and French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre got in common? The answer is found in a book written by Sartre, entitled *Reflexions on the Jewish Question*,<sup>1</sup> first published forty years ago. More serious questions on the nature of anti-Semitism, and the position of the Jew in modern French society, form the main content of the book. But we shall return to the Marx/Sartre analogy shortly.

When first published, Sartre's *Reflexions* made a great impression on its readers in France. Sartre's approach to the subject is interesting, if unorthodox. He attempts to define and understand the Jew, not in terms of any essential attributes common to all Jews, but in terms of how the non-Jew perceives the Jew.

The longest, and most important section of the book describes the antisemite, and defines what it is that makes a person a Jew. The shorter sections deal with possible solutions to the problems of antisemitism, some of which Sartre rejects, and some of which he advocates. But perhaps the most original pages of the *Reflexions* are those where Sartre examines the inter-relationship between the Jew and antisemite.

Sartre begins his *Reflexions* with a portrait of the antisemite. There exists, he says, a category of opinions which, however objectionable they may appear, are nevertheless commonly tolerated and allowed public expression, on the grounds of free speech. (For example, for the restoration of capital punishment.) However, Sartre refuses to place antisemitic views within this category of opinions. Simply because, antisemitism is not the expression of an *opinion* at all. Instead, it is the expression of a feeling, a *passion*. The antisemite does not so much hold antisemitic *views*, as express, literally, antisemitic *sentiments*. Because s/he does not express an opinion, Sartre argues s/he can claim no right to free speech.

## AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB

What, asks Sartre, causes a particular individual to develop an obsessive hatred of a particular minority group? Class and

personal mediocrity are two factors. He sees antisemitism as a predominantly middle-class phenomenon rooted in the administrating middle-classes, as opposed to the working-classes. The antisemite uses and feeds off the Jew, in order to feel the anger and hatred s/he enjoys feeling and needs to feel. Also, antisemitism creates its own special and exclusive club, membership of which is decided at, and by, birth. Its members' place and role in society have been mapped out from birth. Excluding one group from society reassures them of their own place in it. So, assimilation is originally the problem of the antisemite, who has cleverly passed it on to the Jew. The antisemite is a Gentile who solves his/her own problem of social assimilation not by contributing constructively to society and *earning* social status — but instead, by *claiming* it as a birthright, by relegating certain members of society to a social 'second division'. But this means that the antisemite's social status is inextricably linked to the Jew's exclusion from society and s/he has a vital need of precisely that which s/he is committed to destroying.

Antisemitism also represents a certain view of history and morality, according to Sartre. It explains historical events by blaming a particular minority group, rather than analysing history in collective terms. Antisemitism also implies an over-simplistic belief in the existence of evil, with the Jew as evil personified. Sartre writes: "It holds the Jew responsible for all the evil in the universe . . . in this way, antisemitism is first and foremost a Manichean view of the world".<sup>2</sup> The reason why the antisemite concentrates on the task of seeking out "evil" is that the more s/he focuses on fighting evil, the less time s/he has to think about challenging its opposite, "good".

## PHANTOM PERSONALITY

Sartre also provides a penetrating analysis of the psychology of the Jew whom he sees as haunted by the image of the other, — the Christian — has of the Jew. Sartre

calls this self-consciousness "reflexivity". When the Jew acts or thinks, s/he is constantly aware that s/he is acting or thinking. "At the heart of Jewish anxiety lies the obligation to continually examine one's own conscience, and ultimately to take on the role of that unknown, phantom personality which haunts the Jew, and which is none other than oneself, oneself as one is seen by an onlooker".<sup>3</sup> The tendency in Jewish humour towards self-depreciation and even Jewish antisemitism — represents the Jew consenting to be as the other would have him or her be.

To return to Groucho Marx, consider this joke of his: The scene is a train compartment. Groucho is sitting down, lounging comfortably with his feet up. Right beside him, an old lady is forced to remain standing, and is giving him disapproving looks. Says Groucho: "I'd give you my seat, lady — only, it's taken!"

What makes the joke possible? Simply, Groucho experiencing himself as split between two persons: himself as he enjoys sitting in the seat; and himself as the object of the old lady's disapproving stare. Groucho, an American Jew, experiences existing "for himself" and "for others". He becomes aware of that split. This causes anxiety. The joke relieves that anxiety. What Sartre and Groucho have in common is that they both describe a similar Jewish self-consciousness. Only, Sartre analyses it; while Groucho turns it into comedy.

Sartre also claims the Jew cannot afford the luxury of speculating on metaphysics, on philosophical theory, since only those whose place in society is stable and unchallenged can do so. Refused this social stability by the antisemite, denied the possibility of a metaphysical outlook, the Jew is condemned to anguish over his/her social status, perpetually oscillating between feelings of pride and social inferiority.

What the Jew continually looks for, argues Sartre, is recognition that s/he is a valid and accepted member of society. Instead, the antisemite continually reminds the Jew that s/he is alien. The

Jew tries to gain acceptance by acquiring wealth and material possessions; via the purchase of commodities capable of universal acquisition. Assimilation via material wealth. Also, the Jew seeks out reason and rational debate because, again, it puts one on a universal plane. The language and logic of the wider community, transcending the Jew, will, it is hoped, also draw the Jew into the community. Assimilation via reason and logic. Thus both the acquisition of wealth, and the pursuit of reason, conceal a more fundamental desire to belong.

## IN SITUATION

What Sartre really wants to understand is: what is it that makes a Jew a Jew? What is the common denominator shared by all Jews? Why do there seem to be certain character traits — anxiety, "reflexive" self-consciousness, feelings of social inferiority — common to many Jews? Is there a specifically Jewish character?

Sartre rejects the idea that there is, and always has been, some essential "Jewishness" common to Jews of all ages and all places. He maintains that Jews do not share common Jewish *character*, but rather a particular *situation* into which they have been placed, by the antisemite. And certain "Jewish" character traits simply reflect the situation of the Jew, exiled from mainstream Christian society through the ages. So, controversially, Sartre rejects the idea that there exists some Jewish essence common to all Jews — be it religious, racial, national, or psychological — and concludes that the one thing all Jews have in common is their situation.

So, to the question: "what makes a Jew a Jew?", Sartre answers "the Gentile". The Jew exists as a perception of the Gentile's consciousness, who confers on the Jew an acquired otherness. To Sartre, the only satisfactory and encompassing definition of the Jew, is that which defines the Jew in terms of the way s/he is perceived by the non-Jew through a predicament faced, rather than through a set character possessed.

## THE LIBERAL DEFENCE

What effective action can be taken to combat antisemitism? Sartre strongly rejects the solution put forward by the "liberal Democrat". The latter defends the Jew, not as a Jew, but as part of the "Brotherhood of Man". The tolerant Democrat refuses to acknowledge the specificity of the Jewish situation and denies the existence of any social minority. All s/he sees is: "Man; in all ages, in all places, the same".<sup>5</sup> No collectives; only individuals. The antisemite wanted to destroy the Jew *physically*; the Democrat wants to destroy the Jew *conceptually*. The antisemite wanted to destroy the Jew via physical extermination; the Democrat wants the Jew to disappear via assimilation. Sartre comments wryly: "It would seem the

Jew's only option is to choose the sauce with which s/he will be eaten".<sup>6</sup> Sartre sees no solution to the Jewish Question in adopting the abstract, assimilationist stance of the tolerant Democrat.

Instead, he suggests various collective social responses to antisemitism, perhaps inevitably, less original than his analysis of the problem itself — education; positive action to change public attitudes; a socialist revolution, to bring about the end of both class oppression and antisemitism; constructive legislation, prohibiting public denunciation of social minorities; and the establishment of leagues against antisemitism. He acknowledges that the task will be slow and difficult. The capacity of legislation to bring about changes in public attitudes



is limited. Concerning leagues, they should be set up not just by Jews, but also by other groups. Sartre concludes: "Antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem: it's *our* problem too".<sup>7</sup> But he does see long-term solutions to antisemitism through collective awareness and action.

## WITH PRIDE AND HATRED

What can Jews do about antisemitism? On an individual level, Sartre draws a distinction between "authentic Jews" and "inauthentic Jews". Since Jews are defined by their situation in society, their authenticity as Jews can be ascertained by how they choose to react, when faced with their situation.

"Inauthentic Jews are people whom other people look upon as being Jews, and who have chosen to flee in the face of this intolerable situation. . . . What in fact characterises them is that they face their situation by running away from it; they have chosen to deny it, or to deny their responsibility, or to deny their abandonment, which they cannot bear."<sup>8</sup> Denying the reality of one's situation, and the resultant necessity of conforming to an externally-conceived image of oneself, produces feelings of anguish within the individual Jew:

"Jews create complexes for themselves when they try to face their situation in an inauthentic manner. Ultimately, they've

allowed themselves to become convinced by the antisemites; they are the first victims of their propaganda. They both agree that, if there is such a thing as a Jew, s/he must have those very characteristics that popular malevolence attributes to him/her; and so, these inauthentic Jews aim to make martyrs out of themselves, in the original sense of the word 'martyr'; that is, they present themselves as living proof of the fact that there is no such thing as a Jew . . . Inauthentic Jews have let themselves become poisoned by a certain image that other people have of them, and they live in perpetual fear of not conforming to that image, in all they do."<sup>9</sup>

So what makes an *authentic* Jew?

"Being authentic . . . means making a lucid and honest appraisal of the situation, assuming the responsibilities and risks that that situation entails, and claiming it as one's own, with pride and with hatred . . . and living fully one's condition as a Jew".<sup>10</sup>

The authentic Jew gives up trying to assimilate and conform, and in so doing, effectively disarms the antisemite, creating the possibility of a new future:

"Authentic Jews have abandoned the myth of universal man: they have come to recognise and accept themselves in history as historically damned ashamed of their kind . . . they know they're apart, untouchable, held in contempt, outlawed . . . and it's as such that they acknowledge themselves to exist. Immediately, they cast aside their rational optimism . . . and the moment they stop being passive, they strip the antisemite of all his power and virulence. Inauthentic Jews ran away from their Jewish reality, and it was the antisemite who turned them back into Jews, in spite of themselves. Whereas authentic Jews hold themselves out to be Jews of their own free will, in the face of, and against, other people . . . They are what they make of themselves . . . They rediscover themselves in that abandonment to which they now freely consent; they become individuals, well-rounded individuals, with those metaphysical horizons that go with the human condition."<sup>11</sup>

## PERSONAL ANALYSIS

Sartre's approach can be criticised as highly subjective. He doesn't make use of other, contemporary research carried out on the subject of antisemitism, and instead, relies heavily on his own, personal experience. If Sartre refers to mainly personal experience, can this be a reliable enough authority, when it comes to discussing Jews in general?

In Sartre's defence, the book's title provides a justification. The book is a series of "reflexions" — not a scientific study, but a personal analysis. Also, as one of the first books to be published in France on the subject following the war, there was little other up-to-date research actually available to feed off. Indeed, much of the then available literature on Jews was not research into antisemitism,



but antisemitic literature: Drumond's *La France Juive*, Celine's *Bagatelles pour un Massacre*, and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. It was following the Nazi experience that the post-war generation of Jewish French writers emerged. Sartre's *Reflexions* pre-empted this new generation, hence its subjective angle. However, the originality of his arguments is such that the charge of subjectivity can be set aside.

*Reflexions* did not meet with universal acclaim. Some French Jews, while commending the perceptiveness of Sartre's portrait of the antisemite, resented his portrait of the Jew. Sartre's rejection of a distinctly unique Jewishness whether based on race, religion, language, or history, was unacceptable to them.

### IMPACT ON INTELLECTUALS

Here, in England, the very mention of antisemitism in some Anglo-Saxon circles proved an unwelcome intrusion, and an embarrassment. A review of an English translation of Sartre's *Reflexions*, which appeared in *The Spectator*, in 1948 concluded: "It is better that no more books should be written on the subject of antisemitism. Certainly good will is wanted, but also silence is wanted".<sup>12</sup> In the pages of his book, and by the very fact of its publication, Sartre denounces this plea for silence.

Despite scepticism among some Jewish traditionalists, and a certain Anglo-Saxon indifference, the *Reflexions* certainly made an important impression on French intellectuals, Jewish or not, who read the book, when first published. The French journalist and film-director, Claude Lanzman, who directed the film *Shoah*, has expressed his debt to the *Reflexions*.

