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The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

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## Where we stand

- 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.
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- We recognise the equal validity and integrity of all Jewish communities, and reject the ideology of Zionism, 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 an end to the occupation and recognition of national rights and self-determination, including statehood, of the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples.

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# **RITES AND WRONGS Life, death and circumcision**

### Also in this issue

- Gypsies – the persecution continues
- Yugoslavia – eyewitness report
- Berlin – Jews without tears
- Jewish comedy – the new generation



# Editorial

**E**ARLY summer 1992. In the 'belly of the beast' the black and Latino people of south central Los Angeles rebelled against the racist injustice starkly seen in the acquittal of the policemen who beat up Rodney King. There was a terrible aspect to the riot, but it did show that the reactionary US establishment in fact rests on quite shaky ground. As Shelley proclaimed, 'Rise like Lions after slumber, in unvanquishable number / Shake your chains to earth like dew, which in sleep had fallen on you / Ye are many they are few.' Brad Lander's article on page 20 takes a prescient look at the US political scene in the run-up to the presidential election. He sees the right-wing populism of Pat Buchanan as building on the racism of the Reagan/Bush years, rather than being a new American fascism with a different constituency.

In Britain, the re-election of a Conservative government is likely to lead to a renewed attack on black, migrant and refugee communities. As well as the Asylum Bill, and its attack on refugees, there is the spectre of ever stricter internal immigration controls. As in other parts of Europe, people in Britain will be divided formally into citizens and non-citizens, increasing state harassment and increasing the pressure on black, Asian and

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migrant communities.

Increasing racism and nationalism in Europe is brought sharply into focus by a major article on the intertwined history of Jews and Gypsies (page 12). Toby Sonneman gives a harsh outline of past persecution and faces us with the present vicious manifestation of racism against Gypsies in central Europe.

Ben Cohen looks at the history of nationalism in what is no longer Yugoslavia (page 10), as Serbian forces attempt to destroy and partition the beautiful city of Sarajevo and segregates its intertwined people. In their occupied zone they are issuing ID cards stating 'ethnic origin', dispossessing non-Serbs of homes and jobs. The article goes on to damn the Croatian regime of Franjo Tudjman, Milosevic's mirror, which draws its ideology from a racist and antisemitic history, tolerating the growth of the HOS militia, and bringing reactionaries and outright fascists to the side of Croatia from across Europe. The Jewish community in Sarajevo, who have everything to lose, need the understanding and solidarity of Jewish communities worldwide to help them continue their 500-year existence, rather than dissolving one more Jewish community by moving them to Israel.

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Don't blame us, blame the system! It is nearly three years since we last raised our cover price, but with the return of yet another Conservative government prolonging the recession, we have been forced to make a minimal increase. (We have no subscribers in Bauldon.)

## Conferring on alliances

The fight against racism and fascism was one of the most hotly debated topics at the JSG's recent National Conference. Over the past year the group has been active in mobilisations against the visit of Jean-Marie Le Pen and was one of the founding signatories of the Anti-Racist Alliance. The year has also seen the relaunch of the Anti-Nazi League.

After a sustained but comradely debate, the group agreed two motions. The first resolved that the JSG would base its anti-racist and anti-fascist work and its alliances with others on an analysis which accords equal weight to the fight against racism as to the fight against fascism, on democratic organisation and on respect for the autonomous organisation of groups particularly threatened by racism and fascism.

The second resolution went on to consider more specific organisational questions. It stated that by their very nature broad-based alliances involved a degree of compromise on secondary issues in order to obtain united action on basics. It resolved to continue the JSG's affiliation to the Anti-Racist Alliance. In addition, it resolved the group should affiliate to the Anti-Nazi League if we were given assurances that the ANL's policies would be decided democratically. The group also resolved to call for a national conference to be convened by these organisations and Anti-Fascist Action.

## In front of the kinder!

If your Pesach included an exodus to the hills (remember those matzo rambles?), you might have given thanks to some special freedom fighters. On 24 April 1932, hundreds of young people from factory-smoke-filled Manchester and other towns fought for their fresh air in the famous Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout.

Among those arrested that day on Kinder, by a combined force of gamekeepers and police, was a young out-of-work trainee motor mechanic, Benny Rothman. 'We were picked out by the gamekeepers,' he recalls, 'four Jews out of over 400 people. At the trial, Sir Edward Acton highlighted what he called our "foreign-sounding names".' Benny, a Young Communist Leaguer, received four months' imprisonment for 'riotous assembly'.

This year, aged 80, Benny Rothman was among the hundreds who gathered in Hayfield village to mark the 60th anniversary of the Mass Trespass, and he made it up Kinder Scout's 2,000 feet at a sprightly pace. Today it is part of the Peak National Park, Britain's first, and no small thanks to Benny and his pals who fought for access.