"The question which confronted us then, as French Jews who'd survived the great slaughter, was... how could we continue to live in this country, among these men and women... the vast majority of whom we knew to have, at the very least, consented to our being treated as aliens over a period of four years, excluded from this same national community into which, now, all of a sudden, we were being reintegrated... people who were quite able to come to terms with our banishment, our internal exile, and our deaths... Sartre reconciled us at one and the same time with France, and with our situation as Jews... As for me, I know I walked the streets differently, I breathed differently, after having read *Reflexions on the Jewish Question*. Even if infested with antisemites, I could live in the France Sartre had to offer. From that day on, I held my head up high, and I haven't looked back since."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to its strong effect on its French, in particular, Jewish readership, *Reflexions* also exerted an influence on the vast array of post-war French literature concerning the identity and social position of the Jew. The physical violence inflicted on the Jews gave rise to

an intellectual backlash. Autobiographical accounts, historical research, sociological studies of the Jew's position in modern French society, novels and plays, have been consistently published in great numbers, ever since: for example Poliakov's *History of Antisemitism*, Friedmann's *The End of the Jewish People?*, Memmi's *Jews and Arabs*, Trigano's *The New Jewish Question*, Misrahi's *Marx and the Jewish Question*, Finkelkraut's *The Imaginary Jew*, Schnapper's *Jew and Israelites*, the work of Bernard-Henri Lévy, of Jean-Claude Grumberg, the review entitled *Fight for the Diaspora*, of the studies of *The Symposium of Jewish Intellectuals of France*, and generally, the flourishing Jewish press in France. Perhaps the particularly ambivalent position of the Jew France faced with contradictory signals of a Zola and a Barrès, of a Sartre and a Céline, goes some way towards explaining this literary output. The inner conflict of the Jew is mirrored by that of a France torn between the values of the French Revolution and the reality of its perpetually latent xenophobia. The country which produced the Declaration of the Rights of Man also enthusiastically oiled the wheels of Nazism.

### THREE CATEGORIES

Who actually read the *Reflexions*, when they were first published in 1946? Probably, few antisemites themselves, although it did reach the attention of Céline. Undoubtedly, French Jews made up a large part of its readership, even though the book is written by a non-Jew.

But there is a third category of reader who might have been tempted — neither antisemite, nor Jew, but that great mass of public seemingly indifferent to the question, or benignly detached from it — the *Liberal Democrats* of whom Sartre writes. These categories are not fixed and the same person is capable of falling into all three. Sartre's work addresses three types of reader simultaneously. To the antisemitic reader, the *Reflexions* represent an *accusation*; to the Jewish reader, they contain a *message of hope*; and to the Liberal Democratic reader, they try to bring about a *stirring of conscience*, and a *call to action*. By his choice of subject, and timing of publication, Sartre succeeded in holding up a mirror to his readers. In that mirror, they saw 'reflections' of themselves.

What of Sartre's approach to the "Jewish Question"? It sees antisemitism not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a much wider network of inter-related factors, each one acting on, and affecting, the rest. More than "merely" an aversion to a particular minority, it represents "a global perspective, adopted not just towards Jews, but towards history and society too. It is a *certain way of looking at the world*".<sup>14</sup> It transcends the Jew, implying a total system of values of which hatred of the Jew forms only one small part. Within

this perspective, apparently self-contained ideological outlooks come to be seen as inter-related: Christianity and Judaism; Antisemitism and Zionism; Atheism and Orthodoxy.

Ironically, Sartre's method, in practice, actually destroys itself. Sartre's starting-point in his *Reflexions* is: "The Jewish Question". But by the end of his analysis, he says "Antisemitism is *our* problem". So the title should really be changed to: "The Christian Question".

With hindsight, Sartre himself has recognised the book's shortcomings, and the need to qualify certain arguments especially his definition of the Jew. In an interview in 1966, he recognised the need to examine the history of the Jews, as well as their situation. But he maintained his distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic Jew, and felt his portrait of the antisemite was still relevant, twenty years on.

### COUNTERING THE MYTH

As the reader of the 1980s, remember your counterpart in the 1940s when you reflect on these arguments. The *Reflexions* cannot be detached from the period in which they were written. They are firmly rooted in the immediate post-war period, a historical, as well as an intellectual, significance. Indeed, the real importance of Sartre's books is not so much the ideas contained within, but the *fact* of its publication at all, and the *timing* of that publication.

What was the great Nazi propagated myth? Simply, that the Jew was different from, and inferior to, the Aryan. In his *Reflexions*, Sartre countered the Nazi myth by defining the Jew in terms of situation and predicament, rather than in terms of essential characteristics. As an intellectual argument detached from historical considerations, this definition can be challenged. But insofar as it destroys some of the myths of a racist ideology, it deserves recognition.

Forty years since the book was first published, it has lost none of its vitality, nor any of its relevance. It is written by an outsider who felt intimately involved. It describes the psychology of racism in modern society, and how to combat it. It is not, indeed it cannot be, the last word on that subject. But it may have been one of the first. And as such, it is a brave piece of writing.

Still, Groucho Marx would probably have turned it all into a joke! But then, what could an American comedian and a French philosopher possibly have in common?

1. Details as above. First published in full in France in 1946 (Edition Paul Morihien).
2. *Reflexions (RJQ)*, p. 47. (All translations of quotations my own).
3. *RJQ*, p. 95. 4. *RJQ*, p. 83. 5. *RJQ*, p. 65.
6. *RJQ*, p. 69. 7. *RJQ*, p. 184. 8. *RJQ*, p. 112.
9. *RJQ*, pp. 114-115. 10. *RJQ*, p. 109.
11. *RJQ*, p. 166.
12. S. Smith, 'The Jewish Question', 10 December 1948.
13. 'An Acknowledgment', *Temps modernes*, 429, (1982).
14. *RJQ*, p. 15.

# Rags, riches and hidden yidn

Ian Bild takes issue with popular images of the Jewish Community.

Not so long ago I overheard a discussion between two people sitting behind me on a bus on the relative success and failure of the various immigrant groups that have arrived in Britain in the last 100 years.

The conversationalists were viciously stereotypical in their descriptions of, for example, the West Indian community who had "not got one very well", the Asian community who had "made good", and the Jews who had been "very successful".

Some people attempt to categorise whole communities in terms of success or failure. They look for almost genetic reasons to justify the conclusions within such communities. It is true that many Asian people are successful shopkeepers. It is also the case that many work long hours for little pay in sweatshop conditions and are both exploited and discriminated against in the job market. West Indian people work on the buses and in the hospitals, for example, and there are high levels of unemployment amongst youngsters, but there are many professional West Indians. The fact that there are few West Indian shopkeepers is probably because of a lack of capital and expertise which some Asian people particularly from East Africa, already had when they came here.

The Jews, going back to the conversation on the bus, have made it in society. They run Tescos, Marks and Spencers and goodness knows how many other large scale businesses. There are proportionately more Jews in Parliament than anyone else and look how many Jews there are in the professions...!

Now my Grandma, in her council flat in Hackney, would love to see all her children and grandchildren being, as she sees it, successful. For her Charles Clore is a wonderful man. But the fact is that her Jewish friends and most of her family (there is a distant cousin somewhere who drives around in a Rolls Royce) while not exactly living in poverty, have struggled along like everybody else, with some becoming more comfortably off than others.

In other words, stereotypical views, are at best vast oversimplifications and at worst carry racist and antisemitic overtones. Within each community there exist class differences, and the Jewish community is no exception.

### FOLK MYTHS

More overtly antisemitic terms of abuse focus on Jews as having money and not being willing to part with it easily. The

image of the miserly moneylender is a folk myth that has survived the Middle Ages. Indeed prior to the expulsion of the Jews from this country in 1290 many of the small community were moneylenders, often in quite powerful positions in relation to Kings, aristocrats and 'ordinary' people. The reason why they held such positions in society was because they were debarred from doing anything else.

The Jews who were officially readmitted in 1664 by Cromwell were also, by and large, wealthy and influential and had been allowed back because of their "worldwide commercial connections". They were mainly *Sephardim* and with the progressive easing of restrictions became well integrated into the higher classes of British society.

By the 18th and 19th centuries the wealthy merchants were only a small minority of the growing Jewish community. There were large numbers of less-well-off itinerant traders, pedlars, pencil-makers, tailors, hatters, embroiderers, glass engravers, diamond polishers, necklace makers and so on. Up until the 1880s there was a slow and gradual influx of *Ashkenazi* Jews most of whom arrived in great poverty.

Very soon it became clear that the immigration would not stop and that the arrivals were here to stay. Those that had made the journey were mostly younger people stifled by the economic restrictions within the Pale of Settlement often *luftmentshen* or unskilled people with little or no money and often nowhere to live.

### POVERTY AND RADICALISM

The early attitude of the Anglo-Jewish community combined a genuine philanthropy with an attempt to maintain some control over practices and institutions of the new arrivals. They feared that radicals amongst the immigrants would spread their ideas and threaten established interests, commercial and ideological, feeding off the poor housing, and long hours of work for little pay in the sweatshops.

In the East End of London, for example in the 1890s there was a campaign of protest meetings against poor living conditions and rackrenting. A boycott

campaign was organised against synagogues, charitable institutions and friendly societies amongst whose leaders there were rackrenting landlords. It was when campaigns were at their peak that the philanthropists acted. Once established in areas of first settlement the new arrivals began to develop facilities and activities to cater for cultural, educational, political and social needs. Schools, Friendly Societies, Yiddish theatres, youth clubs and meeting places all contributed to the fabric of life within the new Jewish communities.

Different people reacted in different ways to their new environment. A process began of fighting back, getting on and moving out, or getting stuck.

"In di gasn, tsu di masn" ("Into the streets, to the masses") was a line of a popular song in Vilna, Lithuania in the 1880s. Certainly before the First World War Jewish anarchists and socialists were very active within the community. They were involved with protests and helped to form trade unions within the main areas of employment such as tailoring.

For most, getting on and moving out was more important than fighting back. Some set up their own small businesses and flourished. As wages improved or new ventures prospered some left the areas of first settlement to live in more prosperous neighbourhoods.

### MOVING OUT AND UP

Eastern European Jews began life in this country as working class people. They have gradually become more middle class in their income, life style and attitudes. Since the Second World War, there has been a mass exodus from the East End of London and from Strangeways in Manchester. In London, Jewish people first went to Hackney and Stamford Hill, then moved to areas like Ilford, Edgware and Stanmore. In Manchester, the community moved to Prestwich.

But class differences remain within the Jewish community. There are still large pockets of relatively poor, usually elderly people who remain in the older areas of settlement. Many Jewish people still live in the council flats of Hackney and Stamford Hill and there are still many



Jewish Welfare organisations to look after those that cannot cope on their own.

### ANXIETY AND HORROR

By the 1880s the Anglo-Jewish community of mainly *Sephardi* origin had well established itself. Its leaders were wealthy, upper middle-class people. Even in the 1850s this established community began to look with some anxiety on the influx of poor Jews from Russia and Poland.

When the stream from Eastern Europe turned to a flood, due to worsening economic and political conditions in the Pale of Settlement in the 1880s, anxiety turned to horror and active opposition. The leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community feared for their own positions. The new immigrants came with their own distinctive lifestyles, language and religious practices. They had little contact with their established brethren and lived initially in great poverty often depending on poor relief.

In their Annual Report of April 1887, the London Committee of the Board of Deputies, made clear the established community's attitude towards the immigrants: "It is earnestly to be hoped that the persecution of Jews in foreign countries may not be renewed, that the

trade of England, which now shows some signs of improvement may now revive, and that the steps taken by the Board of Guardians to deter paupers from coming to this country will be attended with success."

When it is said that the Jewish community has become more middle class that does not mean that all Jewish people live a life a luxury. Apart from the pockets of real poverty many Jewish people remain working class in that they work in factories, in offices, or in the public services. If I think of just my own family, there is an aunt who works as a dinner lady, an uncle who is a taxi driver, shop assistants, a medical secretary, as well as shopkeepers and small business people. My family is probably very typical in its make up, with a mixture of occupations and incomes, with perhaps a tendency over the years to have become, with some exceptions, better off. There are much wealthier Jewish families. There are also much poorer ones.

Usually, Jewish people identify themselves not in terms of class, but according to which broad inter-communal grouping they belong to. If you ask a Jewish person what they are, they are less likely to answer — working class, or

middle class — and more likely to say Orthodox, Liberal or Hasidic.

But that does not mean to say that class divisions are absent within each of these communities. Historically, the Liberal and Progressive movements have tended to cater for wealthier, more professional people. That is not necessarily true today. Working class Jews flocked to the Orthodox synagogues, but the leaders of the synagogues usually were the wealthier people in the community. The Hasidic communities are probably more business orientated than anyone else.

The tendency has been for the community as a whole to become more middle class, but there remains a radical tradition amongst some Jewish people who remain active in the labour movement, in spite of a drift in the Jewish vote away from Labour and towards the Tories and Alliance Parties.

So when we hear statements that the Jews have been successful, we know, from our own experiences, that the situation is far more complex. While many do have enough money not to have to worry about it, for most that remains a dream. □

Ian Bild is the author of *The Jews in Britain*, Batsford Education Books.

## Farra Khan in Brent

In *Jewish Socialist 5* we detailed the reaction of the Black community and the left to the banning of the Black American antisemite Louis Farrakhan. At the time it seemed to raise passions all over London except in Brent. Unfortunately, as Michael Heiser reports, this situation was not to last.

On May 8th this year council elections in Brent turned what had been a hung council with a Conservative-Liberal administration into one with a healthy Labour majority. I was, incidentally, one of the new Labour councillors elected. As the euphoria was dying down I got to hear about a meeting in a Brent school called by the "Lift the Ban on Farrakhan campaign", which was to be held on that Saturday May 10th. As it was advertised as a public meeting myself and another Jewish member of the Labour Party went along.

There were some thirty to forty people in the hall; all but a handful of Black African or Afro-Caribbean origin. At a table at the side of the hall sat ex-Hackney councillor Lester Lewis, an array of tapes of Farrakhan speeches displayed for sale in front of him.