Besides the rally, Manchester Youth Theatre put on a new play by Mike Harding at New Mills Arts Theatre near Stockport. A *Free Man on Sunday* – the title quotes Ewan MacColl's song *The Manchester Rambler* – highlights the bias of Sir Edward Acton's court, whose jury had two brigadier generals, three colonels, two majors, three captains and two aldermen. Hardly peers of the young working-class rambles from Cheetham, and hardly likely to find against the landowners!

The Ramblers' Association says that even today only half the Peak District moorland is open to the public, accusing the Peak Park authority of not putting pressure on landowners. With air pollution worsening again in Britain's cities, and privatisation threatening forests and Royal Parks, a rash of new signs has appeared in the Peak warning walkers that access is forbidden. From generation unto generation, we'll need to follow in the footsteps of those who went out into the wilderness before, to fight for freedom.

CHARLIE POTTINS

## Strings attached

Klezmer enthusiasts from up and down the country gathered at the Swarthmore Centre, Leeds, on 29 March for 'Fiddler on the Rooftops of Leeds', the first Leeds Klezmer Festival. The revived interest in Klezmer (East European Jewish) music was illustrated by the fact that the event was fully booked well in advance. The event combined workshops and performance, and concluded with a lively concert. The participants decided to establish 'Fiddler' as an



annual event. The next one is planned for May 1993 and will last two days.

For further details write to: PO Box 70, 52 Call Lane, Leeds LS1 6DT.

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## Shekels that hide

**Economic recession has hit hard at our community's most established bodies. Our United Synagogue correspondent reports.**

Amid growing calls for change in the Board of Deputies, the Board appears to be hoping to recruit a secret army of deputies from an impeccably reactionary and conservative, not to say esoteric, source. Apparently, having quit the Board several decades ago rather than face the risk of 'corruption' by the advent of progressive deputies (Reform, Masorti, Liberal and Progressive synagogues), the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations is now restructuring itself to reaffiliate, in some suitable form, to the Board of Deputies, and thereby strengthen the Board against 'over-liberal' tendencies.

Political pressure on the Board is coinciding with an ongoing financial crisis. From figures released in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1989, it appears that only about a fifth of those congregants morally bound to pay the voluntary Board of Deputies

levy are actually doing so.

Meanwhile, the United Synagogue is skint – especially after the major infusions into the Jewish Educational Trust Fund and Community Security Organisation.

'Leading' voices are even more stridently urging that educational monies (to enthrone youngsters for Judaism and Zionism) should be directed into/ targeted at the 'elite' schools containing the community's future 'leaders' (Carmel College, Clifton College, City of London, Haberdasher's Aske, etc) rather than generously augment the JFS, the largest Jewish school in Europe, based in cash-strapped Camden. (The JFS headmistress, Jo Wagerman, has been arguing, for a long time, for JFS to opt out of Camden LEA, to get more money, but the parents and teachers disagree.)

So, what with pressing demands of Israel, and the channelling of money into Jewish Day Schools (eg the Jakobovits, Ronson and Kalms College at Bushey

and the proposals in Ilford), Jewish Care, like the United Synagogue, is finding itself short of funds. True to Tory tradition, the cuts are made in education, especially adult education, where 'uppity' women are dreaming up dangerous schemes to become more instrumental in their congregations. Only the Reform/ Progressive (Sternberg Centre) have the cash for communal/adult education.

Meanwhile, traditional *chaedarim* (supplementary schools) have been starved of pupils for their rolls as a result of the Jewish Day Schools – and Hendon Hebrew Classes has had to

merge with Golders Green and Hampstead Hebrew Classes. Some members are concerned at yet further evidence of the ageing nature of their communities, and young families are finding it difficult to buy homes in the same areas as their parents.

Whereas the ultra-orthodox are growing, along with the Progressives, in a polarisation of Anglo-Jewry, the mainstream is suffering attrition – and the traditional posts are being filled by Lubavitch rabbis, ever more unrepresentative of the largely supine, absentee, traditional United Synagogue congregant.

## A woman's place

A pioneering exhibition examining Jewish women's lives in Britain opened on 24 May at the Manchester Jewish Museum.

The exhibition, which includes photographs, objects and taped interviews, challenges stereotypes of Jewish women that have excluded, marginalised and trivialised their experiences and contribution to Jewish life. A full programme of events will accompany the exhibition,

including a concert on 13 September by Royce Klezmores, an all-women band who have played at several *Jewish Socialist* benefits and other radical events. The exhibition continues until December.

Further information from Frances Guy, Exhibition Officer, Manchester Jewish Museum, 190 Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester M8 8LW. Tel 061-834 9879.

## Family outing

The Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline has been banned from the Chief Rabbi's Walkabout in London's Hyde Park planned for 12 July. The event, which aims to raise funds for charities across the Jewish community, has excluded the Helpline on the grounds that it is not an organisation that 'promotes family values'. No other group has been refused a place on the walk.