The platform speeches were low key. The main speaker seemed concerned to

defend Louis Farrakhan against the charge of antisemitism. He picked out two quotes from Farrakhan to attempt this; the quote that Hitler was a "great man", and that Judaism is a "dirty religion". To the first he answered that Farrakhan had actually said that Hitler was a great German, that he had lifted the German people out of the gutter. To the second he said Farrakhan was referring to "self-styled" Jews. As the meeting progressed things became a bit more heated. Speaker after speaker from the floor railed against the Jews as financially and politically powerful and therefore the cause of Black oppression. At one point, as if to demonstrate this the audience were asked rhetorically how many were wearing Marks and Spencer underpants. I scribbled some of these remarks down. After a time it was realised I was taking notes and I was asked in no uncertain terms to hand them over. This I did and

left the meeting somewhat dazed.

In thinking about this meeting one thing was quite clear; it was an antisemitic meeting in support of an antisemite. A few days later my ward met and I put forward a motion stating that Brent Council buildings should not be allowed to be used for the purposes of antisemitic propaganda. This was passed unanimously. Other Jewish comrades in the Labour Party put similar motions to their wards and they were passed.

What we did not expect at this stage (the middle of May) was that the issue would not finally be laid to rest in Brent until November. Some of the fault for this must rest with the Brent Labour Party's Local Government Committee, who, charged with organising a special meeting to discuss the issue decided (at the beginning of June) that the earliest this meeting could be held was October 30th. Local ward parties and the three Brent constituency parties were asked to discuss the matter by then.

A number of different positions emerged. Jewish comrades from the outset stated that we were condemning the antisemitism of the group that had held the meeting. We expressed full support for autonomous Black organisation in the Labour Party and for the Black fight against all forms of racism and oppression. Unfortunately the Brent Black Section, faced with a difficult issue, chose to attempt to turn it round. Farrakhan, according to them was not an issue in Brent. The only purpose of making it into an issue now was to undermine the confidence of the Black community and the new Black leadership of Brent Council.

Some white party members could not see beyond what to them seemed to be a "Blacks versus Jews" issue. "If I go one way I get called a racist; if I go the other way I get called an antisemite", one white non-Jewish party member said to me in genuine bafflement. I pointed out that the issue was whether an antisemitic group should be allowed to use council premises; in no sense did that group represent the Black community, so the dilemma was a false one.

Faced with this reaction, a number of Jews, including the two of us who had been at the meeting came together to produce a pamphlet which was circulated to all General Management Committee delegates in the Brent parties. Entitled *An End to Double Standards* it contained extensive antisemitic quotations from Farrakhan and detailed his links with the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazis. Although recognising racist power relations in society it argued that "banning racist groups [like the Lift the Ban campaign] will clearly demonstrate that Labour unequivocally opposes all

forms of racism and is committed to the future of Brent as a multicultural and multiracial borough". (The pamphlet is available from the address at the foot of this article.)

One unexpected but nonetheless welcome result was the unity that was engendered amongst all Jewish party members. Those of us who had been used for years to being on different sides on the Middle East came together with a will. We found the novelty quite intoxicating!

As for the organised Left in the Labour Party; many including supporters of *London Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Organiser* were supportive. Unfortunately there was one major exception to this; the role played by Socialist Action. A supporter of Socialist Action was present at the original meeting, where she offered support for the campaign, without in any way criticising its antisemitism. As the debate progressed Socialist Action emerged as the main standard bearers for the right of an antisemitic group to use council premises for its meetings. They duly produced their own pamphlet, subtitled 'The Case for Black Self-Organisation'. This starts off by asserting 'We think that the issue involved in this ban is the denial of democratic rights to the whole Labour movement'; for instance attacks on union pension funds. It goes on with 'There is no equals sign between the statements of Farrakhan and the racism of whites which is backed up by all institutions'. Now to assert that no form of oppression is equal to another; that all have specific roots and manifestations and one cannot be assimilated to another is one thing; to construct a hierarchy of oppression is something else entirely.

Socialist Action went on to quote from Manning Marable's *Black American Politics* to the effect that Jewish and Black American voters support the same causes, for instance the Equal Rights Amendment; Affirmative action programmes and nuclear freezes. In fact Marable uses this to support the viability of a "Rainbow Alliance" and goes on to say "Afro-Americans who are socialized to react strongly against racism must recognise that struggles against... antisemitism must be supported vigorously and without qualification". But Socialist Action seek a different moral to quote — "There is common ground between Jewish and Afro-American people. It is the *Zionists* who attempt to break up this alliance." At last. *Cherchez l'infame*.

I don't think supporters of Socialist Action thought they were compromising with antisemitism. "We are anti-Zionist, not antisemitic", said their pamphlet. One supporter said to me at one meeting

"I don't understand why you haven't taken on board the whole issue of Zionism". I answered that I was prepared to discuss the politics of the Middle East and Zionism at any time but that it had no relevance to the right of an antisemitic group to hire council premises. She turned away bemused.

The issues of Black autonomy, racism against Blacks and Jews and Zionism and the Middle East are of course complex. And (as readers of *JS* do not need to be reminded) some in the Jewish community have attempted to 'use the issues of Zionism and the Middle East to turn Jews away from the Left or from antiracist alliances. But to mix them up in the sort of noxious cocktail brewed by Socialist Action can only lead to confusion and alliances at one remove with the likes of the Ku Klux Klan.

While the Left was entangled, the Conservatives and the Liberals had a field day. Some two or three months after the meeting that precipitated events, the local press got wind of the story and printed fairly accurate accounts of the meeting and its consequences. This was picked up by the Tories and Liberals in order to embarrass the Left. A Liberal motion calling for a ban, tabled for discussion at a Council meeting in July was referred to a meeting of the relevant committee. The Labour Group agreed a ban until the issue was decided by the Party. The opposition parties could, and did, ask quite reasonably why it should take so long for the Labour Party to decide whether or not the Lift the Ban campaign was antisemitic.

In due course all three constituency parties voted for the ban as, finally, did the Local Government Committee on October 30th. On November 13th Brent Council agreed not to hire halls to the 'Lift the Ban on Farrakhan Campaign'. If there is one long-term issue which should be thought about it is the attempt by the Right to alienate Jews from sympathy with the politics of antiracism. One way to counteract this is for the Left to be seen to be taking Jewish concerns on board; as an ethnic minority with interests of combining with other ethnic minorities in a common fight against racism and antisemitism. It is to be hoped that a climate in Brent had been created where that can now happen. If the result of the whole episode is greater Black/Jewish unity, and a greater awareness by both of the specific oppressions experienced by the other it will not have been for nothing.

*"An End to Double Standards! Anti-Jewish racism and Farrakhan" can be obtained (price 40p) from Cllr Michael Heiser c/o Members Room, Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middx.* □

LIFT THE BAN ON FARRAKHAN CAMPAIGN

### PUBLIC MEETING

WHY THE BAN ON



MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN

MUST BE LIFTED

- Why was Farrakhan banned?
- Why are so many lies told about him?
- Why do the majority of black people see him differently from white people?
- They banned Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) NOW THEY BAN FARRAKHAN. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!
- Why is it important that black people campaign and get the ban lifted? Come and find out!

SATURDAY, 10th MAY 1986

at 3.30 pm

Willesden Lower School  
POUND LAND, WILLESDEN NW10

Campaign is initiated by All African Peoples Revolutionary Party, Black Unity and Freedom Party, Black Army Black People, African Union, Pan-African Congress Movement



# FASCISM

To understand fascism we tend to rely on post-war sources. And when we look at feminist analyses of society we usually stay this side of 1968. Julia Bard draws on a recently rediscovered feminist analysis of fascism — written in the 1930s — to offer a fresh approach to the threats of the 1980s.

*Swastika Night*, by Katherine Burdekin,  
(Lawrence and Wishart, £3.95)

"It's an unnatural crime to allow something totally different from yourself to impose a pattern of living on you," concludes Alfred, the hero of *Swastika Night*, when at last he is offered evidence for his suspicions about the regime under which he lives.

Set after 700 years of Nazi rule, Katharine Burdekin's novel was one of many written during the 1930s analyzing and warning of what was in store should Hitler not be stopped. There are no Jews in *Swastika Night*, they were wiped out early in the Nazi era. But there are Christians, the remnant of an ancient culture with a clouded consciousness of disconnected bits of their own history. Books, statues, photographs — any records of a pre-Nazi, or, indeed, an early Nazi, past — have been officially destroyed, save one book and a photograph of Hitler.

Katharine Burdekin's plot is the story of how this book came to be written and passed, undetected, down through generations of knights, the highest ranking group. Each generation carried a vision of opposition to the monolithic German Empire, like a secret family curse, until at last it reaches the hands of von Hess, a direct descendant of the book's author, who has no sons. So it passes to Alfred, an English engineer who the knight recognises as a man whose mind will not be confined by the ideology of "the blood", and who believes that truth, not violence, will break the hold of Nazi rule.

But truth can be difficult to face and may even be buried under the privilege and vested interest of the seeker. Alfred and Herman, his young Nazi friend, have opposing reactions when their world view is upturned by the informal group picture of Adolph Hitler and some friends. Short, plump and dark haired is not how the statues have portrayed the first Fuehrer. "He was dressed in uncomely tight trousers like a woman's, instead of the full mascu-

line breeches of all the statues and pictures, and his form was unheroic, even almost unmale." But next to him was another figure who "though immature, had more of the holy German physique than either the Lord Hitler or the two behind. He had great thick long plaits of hair so light that it must have been yellow falling forward over his shoulders and down over his chest, a noble forehead, large blue or light grey eyes, a square jaw and a wide mouth open in a half smile, just showing big white strong teeth."

Much more shocking than Hitler's appearance is the revelation that this was a girl. "A girl," Alfred breathed softly, "A girl as lovely as a boy, with a boy's hair and a boy's noble carriage, and a boy's direct and fearless gaze."

In the world of *Swastika Night* love exists only between men. Women's purpose is reproduction and they live confined in separate compounds their heads shaved, their male children taken from them at 18 months, their backs bent under the burden of believing that they are worthless and at the mercy of men who have a perfect right to rape them.

This is the core of Katharine Burdekin's analysis of Nazism. She believes that it rests on a "cult of masculinity": a male defined, male organised, male dominated system in which the men, though themselves bound by a rigid hierarchy, are always superior to women.

Through the painful creaking into gear of Alfred's intellectual machinery, Burdekin explores how "the reduction of women" could possibly have been brought about — how the ground was prepared and how women acquiesced. She clearly draws on pre-Nazi ideas and early Nazi events like the destruction of the German women's movement in 1933 based on Hitler's statement that "The programme of our National Socialist women's movement contains only one point — and this is the child." Subsequent

political analysts, better known than Burdekin, have lost or discarded this fundamental dimension of fascism.

"The National Socialist movement is in its nature a masculine movement," said Goebbels in 1934. "... While man must give to life the great lines and forms, it is the task of woman, out of her inner fullness and inner eagerness to fill these lines and forms with colour..." What is so shocking about this statement is that it is not shocking at all. It is a very mild expression of a view we find every time we turn on the television or open a newspaper. Also shocking is the fact that most analyses of fascism today fail to see this same truth that a German newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) warned about in 1933 saying: "The Nazis demand the death sentence for abortion. They want to turn you into compliant birth-machines. You are to be servants and maids for men. Your human dignity is to be trampled underfoot."

Indeed, as I read this quote it gives me a jolt to find myself in the unfamiliar position of being directly addressed as a woman in a newspaper article.

Forty years after the concentration camp gates were opened and the remnant of their inmates stumbled into the blinding light of liberation; forty years after the defeat of Hitler, we have our own unpalatable truths to deal with. Forty years on, the treatment of Gypsies in Britain closely resembles that of the Christians in *Swastika Night*. Forty years on, AIDS is used to whip up hatred of homosexuals. Forty years on, the *Daily Mail* "accuses" anti-fascists of being an assortment of homosexuals, students, communists and anarchists, and this serves as sufficient "explanation" of their intentions. Forty years on, where the Jews were wiped out and where Jews continue to live, there are still Nazis and other antisemites.



And now I hesitate before I write because I believe it is urgent and vital that the targets of fascism — women, Jews, Black people, Lesbians, Gay men, Gypsies, socialists, communists, anarchists, students... — must ally with each other if they are to pose a serious challenge to their oppressors. But our opposition must be appropriate, specific and up-to-date in order to be effective, and this means examining our differences as well as our common experiences. We must recognise that our histories, our political situations, our variety of cultural expressions, our oppression and our response to oppression are peculiar to our own group.

In the 1980s, for instance, though antisemitism seems to be emerging once again from under the veneer of good manners, it is still unacceptable for people to openly state that they hate Jews. Though Gay men have been given some protection by liberalisation of the law, there has been a continuous thread of openly expressed hostility. The current AIDS scare has been used to throw into reverse most of the gains they have struggled for and also to catch prostitutes, drug users and other "undesirables" in the net of those who are "unclean" and therefore without moral, political, indeed human, rights. Since the discovery that the disease originated in Africa, Black people have been added to the list, just to add weight to their already overlaid history of oppression. Gypsies have had no let up in the intervening years. They have remained beyond the margins of acceptable political concern and are found on the agendas of local councils, left and right, only as an intractable "problem".

We must find out how this came about: what strategies one group may use to protect itself while another remains

## — a cult of masculinity

vulnerable; why at certain times some groups seem better able to act collectively than others. We have to examine closely how such strategies are undermined by divergent interests within those communities as well as under pressure from outside.

These are difficult issues, both intellectually and emotionally. Forty years is a short time for any community to come to terms with its near extermination and there is now no escaping the fact that such debates are, literally, a matter of life and death.

We must look, for instance, at what effect the foundation of the State of Israel has had not only on the inhabitants of the Middle East, but on diaspora Jews. Has it genuinely given those who survived Hitler protection against fascism in the future, raising their status and self-confidence by offering them a nation state to identify with "like everyone else"? Or is fascism nurtured on the majoritarian society that precedes it leaving us no option but to assimilate if we are not to be targets? If so, does Israel's central place in diaspora Jewish life represent an acceptance of that majoritarianism? Has it, in exchange for temporary status among the capitalist nations, drawn cultural, economic and political resources away from those communities leaving them less able to state their commitment to a pluralist society in which no group's interests override those of any other.

This issue raises such sharp emotions within the Jewish community that even asking these questions is perceived as a serious threat by the communal establishment. Any debate on Zionism has been permitted only within a limited frame of reference defined by that establishment; anyone who publicly takes the discussion beyond those boundaries is scorned, insulted and marginalised rather than argued with. Defend Zionism, they say before we will hear what you say or defend your human rights.

This same debate has also been declared a no-go-area by some elements on the Left who insist on examining the anti-Zionist credentials of any Jew who functions politically as a Jew. Zionism equals racism, they tell us, therefore, denounce Zionism, they say, before we will hear what you say or defend your human rights.

Feminists within the Jewish community and on the Left have faced parallel situations, being pushed to the fringes of one and expected to "assimilate" in the other.

Other threatened groups have their own painful questions to ask, both internally and about their relations with each other. They have their own comparisons to make and their own contradictions to

resolve. Is it in the best interests of Asian feminists, for instance, to go public on their struggle against the specific forms of male domination they face in their communities? Or does such publicity expose the whole community to the racists finding a nice juicy issue like "arranged marriages" to sink their teeth into?

I believe we all have to be brave enough to discuss such concerns openly, taking the risk that the information might be misused. As a woman and a Jew I am deeply aware that danger was never driven off by silence. As a feminist and a socialist I know that though speaking out may not in itself drive off the danger, it forms the basis for action. As Audre Lorde wrote in *The Cancer Journals* (Sheba), "And it is never without fear; of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgement, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now, that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die..." And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognise our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives."

Such exploration of differences between oppressed groups and teasing out of the strands of opposing interests within our own communities is not breaking ranks. It is a prerequisite for effective unity and the basis for a truly liberating political order. At this point many political movements have come adrift. They have been unable to free themselves from an ideological framework and form of language which compels us to create hierarchies and see our differences as competitive. They have also been confined by a Christian ethic of "the meek shall inherit the earth", which seems to make the oppressed morally superior and beyond political criticism.

We must discard this ideological flotsam and jetsam, not because we don't like it, but because it is dangerous not to.

In *Swastika Night* the men have done a deal: they have accepted the rigid Nazi hierarchy in exchange for their privilege over women. The Christians have also done a deal but they believe they are paying a high price. According to their religion, their poverty-stricken lives as outcasts are a punishment for the centuries during which they persecuted the Jews. Here Burdekin is not stating a moral case but a political one: that our collusion in the oppression of others does not enshrine our power, but isolates us, making our own future a very shaky one. □



# Uprooting in Zion

**'For Palestinian Arabs it's more than their livelihood which is uprooted when their olive trees make way for a Jewish National Fund Tree. Zeev Templer and Nuri El-Okbi examine the consequences of "Helping Israel Grow".'**

The next time you're asked by the Jewish National Fund to plant a tree in Israel on *Tu B'shvat*, (new year of the trees) bear in mind that a "Jewish" tree is involved, its planting integral to the agropolitics of "redeeming" the land. Palestinian-Arab trees, of course, are another story entirely. Like their planters and owners, they remain subject in Zion to the harsh and often arbitrary discriminatory policies of the Israel Lands Administration and the strong-arm tactics of the Ministry of Agriculture's "Green Patrol".

The uprooting and forcible confiscation of Arab-owned trees — and, in many cases, their replanting on Jewish soil — is a little-known dimension of Zionist land-control policy that is apparently on the increase in line with a new get-even-tougher approach by the authorities. Under the pretext that the orchards in question are planted on "state land", (ie land meant solely and exclusively for use and cultivation by Jewish citizens) thousands of Arab-owned trees, generally olive trees many generations old, have been uprooted and confiscated this year in a series of blitz actions by the Israel Lands Administration (ILA) and the Green Patrol, both within the Occupied Territories and the "Green Line".

In a surprise operation on Feb. 4th, 1986 ILA workers uprooted a large orchard of olive trees on land north of Beersheba belonging to Salman Al-Bahari of the Negev Beduin tribe Alhozael, causing an estimated \$80,000 damage. The ILA claims this land is "army property" although the property (some 1260 dunams) has been handed down from father to son for generations.

Several weeks earlier, the Green Patrol uprooted and seized some 2,000 olive trees on lands belonging to the West Bank village of Katanna, a few miles north-west of Jerusalem. It was later learned that 16 of these trees had been replanted *davke*\* on Martin Luther King Street in Jerusalem, adjacent to Jerusalem's Liberty Bell Garden. This sparked a joint Arab-Jewish protest demo in the city. On *Tu B'shvat*

on January 25th, activists from several groups participated in an Arab-Jewish tree planting ceremony in Katanna, but these 500 saplings were uprooted by the Green Patrol shortly afterwards.

The most recent tree-uprooting action, as I write, occurred on lands belonging to the West Bank village of Al-Midiya, located near the "Green Line" demarcation east of Lod. In the wake of the 1949 armistice agreement, this village found itself cut off from much of its ancestral land, acreage which was subsequently expropriated by the State of Israel for Jewish cultivation. Now the ILA claims that a significant portion of Al-Midiya orchard land in the "no-man's land" just beyond the Green Line is, "Israeli state land", even though this acreage is dutifully registered in the *tabu* (land ownership) files.

What follows below is the translation of a first-hand report by Progressive List for Peace Bedouin activist Nuri El-Okbi published in Hebrew in the July/1986 issue of ALTERNATIVA, the Progressive List for Peace (PLP) monthly. Since its writing, lawyers representing the villagers have obtained a temporary injunction from the High Court on any further uprooting of trees in Al-Midiya. The over 3,300 uprooted trees are the sole source of livelihood of a number of families in the village; many of the olive trees are several generations old (although the ILA claims the trees were all planted "within the past five years". . .), and the average value of each tree has been independently appraised at approximately \$2,000.

## WHAT HAS BEEN PLANTED — DO NOT UPROOT. . .

The operation of the uprooting of 3,300 olive trees of the village of Al-Midiya was a military action in every respect: in the early morning hours of June 19th, army units, members of the Border Guard and the Green Patrol, along with workers of the Israel Lands Administration, descended on the village. The village was placed under curfew, soldiers and Border Guard

forces fired warning shots from their automatic weapons into the air, and turned the area of the village into a battlefield.

Workers brought to the village proceeded to saw off the branches of the olive trees belonging to the inhabitants. After this, bulldozers uprooted the remaining stumps of trees many generations and even hundreds of years old; which were located within the courtyards of villagers' houses. Olive trees constitute the sole source of livelihood of many of the villagers.

Incidentally, the inhabitants of Al-Midiya already lost most of their lands back in 1948 when the armistice line cut them off from their fields, which remained in no-man's land. Now the state authorities have destroyed what was left over, claiming that the trees were planted on "state land" some five years ago. This claim, of course, is without any foundation whatsoever.

I got to the village and tried to stop the uprooting of the trees. I saw one of the tractors approach a tree, its hydraulic scoop lowered for action. I placed myself between the tractor and the tree. The tractor halted. An officer from the Border Guard ran over to me grabbed me and pulled me away from the tree. Another officer on the spot informed me I was under arrest, since I had entered a "closed army area."

I was interrogated in Ramalla. Members of the Border Guard charged there that I had thrown stones at workers carrying out the operation of uprooting, and that I had incited villagers from Al-Midiya against the security forces. That evening I was taken to jail in the "Russian Field" area of Jerusalem.

I was under arrest for 96 hours, placed in a cell together with 20 "security" prisoners. I was not questioned once during the entire time I was in jail. I asked one of the officers on duty there why I was under arrest and what was the charge. His reply: "Be thankful that I wasn't around when you were arrested. If I'd

been there, I would have shot you!"

On June 29th, I stood together with villagers from Al-Midiya in a protest demonstration opposite the offices of the Prime Minister in Jerusalem. We had brought along with us a number of stumps of ancient olive trees that had been uprooted in the village. The police accused me of "placing tree stumps in a public place". . .

The uprooting of trees in the village of Al-Midiya was an illegal action. In addition to economic damage, an action like this also causes other serious harm. Such a traumatic event will not be forgotten.

Operations of this kind must be halted completely. Those who organized and carried out the operation should be brought to justice and punished in accordance with the full severity of the law. Full compensation must be paid to the villagers of Al-Midiya affected by the uprooting.

Nuri has also learned that some of the trees confiscated in Al-Midiya have been replanted in the Herzl Forest.

What is to be done? Activists abroad should attempt to gather full factual information on the oppressive and reprehensible policies of the ILA and join Israeli progressives in calling for a public investigation of the Green Patrol and its disbandment. The Green Patrol's speciality, when not destroying Arab orchards and crops, is the harassment of Beduin shepherds and the confiscation of their sheep and goats. Greater efforts should be made by Jewish activists in Britain and Eire to confront the national chauvinism and hypocrisy of the Jewish National Fund, which serves as a silent partner to these abominations and a recipient of confiscated trees.

Such political consciousness-raising and agitation should be placed within the broader framework of a demand for equity for *all* citizens in Israel and an end to all laws, institutions and practices which grant special privileges to one ethnoreligious segment of the population.

There is in Palestinian society a value called *sumud*, a powerful attachment to the soil, a proud and stubborn steadfastness in clinging to the land. It is *sumud* which remains the lifeblood of the Palestinian resistance by simple villagers to oppression and expropriation in Al-Midiya and elsewhere. And it is *sumud*, that resolute Palestinian determination not to be uprooted and denied as a people, which Israeli Jews must recognize and affirm in the difficult dialectic of transforming extant realities and forging a genuine, radically democratized basis, both in national and class terms, for a coexistent future in and on this land. □

\* *davke* — "Thank God we've got Israel!"

# When is a racist an anti-racist ?



**Haim Hanegbi assesses the efficacy of the Knesset's attempts to outlaw racism from Israeli society**

The draft bill for a law against incitement to racism is the most talked-about draft bill to reach the Knesset in recent years. There are many, (and among them some quite well-intentioned individuals), who mistakenly think that if this bill is passed by the Knesset and enacted as law, it will make a decisive contribution toward rooting out racism and cleansing the Israeli social fabric. The truth, however, is another matter. If this draft bill becomes law, racism will not vanish from the State of Israel. Racist institutions and organizations, as well as racist laws, regulations and procedures, will remain unaffected. Discrimination will continue as in the past.

The law may perhaps serve to restrict Kahane's latitude of operation. Just maybe. There is no certainty that this will in fact take place. But what can be stated without the slightest doubt is that the law will function to provide a democratic cloak to cover over the racist policies which are indeed actual common practice in Israel; it will function to clothe ugly deeds and practices in a speciously attractive mantle.

Attala Mansur, a journalist with the paper *Haaretz*, published a "List of Discriminatory Practices" on May 25th of this year. In his words: "First and foremost, there is *national discrimination*, based on the activities and actions of the Jewish Agency, the Jewish Foundation Fund, the Jewish National Fund and the Histadrut — the bodies which provide services and funding only to Jews. Their budgets are channelled to provide support to settlements and to individual citizens. But land and financial aid to settlements, provision of special privileges and production quotas — all these are granted solely and exclusively to Jewish citizens. A substantial portion of such monies is

derived from tax revenues collected from all citizens in the state, including Arab citizens. Another portion of these funds comes from foreign aid designated for the State of Israel and all its citizens — not just Jews. There are monies derived in part from contributions by Jewish communities outside Israel, but there are also funds that flow directly from the national treasury. What stands out most among these budgetary funds is the budget allocation for Project Urban Renewal — that project is aimed at urban renewal exclusively in Jewish neighbourhoods, and sidesteps the matter of Arab neighbourhoods. . ."

The List of Discriminatory Practices is lengthy:

1. *Special Child Allowances for Army Veterans from the National Insurance Institute (Bituach Leumi)*: this practice involves discrimination against Arab children under the pretext that their father has not served in the Israeli armed forces. The explicit anti-Arab character of these special army-vet child allowances is reflected in the fact that the National Insurance Institute finds ways and means to get around this regulation in the case of Jewish families where the father has not served in the armed forces: one such example is the situation of students in Talmudic academies who are fathers — their military deferment is indeed generally tantamount to full and complete exemption from the military.

2. *Housing for Young Couples*: a young Arab couple is denied the opportunity to receive a mortgage from the Ministry of Housing for quarters in a development town near to their own village, even if in many instances it was that very same Arab young man — he and his friends — who in fact built the buildings in that development town with his own hands



and effort. And he can see all those empty apartments, waiting and ready, but earmarked solely for Jews.

3. *Budgets of Local Councils*: Jewish local councils receive more and Arab local councils receive less. The government authorities admit that this gap exists. In the words of Mansur: "The gap between the most developed Arab village and the most neglected Jewish settlement is still a long way from being closed. . ." The Arab settlements also suffer from discrimination in respect to basic services: educational facilities have deteriorated to the point of near collapse. Medical clinics — both of the Ministry of Health and the General Sick Fund — are in a state of neglect, and the sanitary facilities remain at a wretched level in comparison to parallel services in Jewish settlements.

4. *Agriculture*: The Agricultural Centre — which is the principal organization of agriculturalists in Israel — does not include Arab agriculturalists within the scope of its services. This institution practises total apartheid. The decisions taken by this body — such as agreements reached with government ministries in general and the Ministry of Agriculture in particular — are, of course, binding on Arab agriculturalists as well. The upshot is that Arab farmers are discriminated against in respect to budgetary funding, water and production quotas vis-à-vis Jewish farmers. Such is the case even in regard to the types of vegetables and fruits which Arab farmers are permitted to cultivate.

5. *Industry*: the map of development areas and of investment policy is fashioned in such a way so as to include only Jewish areas in its purview. Arab settlements are beyond the pale of development. As Mansur writes: "Here and there an Arab has been granted permission to set up an industrial plant under conditions obtaining for a designated development area, but there is not a single Arab settlement within the State of Israel which is classified as a development area. . ."

Indeed, the list is long: a prohibition on meetings between Jewish and Arab youth, with backing from senior officials in the Ministry of Education and the open encouragement of the rabbis; a prohibition on selling land to Arabs despite the fact that Arab citizens have fallen victim to — and are still being victimized by — the policy of land expropriation for the purpose of "Judaization"; discrimination within the educational system; discriminatory practices in the hiring of Arab workers for many jobs, and a total ban on employing Arab workers for certain other kinds of employment; racist incitement in the media and statements by so-called respected politicians — (not

Meir Kahane!) on the need to expel the Arabs. . .

Here are a few recent examples

Several months ago the Financial Committee of the Knesset decided to grant tax concessions to settlements along the northern border. On the surface, these concessions were ostensibly granted in line with a criterion based on geographic and

from this geographical area so designated (villages of Fassuta, Jish and Tarshicha).

On May 11th of this year, the government made a number of decisions which were labelled by the Center for Demography (associated with the Ministry of Labor and Welfare) as being "significant decisions". The matter involved: the so-called *demographic problem*. The text of the decisions stated that "the government has decided to pursue a broad demographic policy adapted to long-term needs, which will, among other things, attempt to ensure a proper level of growth of the Jewish population. . ." The government went on to decide to harness suitable government ministries for purposes of this task (Health, Education, Labour and Welfare, etc.). i.e., it is the government, and not some private organization or institution, which here declares — loudly and for all to hear — that Jewish citizens should be placed at an advantage vis-à-vis Arab citizens; that efforts should be made to encourage the growth and strengthening of Jewish families; that Jewish families should be encouraged to increase their number of children; that efforts should be made to prevent abortions within the Jewish sector of the population. And so on.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the draft bill against incitement to racism is designed to improve Israel's image without changing its true nature one iota.

*Haim Hanegib is a key figure in the Progressive List for Peace and Secretary of its Knesset faction. This article first appeared in the June/1986 issue of ALTERNATIVA, the new Hebrew-language monthly of the Progressive List, and has been translated into English by Zeev Templer for publication here. A recent pamphlet of MATZPEN/Tel Aviv, entitled "Arabs, Jews and Racists", which explores the question of institutional discrimination against non-Jews in Israel in greater detail, should soon be available in English translation.*

Translator's postscript: After a closing last-hour-before-summer-recess debate, the Knesset finally voted the anti-racism bill into law on August 6th: its ratification in a dangerously diluted form is a step that many observers believe may actually serve to legitimize racist incitement that makes use of religious texts, since such texts — and statements based on them — are specifically excluded from the purview of the law. In an August 7th editorial, the liberal Zionist *Jerusalem Post* expressed its dismay: "If the Knesset had actually intended to promote racism by seeming to ban incitement to it, it could not have done better. For what it has legislated is the grant of a kashrut certificate to all racists who put a religious label on their wares." Even Meir Kahane, sensing the inherent contradiction in the bill and the dialectical irony of the moment, vote in favour of the legislation. All of which is proof that a state apparatus and ideology predicated on ethno-religious exclusivism and institutionalised racism cannot be expected to pass laws which might function as the tools of its own abrogation and demise. □

## Israel and South Africa: Zionism and Apartheid

Pamphlet with the texts of speeches to a seminar on 11th October by Solly Smith (Chief ANC representative), Faisal Aoudha (PLO representative), Jane Hunter (Editor of *Israeli Foreign Affairs*) and David Watkins (Director of CAABU) plus an appendix outlining the history of Israel's relationship with South Africa.

(32 pages)

Available for £1 (including postage) from: Council for the Advancement of Arab British Understanding, 21 Collingham Road, London SW5 0NU.

## LETTERS

### NO SHORT CUTS TO SOCIALISM

Michael Safier's article, "Which Way to Socialism?" (*Jewish Socialist* 6/7) claiming to map out a new course for the British Left, was remarkable only for its lack of originality. Lurking behind the phrase "actually achievable socialism" was the same old rag-bag of ideas which, in slightly altered form, are put forward by Peter Hain's Labour Co-ordinating Committee and the Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party. The main thrust of Safier's argument seems to be that we should find new methods of struggle and that we should focus more strongly on "the community".

Presumably he has in mind the GLC and the example of other local councils. While the experiences of the GLC and Liverpool did show greater imagination and arguably, a "broadening of alliances", the lesson was equally clear. The GLC, along with four other metropolitan councils, was abolished, while local councils either backed down in the face of a central government onslaught or had their councillors surcharged.

Michael Safier's search for a "third path" is illusory. If the working class and oppressed groups are too weak to confront the State and the ruling class, then it is no good looking for short cuts. We cannot pretend that "community groups" or local councils can do the task for us; nor should we harbour illusions that socialism is "actually achievable" within the framework of a capitalist state!

Tim Barnes-Gutteridge  
Manchester

## FACING UP TO ANTISEMITISM:

### How Jews in Britain countered the threats of the 1930s

by David Rosenberg

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### BEBEL, BABEL OR THE BABBLE OF BABEL

Concerning Martin Lachs' use of the phrase "socialism of fools" (*Jewish Socialist* 6/7), which he attributes to one "Isaac Bebel". I expect the person whom Martin had in mind would have been the German workers' leader and socialist Auguste Bebel, who *did* use the phrase. Not to be confused with the Russian Jewish writer and Red Army man, Isaac Babel, though as a good communist the latter would I'm sure have agreed with Bebel.

What either of these admirable comrades had to say on Zionism, perhaps some better scholar than me can tell us; and what they would make of today's "campus wars" we can only speculate. However, both Bebel and Babel were definitely advocates of, and active participants in, the "class revolution" which Martin Lachs appears to view with distaste.

Bebel used the expression "socialism of fools" with regard to demagogues who sought to replace class struggle with unity of the "folk" and to divert spontaneous anti-capitalist feeling into the archaic channel of Jew-hatred. In using the phrase "socialism of fools" or "idiot socialism", he was not merely accusing opponents of lack of intelligence. . .

With its connotations of "rural ideology", Bebel's phrase was a warning to socialists against any concessions to an essentially reactionary demagoguery. He urged that the "socialism of fools" be combatted by the real thing.

Not being personally acquainted with the campus tussles on which Martin writes, I can't judge whether the phrase he invokes can justly be applied to those he criticises. In the "real world" of class struggle outside, workers have to unite, whether black, women, Jews, gays or whatever. The need to reinforce that unity, requires us also to be alive and sensitive to all the specific forms of oppression suffered by particular groups of people, and solidarise with them in struggle.

There may be socialists, of a sort, whose "economism" blinds them to this duty. But to judge from some experiences in recent years (the "Spare Rib debate" and Farrakhan rows spring to mind) there is another danger: that when the perspective of "class revolution" is replaced by a babble of self-centred groups each asserting only its own oppression, competing to be heard even, we erect not a movement, but a Tower of Babel, without communication, let alone unity.

Charles Pottins  
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### MY NATURAL LANGUAGE

I was delighted that you published my first fiction piece (*Jewish Socialist* 6/7), but less happy that you put the Yiddish words in italics and wrote explanations of them (without consulting me). I include Yiddish expressions in my writing as a natural part of my language. To put them in italics brands them as foreign or exotic — the very stereotypes I resist. Once you put Yiddish words in italics, why not other turns of phrase which, although in English, are considered "Jewish" idiom? Why not then the whole piece (indeed the whole magazine)?

You obviously want to make *Jewish Socialist* accessible to all its readers, not all of whom are Jewish or Jews from a Yiddish background, but I am not convinced that adding a glossary like this reduces alienation: it highlights a "them and us" situation — some readers understand the references, some don't; looking to the end spoils the reading flow, especially with fiction; while your explanations were generally less comprehensive than mine.

I want to write clearly and accessibly, particularly when communicating with people who don't share my experience. Thus I try to explain Yiddish expressions *within the text*. Where I fail, I want to know, but I dislike having the context of my writing needlessly altered.

As a feminist and writer, one of my preoccupations is how women who don't speak/think in standard English are systematically excluded from "literature" because we cannot write as we speak. A Scotswoman explained this as the reason she makes rousing speeches but hates writing the shortest letter. I have written competent non-fiction for years, but fiction is closer to my soul, more inextricably connected with my Jewish self, and so the language that comes is my spoken language, or, as in this story, my childhood language. I'd welcome more discussion with other readers.

*Yours for more feminism, debate and fiction,*  
Sharon Rose  
London N16



# ANTISEMITISM on the home front

While Britain went to war against the Nazis,  
antisemitism was alive and well on the  
home front, says David Rosenberg.

In recent years historians have begun to examine British attitudes to Europe's Jews during their destruction in the Holocaust. They have found that the British establishment, at best, was sublimely aloof. They refused to believe what they were told about the fate of Jews under the Nazis and did not make the rescue of Jews a war priority. In their eyes it was primarily a war against German militarism and their ritual condemnation of antisemitism and fascism lacked any substantial content. But if that was the view of the political and military establishment, what then were the attitudes to Jews here at a more popular level?

The 1930s had seen the rise and fall of Mosley's antisemitic British Union of Fascists (BUF). Working class Jews and non-Jews had united in the forefront of anti-fascist opposition which peaked with the Battle of Cable Street. But the decline of the BUF as a political force did not necessarily herald the decline of antisemitism. Indeed, much of the antisemitism they propagated became increasingly crystallised in their decline. Popular authors such as Douglas Reed, for whom antisemitism was a "commonsense" attitude, were reprinted again and again, while the immigration of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany was openly and widely resented.

As war loomed, the popularity of the fascists rose once more. "Shall the Jews drag Britain to war?" asked the BUF organ, the *Blackshirt*. They later popularised the slogan: "We will not fight in a Jewish quarrel", and organised huge "peace" rallies at the Albert Hall. In 1940 the BUF were declared illegal and their leaders interned under Defence Regulation 18b. But by the middle of the war, many of their cadres were once again active and circulating their propaganda with impunity.

One of the leading organisations of counter propaganda was the National Council for Civil Liberties, formed in 1934. It played a major role in popular-

ising the fight against antisemitism and fascism in the mid-1930s, working closely with the Jewish People's Council in raising public awareness of the threat posed by fascism to the civil liberties of all. During the war the NCCL was at the forefront of public activity against the antisemites in Britain.

In 1941 they produced a pocket handbook for mass circulation entitled *Fight Against Antisemitism - what you can do*. It urged people to deal on the spot with antisemitic talk - to answer with reason and factual information; to counter rumours and try to trace their origins since whispering campaigns could have far-reaching effects; and to make people aware at all levels by distributing literature, writing to your MP, reporting all wall slogans and answering all antisemitic press articles and advertisements. It urged people to educate themselves about the nature, motives and consequences of antisemitism.

In December 1942 the NCCL appealed to people to protest against the Nazi extermination of the Jews in Europe. In February 1943, 1200 people attended a public meeting against antisemitism in Manchester organised by the NCCL and the Kersal Jewish Discussion Circle. The speakers included P Oliver, President of the local NCCL branch, Reverend Wright of the district Free Church Council, W Mann, Secretary of the Manchester Trades Council, P Dean from the Communist Party and a Rabbi K Rosen.

The NCCL's Annual General Meeting of March 1943 called upon the Government to legislate "against individuals and organisations disseminating anti-semitic and fascist propaganda" and to "open the doors to Jews whose systematic extermination is being carried out". A month later 443 delegates from 273 organisations held a conference to hammer out plans for a national campaign against antisemitism and fascism. There were representatives from the national and local trade unions and political organ-

isations (mainly Labour and Communist Party branches), trades councils, co-op societies and religious organisations. Jews were represented through the Workers' Circle, the British section of the World Jewish Congress, and the "New Zionist Organisation". The conference welcomed messages of support from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi.

This gathering called for a public enquiry into the form, content and source of anti-Jewish campaigns; a deputation to the Home Secretary urging legislation against fascism and antisemitism; a deputation to the Minister of Information urging propaganda against antisemitism; prompt action by the Government to rescue Jews on the Continent; and organised activity and propaganda through publications and public meetings and campaign posters for display in factories, churches, co-op stores and public buildings.

At the heart of the propaganda campaign was the NCCL's 32 page pamphlet, *It Shall Not Happen Here - antisemitism, fascists and civil liberty*. It illustrated and analysed the nature and appeal of antisemitism in wartime Britain and urged action to counter it. In its introduction Elizabeth Allen, General Secretary of the NCCL, wrote: "Why should we be concerned about fascism in this country when we are fighting them abroad and when the BUF... was made illegal in 1940 and its leaders were interned? Will not military victory deliver us once and for all from the fascist enemy both at home and abroad?"

The pamphlet argued that people were becoming physically tired of the war, and while suffering deprivation such as food shortages, were becoming easy prey for scapegoating ideologies. In this respect, rumours, whispering campaigns and wall slogans were likely to be especially effective.

Word went round that the shelter disaster in early 1943 in which 143 people were killed and hundreds injured was "caused by a Jewish panic". Small

shopkeepers were told that small shops would be abolished after the war to be replaced by Jewish combines. Rumours spread that Jews were buying up homes and land and in particular that Jewish doctors were settling and practising in areas where non-Jewish doctors, serving in the forces, had previously been. Wall slogans declared: "Smash Jews' Shops", "Smash the Jewish press and peace is yours", "Stop the Jews' War", and "PJ" (Perish Judah). Meanwhile leaflets circulated saying: "JEWS They plan it, make it, finance it, and you fight it WAR".

The NCCL's pamphlet argued for an educational campaign to combat ignorance which they saw as being at the root of much antisemitic propaganda. "Those who are at present innocently passing on antisemitic propaganda must be shown the results of their actions... Professional and middle-class people must learn that they are particularly vulnerable to antisemitic and fascist propaganda... their prototypes in Italy and Germany lost their civil liberties and lived to regret their failure to defend democracy... At the end of the war social conditions will be uncertain and unemployment may be heavy for some time. Such circumstances will demand from us increased vigilance and united action to defeat the fascist propaganda which will undoubtedly seek to prove that the Jews are responsible."

Little has been written about popular antisemitism in wartime Britain and it should be looked into more deeply. It will show the actual extent of British anti-fascism during a purportedly anti-fascist war and the widespread nature of antisemitism here some years after Mosley and his troops had lost the Battle of Cable Street. □

## THE JEWISH WORKERS' BUND

by Clive Gilbert

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## I AM A JEW

I am a jew because my mother and father said I was a jew  
I am a jew because you tell me I look it  
I am a jew because when you ask me if I am a jew I say yes  
I am a jew because you tell me that I ought to try and become more like you  
I am a jew because my great-great-great grandfather was forced to buy our name  
I am a jew because I don't believe in god  
I am a jew because my mother told me about standing in Cable Street in 1936 so that Oswald Mosley wouldn't be able to get through  
I am a jew because my father told me that his grandfather told him that if you take one match you can break it but if you take a whole boxful of matches you can't break them - that's a union  
I am a jew because when I went to see my buba she used to say "Tottala come to buba,"  
I am a jew because my mother told me that she left the zionists when she was a young woman and joined the young communists because they were the ones who were fighting fascism  
I am a jew because you say that Woody Allen is one of my lot but I shouldn't say Woody Allen is one of my lot.  
I am a jew because you tell me that no one's against the jews now  
I am a jew because my grandparents were brought here by their parents when they ran away from Poland and Russia  
I am a jew because I haven't read the diary of Anne Frank  
I am a jew because you tell me it's easy for jews now because jews have done OK  
I am a jew because you tell me there is something called a world-wide zionist conspiracy  
I am a jew because you tell me jews are rich, jews want to run the world, jews do run the world, jews are communists, jews are mean with their money, jews only care for their own, jews have big noses, jews are greasy, you never see a poor jew, you can never trust a jew, the jews bring all their troubles on themselves by trying to be different, jews went to the camps without a fight, jews make too much fuss about the camps  
I am a jew because you tell me that we killed your god  
I am a jew because I know that the palestinians have the right to their homeland  
I am a jew because you've said since 1905, no more jews here  
I am a jew because everywhere said, no more jews here  
I am a jew because you tell me that Israel is the jews' fault  
I am a jew because you tell me that jews are safe when I know that I am as safe as the Kaiser's tailor  
I am a jew because I like the one about Hymie and the pope and the one about rabinowitz and the golf club.  
I am a jew because I can't stand all kinds of people-hating  
I am a jew because I know that there is no such thing as the jewish race, the white race, the black race, english race, my race or your race.  
I am a jew because even if I say I am not a jew you will tell me that I am  
I am a jew because you tell that there are too many jews in high places  
I am a jew because I am looking forward to the time when there will be no high places.

MICHAEL ROSEN



## Daughters of the Pale

Drienne Wallman reviews an exhibition on the lives and experiences of Jewish women.

The Jewish Women in London Project was set up in 1984 to record the experiences of Jewish women in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Interviews have been carried out with women of widely different backgrounds, all immigrants themselves or the daughters of immigrants. The project has prepared a tape/slide programme in which three women, one born in India, one born in Vienna, and one born in the East End, talk about their lives. They also have an exhibition which was recently shown at Swiss Cottage library in North London.

The exhibition looks at Jewish life, through the eyes and voices of individual women, from the mass emigration from Eastern Europe in the 1880s up until the 1930s and 40s when a new set of refugees were fleeing from Nazi persecution.



Women worked just as hard as men, often harder. Even in the *shtetl* they worked to support their families and the point is made that because of their economic role they lived less confined lives. In this country the immigrants' children were sent to schools which immediately set about teaching them English ways; in particular, they must speak, think and even dream in English. It was very hard when your family at home spoke Yiddish. It was also particularly difficult for girls; Rose describes how she was the only daughter and as her mother was in poor health she was "made to drudge". The Jewish attitude was that the boys weren't asked to do a thing. I had to clean the brasses every Friday. How I hated the smell of Brasso! My mother was so ill that I had to clean the floor when I was six.

Girls were expected to marry — but they were taught nothing about sex. Although a few of the more radical ones did manage to break away, and Ruth describes being unusual in getting contraceptives before she was married. Between school and marriage young Jewish women took jobs in the tailoring industry — where

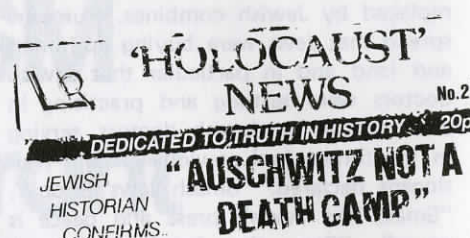
they outnumbered men but were usually confined to unskilled, low paid jobs: "women did the finishing, button-holing, and the handwork; men did the machining" — and they also worked as dress-makers and milliners. But they didn't just accept their lot unquestioning. Rose Kerrigan from Glasgow was active in the union and encouraged her co-workers to fight for better wages and conditions. In the 20s and 30s women began to branch out into other jobs such as office work, and some left the comfort of the East End.

The women represented in this exhibition were also active politically. Rose attended a socialist Sunday school in Glasgow; Ruth was a member of the Workers' Circle, a group of Bundists, Socialist Zionists, Communists, Anarchists and others, and later of the Communist Party; and Helen was a founder member and secretary of the Jewish Peoples' Council which was formed in the 1930s to fight antisemitism and fascism in the East End. She describes how her parents advised her not to get involved and "everything we did we did behind their backs". Moseley and the British Union of Fascists were never discussed at home.

Also described are the struggles of actually getting to Britain in the first place with husbands travelling ahead to find work and their wives coming on later with the children and facing the perils of the border crossings; and the problems of single women who risked being taken away into the white slave trade when they arrived at the docks unless rescued by Jewish agencies set up for the purpose. And there are sections on religious observance which was central to Jewish life at the time. Women's sphere was the home, although some did study Yiddish texts.

The exhibition shows how women's lives were constrained, but how at the same time many women refused to accept these constraints. I don't expect these women would have called themselves feminists, but they were preparing the way for future generations of women, Jewish and non-Jewish, who are now taking an independent place in society.

I suppose, for me, the story is not new, but it's refreshing to see it told through the experiences of women. This particular exhibition is very much the story of East European Jewry. It would be good to see a parallel exhibition about the lives of Jewish women from other communities. □



*The Holocaust Denial/Anti-semitism, Racism and the New Right* by Gill Seidel, Beyond the Pale Collective, £4.95. Distributed by Turnaround, 27 Horsell Rd, London N5.

A young nurse overhears our conversation and asks brightly, "What's Auschwitz?"

A keen Sixth former enthusiastically describes to me a day school her history class attended in Oxford, "where we debated whether or not the Holocaust was a Zionist invention."

A neighbour informs me with quiet authority that *The Diary of Anne Frank* is a forgery.

If these anecdotes are at all representative, there seems to have been a sea change in popular conceptions about the fate of European Jewry under the Third Reich. If such a change has indeed occurred, is it simply the result of the passage of years? After all, as a wise old friend in his eighties once reminded me, "Every generation needs to learn its history all over again." History which we have not ourselves directly experienced can seem, no matter how horrific, dry, distant and detached from our immediate concerns.

Gill Seidel's book, *The Holocaust Denial*, has a different explanation for this shift in popular consciousness. She contends that there has been a concerted and cynical attempt to erase the death of 70% of Europe's Jews from the history books. Such "revisionism", Seidel writes, is central to an over-all Neo-Nazi strategy to rehabilitate Hitler. It coincides not only with a general resurgence of the anti-egalitarian Right, but also dovetails with the more dubious reaches of left-wing antisemitism.

These are weighty charges. Can Seidel sustain them?

After an interesting, but journalistic, preface by the radical Jewish collective who published her book, and an introduction of similar type by Michael Billig, Seidel begins to build her case.

The beginning of the book deals with current interpretations of the Holocaust and includes some useful etymologies of the terms "genocide" and "holocaust". After stressing the singular nature of the destruction of European Jewry under Hitler, Seidel contends that recent historical interpretations of Nazi Germany, along with such recent memorial rituals as the one at Bitburg, "contribute to an antisemitic discourse."

Seidel then seeks to establish "the

facts" of the Holocaust in a chapter which, like the book as a whole, is mad-deningly uneven in its intellectual rigour. There are very moving passages in which she vividly conveys the wide-ranging complexity of the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policy. But it is unclear to what audience these arguments are addressed. Jewish readers over 40 need no convincing of the annihilative intentions of the National Socialists, so presumably the book is aimed at those less sceptical of "revisionist" history. If so, surely Seidel should discuss and cite more primary sources than she does. More debatably, it might also be argued that such primary research is especially important since so many of the secondary sources on which she heavily relies are by Jewish authors. For it is a measure of the insidiousness of "the Holocaust denial", that Jewish scholars could be discounted by the second category of reader on the grounds that they are Jews (ie "they would say that wouldn't they?"). In any case, more primary research and a more critical attitude to the authorities cited in Chapter two would have strengthened the argument.

The strongest part of the book is the central section which focuses on the International Neo-Nazi network and its relation to the New Right and on the exponents of the Holocaust denial in the USA, France and Britain.

One of Seidel's main achievements is to collate existing specialist literature on the activities of present day fascist and Nazi groups and to point to the connections between them and the emerging authoritarian right. She performs a particularly invaluable service in showing the overlapping personnel which link Neo-Nazis across Europe and America with more respectable right wing groups. She also explores the implications of the ideology of the New Right (which incidentally, includes a right wing version of Gramscian theory) saying, "It is my contention that this shift to the right has regenerated a configuration of authoritarian meanings with very particular implications for national minorities ('ethnic' minorities) and gender roles; these impinge on a wide range of policies, including education and social policy. They constitute a discourse of inequality." The New Right's development of a "discourse of inequality" dovetails neatly into (and in certain instances

# EXTERMINATING HISTORY

directly derives from) older right wing writers of a nakedly fascist and antisemitic tradition.

Her discussion of French antisemitism and "the Faurisson affair" is particularly illuminating. Here she demonstrates the link between Faurisson's supposedly "objective" questioning of the Holocaust (in a book prefaced by the respected libertarian, Noam Chomsky) to those polemicists who trace their pedigree straight back to the anti-Dreyfusards of the virulently anti-Jewish Action Francaise.

Similarly, her discussion of the "soft" British version of the Holocaust denial as posited by the popular historian, David Irving, is penetrating and considered. Chillingly fascinating, too, is her examination of the links between Germany's old and new right, though here the evidence is more uneven.

Seidel also deals with that old forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which claimed in 1920 to be proof of an international Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. The *Protocols* (originally published in England by the same firm who issued the Book of Common Prayer) is still going strong. Unsettlingly, Seidel tells us of links between Saudi Arabia and American Fascist groups who still publish the *Protocols*.

These are all important issues and Seidel is to be congratulated for having the courage and stomach to tackle them. But there are problems with both the tone and content of the book. For a start, her best chapters (3-6) are also the most densely written and the reader is easily lost in a forest of small inter-locking fascist and right wing groups and institutions. This is not a nice place to be lost in at the best of times, and Seidel could have easily signposted the way with a few flow charts. She also leaves a number of intriguing contradictions unaddressed. For example, in her discussion of the American New Right, she does not really explore why Jewish neo-conservatives have seen fit to be bedfellows with the patently racist and antisemitic members of the red-neck Right.

More seriously, her contention that "The equation of Jews with Zionist is not just a facile and misleading formula but part of a well planned Neo-Nazi strategy..." It is not only Neo-Nazis, but a large proportion of ordinary people, both Jews and non-Jews who equate Jews

with Zionists. We have to ask how this has happened and whose interests it serves. In addition whilst Seidel acknowledges the abuse of Palestinian rights by successive Israeli governments, she seems loath to confront the underlying problems which the definition of Israeli citizenship, especially the Law of Return, for example, poses in terms of the Israeli State making a law on behalf of all Jews.

Perhaps it is the tone of the book which is its most serious flaw. It is impossible to be "objective" — more especially so about people who want to annihilate you, but sometimes the emotive language Seidel uses to describe the exponents of the Holocaust denial undermine the credibility of her arguments. Finally, whilst Seidel is careful to state that she is not a conspiracy theorist, and even admits that some of the links between various Neo-Nazi groups and more respectable right-wingers "may appear arbitrary or coincidental," this doesn't fit in very clearly with her earlier assertions about a "conspiracy of silence about the destruction of the Jews." Indeed, an atmosphere of conspiracy pervades the whole book. This shifting of tone is at its worst in the first and last chapters which are the least impressively documented and at times sloppily argued.

I make these criticisms with some reluctance because it is evidence this "albatross" of a book (Seidel's own words) has been a depressing ordeal for its author. This has been partly due to its chequered publication history. Pluto Press were to have published it in 1983, but backed out, according to one source this was because they feared a libel case. But one must also acknowledge, with Seidel, the corrosive effect of steeping oneself in anti-semitic literature: "My revulsion for the subject matter is such that there have been days when I have been unable to either write or speak."

Seidel is a flawed Cassandra and one wonders how much a supportive and sympathetic editor (Pluto take note) might have helped her. If the historical research had been beefed up, her language coaxed into more lucid and controlled tones, and her vaguer charges more clearly distinguished from her better substantiated one, Seidel's important pioneering book could have been made a better one.

MADGE DRESSER



# Views on the Jews

*Cult, Ghetto and State: The persistence of the Jewish Question*, Al Saqi Books, £5.95

*Cult, Ghetto and State* is a collection of essays on the Jewish Question by Maxime Rodinson, the French Marxist and Middle East Scholar. Rodinson is that by now most familiar of creatures, the disillusioned Communist. He was a member of the French Communist Party during a period when Communism equalled Stalinism, but his reaction has been less extreme than one might expect, and he remains a Marxist and a humanist. As he explains in his "Self-Criticism", which is in many ways the most interesting essay in this collection, the experience has made him suspicious of ideologies per se, which is a classical humanist position. Ideology seems, for him, to be almost synonymous with propaganda, and it is from this point of view that he criticises both Stalinism and Zionism.

Thus much of the book is aimed at demythologizing Jewish history and historiography. He scores several notable successes with this approach, particularly in his essay "What is Zionism?", but it does have its pitfalls. An example is his refusal to use the term "Holocaust" on the grounds that this elevates it to a metaphysical phenomenon, and furthermore, the reason we don't view, for instance, the Armenian massacres in the same light is our "Judeocentrism". Whether the Holocaust was qualitatively or merely quantitatively different from other massacres, such an approach, I think, misses the point. When seen clearly it is the most terrifying event in history because of the sheer cold-blooded efficiency with which it was carried out; ordinary shooting was not efficient enough for the Nazis. The Holocaust gives us a glimpse of what Orwell meant when O'Brien speaks of the future as a boot stamping on a human face, forever. Rodinson misses this point in his desire to avoid mystifications. I am reminded of Russell's remark about Zeno, the Greek Stoic, who in his enthusiasm to combat the metaphysical sceptics ended up by insisting that God, virtue and the rule of three are all as solid as a table. As Russell points out, it is apparent that Zeno, in his enthusiasm has been forced into a metaphysics of his own.

In his "Self-Criticism", he examines his Stalinist past, with a view to explaining how the intellectual voluntarily submits to the Party Line. He is concerned in a more general way with the question of how it is that starting from wholly admirable motives people end up in criminal complicity with the likes of (but not only) Stalin. However, though he

emphasises the similarity between Zionism and Communism, in their concern for the oppressed and in many features of their structures as ideological mass movements, he never seems to notice that the same question might be asked with respect to Zionists. His answer to the question, on one level, is that the party or organization becomes an end in itself, the long term objectives becoming subordinated to the everyday needs of the organization. On another level he charts the decline from the original pure aspirations to frustration at and then resignation in the face of the inevitable impurities of the process, until finally, in an attempt to cling to the initial vision and the meaning it has given to one's life, one manages to ignore the most brute of facts.

Most of the other essays are concerned with Jewish history and with Zionism in particular. Rodinson's anti-Zionism rests on three basic grounds. Firstly, he believes that the Jews are not a proper nation. He is concerned here to combat idealist, or essentialist views of Jewish identity and survival through history, as propounded by Judeocentrists, Zionists and anti-semites. He is not completely convincing on this point, although it is clear that the Jews are a peculiar type of nation, if they are one. Secondly, as a socialist, he is hostile to all nationalisms. Finally, the basic complaint of the Palestinian Arabs, that they were conquered and expropriated by foreigners, who acted in many ways like colonialists, is just. Interestingly, he says, perhaps in contradiction to the first two points, that he wouldn't object to a Jewish state on the moon. Of the three, I think that the most important for him is the second. In this connection, I find it surprising that as a winner of the Isaac Deutscher memorial prize for his book *Islam and Capitalism*, he does not find the need to reply to Deutscher's remark that the belief in socialism as the solution to the Jewish problem rested on an over optimistic estimation of European civilization, an estimation conclusively demonstrated to be false by the Holocaust, and that contrary to Rodinson's view of the creation of the State of Israel as an historical error, it was, rather, an historical necessity. Is Deutscher, then, a Judeocentrist?

Despite his principled opposition to Zionism, in his essay "What is Zionism?" he gives a very fair overview of the subject, regarding it as an example of the 'centripetal tendencies' of all oppressed groups and citing the establishment of Liberia by American blacks, and Pakistan as cases in point. He implies that given the resurgence of antisemitism at the end of the nineteenth century, coming as it did in the heyday of European national-

ism, some such movement among the Jews was inevitable and notes that 'Initially Zionism paid very little attention... to the Arabs. This was understandable at a time when colonization seemed a natural and laudable phenomenon'. (p. 146) Although Israel is an "historical error", he is at pains to point out to Arabs that there now exists a real national entity in Palestine, the Israeli Jews, and any proposed solution which treats them as merely a religious community is unjust and will be rejected. This tendency of Arabs to view the Jews as just a religious community, explains much of the *a priori* outrageousness of Zionism in Arab eyes, since a religious community is not regarded as a valid basis on which to build a state.

Rodinson is an assimilated Jew, and as he says, a non-Jewish Jew, in Deutscher's sense. Now this is all very well but it hardly satisfied the requirements of the categorical imperative! Yet strangely enough, he seems to think that the solution to the Jewish Question is that the Jews should assimilate. Thus: "There was no divine or extra-rational necessity for the survival of the Jewish people, or the Jewish religion, as such. The only moral necessity is to demand respect for the legitimate collective rights of a religious or secular community when it exists, but not to maintain it, recreate it, or reinforce it when impersonal social factors... cause it to wither". (p.117) I could quote other even more blatant passages from his otherwise excellent survey of Jewish history "Jewish nation to Jewish problem". It is especially sad since it comes from a Jew, to hear Rodinson trotting out the clichés of that Left assimilationism, which has been so well documented by Steve Cohen in his book *That's Funny You Don't Look Anti-semitic*. I might add that the desire to bow down before "impersonal social forces" is reminiscent more of the worst features of Hegel, than of Marx.

Other interesting essays in this volume include an interview, originally published in the PLO journal *Palestinian Affairs* and an essay on antisemitism which attempts to explode mythical explanations, of the "eternal hatred for the Jews" variety, emphasising that antisemitism has changed through history, its presence and character depending on social conditions. He also discusses Arab antisemitism in some detail, perhaps to the annoyance of some Anti-Zionists. Despite the serious flaw mentioned above, this is a very thought provoking collection of essays for anyone interested in the Jewish Question, a question which, as the book's subtitle indicates, has certainly not been solved by Zionism.

DAVID KING

Berl. *The Biography of a Socialist Zionist (Berl Katznelson 1887-1944)* by Anita Shapira. (Cambridge University Press, £17.50).

One of the dominant themes of recent Jewish history has been the many different attempts to embrace the modern secular world while still maintaining a conscious link with the Jewish past.

The growth of both Jewish nationalism and Jewish socialism are two fascinating instances of such accommodation; yet the story of their flowing together into the Socialist Zionist thought of Nachman Syrkin, Ber Borochov, Berl Katznelson and others, against the tortured yet exhilarating background of early 20th century Russian history, more profoundly reflects the bewildering range of tensions between Jews and their environment than perhaps any other example.

This penetrating work on Berl Katznelson is more than a biography — through the prism of his experience the reader can chart the unlikely success story of the emergency of socialism as a principal shaper of Zionist ideology and practice. For socialism was barely mentioned at the first Zionist Congress in 1897, yet twenty years later the socialists of the *Second Aliyah* (1903-1914) had gone some way towards laying the national foundations first of the *Yishuv* (settlement) in Palestine and later those of the State of Israel.

So what accounted for the appeal of socialism to the Russian Jewish intelligentsia during this period and what were the major dilemmas facing those who tried to express their Jewish socialism in national terms and indeed their Zionism in socialist terms?

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the East European variety of *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) had tended, in contrast to its counterpart in the west, to take place somehow within a Jewish framework, albeit in secular guise. As a result of the halting pace of social and political change in the Tsarist Empire, and its cultural diversity, one can describe the distinctiveness of Russian Jews as still being most pronounced. Ashkenazi culture, tradition pietism and the Yiddish language and spirit were still ingrained in the Jewish consciousness. But growing Jewish participation in Russian society was radically challenged in 1881 by open anti-Jewish violence. The psychological stress induced by the pogroms and the 'May Laws' which urbanised and pauperised hundreds of thousands of Jews now only contributed to their sense of cohesion but strengthened the urgency of their plight.

By 1900, thirteen years after Berl's birth, there were still over 5 million Jews in Russia, packed into the larger cities of the Pale of Settlement. A combination of high birth rate and the virtual disappearance of their economic role as middlemen between peasants and town-dwellers meant that the overwhelming majority

# FROM TSAR TO ZION

were badly paid labourers in small workshops, often owned by other Jews. Many were entirely destitute, relying for subsistence on communal hand-outs.

Although the Tsarist government was eminently capable of orchestrating, or at least conniving at, acts of savagery and although it attempted through censorship and other devices to curb the spread of 'dangerous' new ideas, it was not a totalitarian regime but an autocracy — and an extremely inefficient and unwieldy one at that. Despite government restrictions, there remained enough opportunity and space for a number of illegal and semi-legal Jewish organisations and movements to develop. The spread of *Haskalah* and modern education had encouraged the growth of a small but active nucleus of secular free-thinkers who were keen to depart from previous patterns of Jewish authority in Russia and the now inappropriate paradigm of Jewish modernisation created earlier in the nineteenth century in Germany.

Jews lived in the westernmost part of Russia and therefore had the closest connection with the west and were more intimately associated with the new socialist and national ideas. A strict *numerus clausus* had driven thousands of young people to western universities where many were radicalised, later to return to the Pale with well-developed revolutionary ideas. Moreover, the bulk of socialist literature was in German and Jewish intellectuals were consequently in many ways well positioned to be in the vanguard of the nascent Russian socialist think-tank.

Tsarist censorship had generated an infrastructure of underground printing abroad and Jews had long enjoyed experience of smuggling all kinds of things into the Pale. Jewish aptitude for Talmudic *pilpul* could now be transferred to socialist argument and even Marxist dialectic (from which it is arguably not a million miles removed!).

Jews now lived in urban areas of the major centres of Russian industry where conditions were ripe for the development of socialist ideology and strategies. The spread of socialist ideas among the Jews was also aided by the increasingly urgent need for economic improvement which they shared with all Russian workers: by the long tradition of *Hevrot* — self-help social institutions within the Jewish community: by the need to address the problems peculiar to the Jews posed by antisemitism; and by the resentment of the Jewish poor for the Jewish rich which stemmed from the tyranny of the 'Kahal' tradition and which had expressed itself as far back as the Hasidic revolution of the late 18th century onwards.

Many Jewish, and later Zionist, socialists believed that they were heirs to a traditional Jewish predilection for social justice and egalitarianism. Berl Katznelson, like Moses Hess and Nachman Syrkin before him, tried to read modern socialism back into the Torah and Talmud. In 1862 Hess had maintained (in 'Rome and Jerusalem') that all the sabbatical laws and indeed the entire Mosaic Code were 'proto-socialist'. He quotes from *Pirkei Avot* (The Ethics of the Fathers): "He who says, 'what is mine is mine and what is thine is thine, is a mediocre character: some say, this is a character like that of Sodom', to 'prove' that the Jewish ethic has always been opposed to individualism based on private ownership. Syrkin also regarded the class struggle as one of the central motifs of Jewish history, reflected in both the *Pentateuch* and the Prophets. The history of ancient Jerusalem, as he interpreted it, was the unfolding struggle of the toiling masses for dignity and a socialist way of life.

Katznelson, too, had a deep respect for the Jewish religious tradition, which he tried to make compatible with the new Zionist socialist movement and was acutely aware of the need to emphasise the continuing significance of eternal Jewish values and of Hebrew literature within the revolutionary movement. His was one of the few voices in labour circles to press for the observance of the Sabbath and festivals, dietary laws in the Histadrut kitchen, and circumcision on Kibbutzim. He recognised the importance of imbuing the younger generation with reverence and appreciation for the Jewish cultural and religious heritage which was in danger of being cast to the winds by the growing number of secularists.

In the early years Katznelson's quest for self-discovery mirrors the theoretical and ideological tensions between universalism and particularism, between internationalist and Jewish socialism and the practical difficulties for Jewish activists operating both within the Jewish community and within orthodox socialist circles.

Shapira traces the personal development of Berl from a young Russian socialist into one of the seminal ideologues of the Israeli labour movement, and a founding father, together with David Ben-Gurion and others, of *Mapai* (1930) — the Palestinian Jewish Workers' Party which would dominate the Israeli political scene until Menachem Begin's victory in 1977.

Berl's personal odyssey is charted against the background of the stormy days of Arab-Jewish tension during the period of the British Mandate in Palestine; against the rise of Nazism and its implications for the scale of Jewish immigration into Palestine and possible interpretations



## REVIEWS

of the concept of the 'Jewish National Home', culminating in the British White Paper of 1939 restricting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the subsequent 5-year period.

This book is strongly recommended for anyone interested in a scholarly, but highly readable, analysis of the successes and failures of Zionist policy and diplomacy during the pre-State period, and the intellectual seeds and revolutionary birth of contemporary Israeli society.

RONNIE LANDAU  
(Educational Director, The Spiro  
Institute for the Study of  
Jewish History and Culture)

## Forbidden dialogue

**My Friend the Enemy** by Uri Avnery  
(Zed Press, £7.95)

He's a funny sort of bloke, Uri Avnery. He is no socialist; he believes in capitalism, "as long as it keeps its hands clean" but, almost despite himself, he has ended up on the far left of the Israeli political spectrum. He is a fighter for peace with a background in the Irgun, friendly personal relations with Begin and half the Israeli political establishment, and a track record of occasional lapses into almost rabid nationalism. He edited a funny sort of newspaper, too; a radical anti-establishment pro-peace paper which, in 1967, carried an editorial, signed by Avnery, proclaiming "ON TO DAMASCUS!"

He's written a funny sort of book.

There is precious little that is funny about the bitter and bloody conflict in which Israelis and Palestinians have been locked for the past forty years; yet Avnery insists on repeating all the jokes that he swapped first with Said Hammami, and then, following Hammami's assassination by rejectionists, with Issam Sartawi. He dwells uncomfortably long on the meals they ate, and the coffee and wine they drank. He makes it fairly clear, as well, that feminism has had as little impact on him as socialism. There are some silly mistakes, too; like attributing events which took place in 1978 to the Iran-Iraq war, which did not start for two years.

Nevertheless, this is an important book. It is still just about possible that the Israelis and the Palestinians will learn to live with each other. If they do, then future hindsight will place great importance on the first tentative contacts between Zionists and PLO members. As both Avnery (who has described himself as a non-Zionist) and his book's "hero", Issam Sartawi, recognise, there is little point in making peace between Israel and Palestinian quislings like the now-forgotten Village Leagues, or between the PLO and anti-Zionist Israelis.

Avnery has written an insider's account of this unofficial peace process, from his own meeting with Said Hammami, the PLO's representative in London in 1975, through his interview with Arafat at the height of the Lebanon War, to the aftermath of the inconclusive 1984 election in Israel. As he clearly shows, the process has been exceptionally fragile; a single ill-considered "joke" by Meir Pa'il permanently damaged his acceptability to the Palestinians. The Israeli state has done its best to prevent meetings between its citizens and what it sees as the enemy, and such meetings are now defined as a

crime in Israeli law. On the Palestinian side the proponents of a two-state solution have been judged as traitors, and have paid with their lives.

Movement has also been limited by the intricate machinations of factional struggle within the PLO. Avnery is really quite charitable about this. He is told, and seems to accept, that even many 'rejectionists' leaders would like to make a two-state peace with Israel, but don't believe it possible (George Habash is mentioned in this context, though Naif Hawatmeh — a far more likely candidate — is not). He also accepts the Arafat is genuinely convinced as to the desirability of a two-state solution and that all apparent repudiations or coy hesitations before outright endorsement have been forced on him by internal political considerations.

Avnery argues that the political consciousness of the PLO has undergone a long transformation, partly as a result of contacts with the Israeli peace camp, in its attitude towards the permanence of the Israeli presence in the region. He suggests that the adoption of the slogan of the "democratic secular state" was the first stage in this transformation. Whereas before the Jews were, going to be, at best, peacefully repatriated, henceforth they would be allowed to stay as a tolerated religious minority in an Arab region. Now, says Avnery, the Palestinians are beginning to accept that, for better or worse, there is an Israeli nation in the region.

A similar transformation in Israeli popular consciousness has yet to be achieved. And yet, Avnery suggests, it is Israeli public opinion that holds the key to a solution to the conflict... If there is a solution. In 1979 Avnery made a bet with Issam Sartawi that "... within seven years a Palestinian State would come into being and peace would reign in our common homeland." It's hard to imagine anyone making such a bet in 1986.

JONATHAN FELDMAN

## Ganef steals the show

**The Death of Moishe-Ganef**  
by Simon Louvish  
Heinemann, £9.95

Moishe-Ganef, Moishe the thief, so the story goes, has stolen something awfully important from Israeli intelligence. Because of this whole gallery of intelligence and ex-intelligence agents, Israeli and Palestinian, are on his trail. Of course they don't find him because in the first scene of the book he is shot in a London hotel room. (Or is he?). So they have to put up with going after the *Ganef's* old friend, Joe Dekel. The scene shifts from London to Jerusalem to Nablus to Tiberias and finally to Beirut but the plot remains basically the same — Dekel is hauled in, imprisoned, interrogated and released. He is armed only with a supply of one-liners, plentiful references to Dallas, the Wizard of Oz and Smiley's People (he isn't a TV critic for nothing) and his

"hattie", ("I'm damned if I'm going to call it a Yarmulka") which he wears when in Israel but not abroad. He explains:

"At least at home they know my face and my views and the chauvinists give me a wide berth. Abroad I loathe people assuming by the hatie that I am a Nationalistic zealot. Jews who come up to me in the street and say 'Don't be downhearted, I think your Menahem Begin is wonderful'. What can I say? You are not in luck, *Re Yid*, I am Israel's only religious anarchist..."

Underneath the banter lies serious purpose. Dekel and, presumably, Louvish are revolted by the brutalisation of Israel as an occupying power. "I didn't expect kids to run screaming from me. I am not yet the wicked witch of the West", he recalls saying to his commanding officer

in a captured Jordanian barracks in 1967. "Have you looked in the mirror lately?" is the reply, "There's no room in this town. Take your pick, Joe — Self or Other." "If this is self", reflects Joe, "I want an id transplant". So on to Lebanon and the official lies and evasions. Dekel meets Ariel Sharon briefly, his "red devil". "If you were in my battalion, you would have been for it", gaffaws "Mister Lebanon 1982". And gathering theocracy ("You might get religious interrogators these days who will do you to 'Sabbath the Bride'. Isn't a Jewish State wonderful...")

In the end, the light tone and the repartee do not quite chime in with the serious themes of life and death in contemporary Israeli and Palestinian politics. ("The Middle East; futile death is so modish...") and the plot is just that bit too paper-thin. But a book to read, enjoy, occasionally wince and ponder.

MICHAEL HEISER

## IRAQI EXODUS

**The Lure of Zion/The case of the Iraqi Jews** by Abbas Shibliak, (Al Saqi Books, £4.95).

Some years ago I discovered that the version I grew up with of the exodus of Jews from Iraq to Israel was not the only one in existence. More surprisingly, I met left-wing Jews who only knew and believed the stories according to which almost the entire Iraqi Jewish community — more than 120,000 people — were frightened by a few Zionist terrorists into leaving the country where their forebears had lived happily for over 2,000 years. The crassest of these accounts not only contains an obvious slur on the sense and intelligence of the Iraqi Jews themselves, who apparently behaved like silly sheep, but contain glaring inconsistencies.

In *Khamsin 6* (Journal of revolutionary socialists of the Middle East, 1978), for example, Machover and Offenberger maintained both that the Iraqi Jews themselves had "absolutely no reason to emigrate from Iraq to Israel", having good relations with their Islamic and Christian neighbours, and that the Iraqi government was in secret collusion with Zionist agents to encourage the Jews to leave in order to confiscate their property. This has been more or less the Left's official version, yet it does not take much scrutiny of this odd story to see that the attitude of the Iraqi government towards its Jewish population can hardly have been neutral. Persecution takes many forms, and I am inclined to count being officially "encouraged" to leave your homeland, without your possessions, as one of them rather than as "no reason to emigrate".

Abbas Shibliak's account in *The Lure of Zion* escapes such inane attempts to make the whole episode seem the result of the actions of a few agitators. The great merit of his calm and scholarly book is the attention he pays to the pronouncements at an official level about the situation of the Jews, and the general political background, including the theory supported by Britain that a "transfer scheme" would somehow solve the problem of compensating Palestinian refugees.

The significant pieces of legislation are included, with other official documents, in a useful appendix: Law 1 of 1950 allowed Jews to emigrate if they first renounced their Iraqi nationality, and was valid for twelve months; Law 5 of 1951 "froze" the property of anyone who had been deprived of Iraqi nationality. Yet while Shibliak by no means tries to exonerate the Iraqi government of all responsibility, discussing both "push" and "pull" factors behind the exodus, he



leans over too far on occasion to present the "push" factors as official mistakes rather than evidence of hostility towards the Jewish community, while the "pull" factors from the Zionist side are seen as unequivocally cynical and manipulative.

Shibliak has fortunately provided enough factual material for us to make up our own minds about how convincing his own analysis is, and on some points I found it unacceptable. For example, writing of the 'Farhud' — riots in Baghdad in 1941 which left 250-300 people, mainly Jews, dead or injured — Shibliak appears to endorse the view that although the targets were Jews, the mob's intentions were not anti-Jewish as such, but were the feelings of nationalist factions vented against a group they saw as pro-British. He even quotes with approval Hirst's comment that "Arab Jews must themselves take some of the blame for the prejudice which this behaviour generated against them." If Shibliak wants to blame the victims in this way, he does need to explain why the Jews were more sympathetic to the British colonial power than to the nationalist cause, but in the book's earlier chapters Shibliak tries to have it both ways and depict the Jewish community as a secure, rather than vulnerable minority.

My main reservation about Shibliak's book is its reliance on official sources, although the wealth of information he provides is also useful to have. But

statistics, memos and the like cannot tell us everything, and we are talking here about events in recent history, about two generations of Iraqi Jews who are still alive. Their voices, the evidence of ordinary people, are absent. Of course it is not unusual for histories to be written in this way, but the result is that we are asked to infer, from tables setting out the economic participation of Iraqi Jewry and so forth, that an entire community felt prosperous and secure when surely those remaining have their own stories to tell. At times the lack of this important perspective is grotesque, as when Shibliak reports that "Zionists have repeatedly claimed that Jews were reluctant to register [for emigration, and to renounce their nationality] at first because of their fear of the authorities... this claim seems doubtful". I would not count my mother as a Zionist source, and her story tallies with the one Shibliak decries.

Surely a good way to find out if the Jews thought the authorities were conspiring against them is to ask them, and in fact Shibliak does retail evidence which points strongly to the fact that some government ministers had their own financial stakes in the events of 1950-1951. There was not only a clandestine Zionist operation, but a counterpart Iraqi one which, though Shibliak does not emphasise the point, was more threatening because it meant that Jews in Iraq, already subject to discriminatory restrictions on their economic activity and employment, could not trust the Iraqi state to see them as citizens worthy of protection. *The Lure of Zion* is a misleading title, against this background: I agree with Shibliak's opinion that on the whole the Iraqi Jews were not especially interested in Zionism. They went to Israel because they felt they had to and those who were able to emigrate to other countries did so. The operation to provide them with transport to Israel provided an opportunity, rather than a lure, and as Shibliak says, the Israelis were not especially keen to take penniless refugees in such large numbers, but could not refuse them. The bomb outrages certainly had an effect, as Shibliak shows quite convincingly, but they were only a part of the story.

The losers were, of course, the ordinary Iraqi Jews themselves, still ranking low in Israeli society compared with other groups, with reason to resent both the Iraqis and the Zionists for past injustices. As a somewhat selective source of information about them, *The Lure of Zion* deserves a cautious welcome, but the case will not be solved until we hear their own story.

DENA AFTAR



# 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 1987 our Jewish establishment actively oppose progressive causes; many Jews have enjoyed considerable social and economic mobility; and the general image held of the Jewish community, apparently confirmed by its institutions, is one of relative comfort and security.

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

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

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

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

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