Five youth groups –

Habonim-Dror, Hanoar Hatzioni, RSY-Netzer (the Reform youth movement), the Association of Jewish Sixth Formers and the Union of Jewish Students – along with a group of Reform and Liberal rabbis, have publicly criticised the ban and called on the Chief Rabbi to reverse the decision. But at the time of going to press, the Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline and its supporters are still considering how to respond.

Secretary of the Helpline Jack Gilbert told the *Jewish Chronicle*, 'We are certain the Chief Rabbi will wish to correct the basic injustice we have suffered.' This does not sit comfortably with Jonathan Sacks's callous reply to a BBC Radio 1 interviewer who asked what advice he would give a young person who had homosexual feelings: 'I would say very candidly that there are all sorts of things one has to fight in our own

nature. Sometimes we're very aggressive, sometimes unduly self-abasing. We have to fight our nature. That's what being a moral human being is all about.'

We support the Lesbian & Gay Helpline in their demand for recognition as a legitimate part of the Jewish community and their public opposition to discrimination by supposed communal leaders. That's what being a moral human being is all about.

## Moscow must remember

American labour, socialist and cultural organisations have called on the Russian government to open the archives on the incarceration and secret trials of the two Bundist leaders Erich and Alter, who were executed in December 1941.

At a meeting in New York

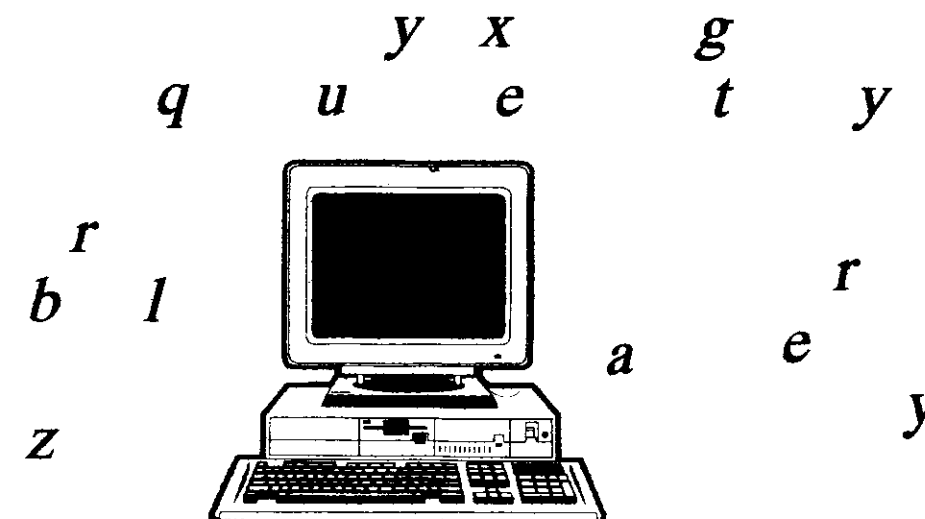
on 16 April sponsored by 14 organisations, including the AFL-CIO, the Jewish Labour Bund and the Democratic Socialists USA, they also demanded the posthumous rehabilitation of Erich and Alter as martyrs of democratic socialism.

In a message of support

sent to the Bund, the veteran Socialist International leader, Willy Brandt, recalled how the former Soviet authorities had failed to fulfil a promise to respond to calls for their rehabilitation. 'Now', Brandt said, 'the Russian Federation, as the main successor to the ex-USSR, has a moral obligation to act. The truth has to be made public in Moscow, as well.'

*Jewish Socialist* urges other Jewish and labour movement organisations in Britain to support this campaign to open the archives and rehabilitate the murdered Bundist leaders.

## Double identity



In an idle moment we ran the names of some of the great and good (and small and bad) through a computer's spelling checker program. Some survived relatively unscathed; others acquired oddly appropriate identities.

Star of the small screen and reform synagogue, Rabbi Hugo Gryn, became **Rabbit Huge Groin**, and his film-maker daughter, Naomi, was transformed into **Gnome Groan**. That would live up to the credits. Yitzhak Shamir was renamed **Schemer**. Neil Kinnock, no champagne socialist, became **Nil Cognac**, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin became **Vladimir Alice**. That esteemed organ, the *Jewish Chronicle*, sounds endearing as the **Jewish Crinkle**, while editor Ned Temko could choose from **Nerd**, **Gnat**, **Newt** or **Naught Tempo** if he needed a nom de plume. And

who better to write a contentious weekly column than **Chasm Berate**? And Beattie might be beaten if Maureen Lipman changed her name to **Maroon Limp**. Would the great playwright, Harold Pinter, ever have made it as **Herald Ponder**? Elie Wiesel's reputation would hardly have been damaged by the name **Elite Whistle**, but he might have blown **Robber Maxwell's** cover.

Closer to home, the *Jewish Socialist* Editorial Committee, Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Michael Heiser, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel, David Rosenberg and Marian Shapiro, sound like a firm of disreputable lawyers: **Bared**, **Colonist**, **Hisser**, **Lyceum**, **Loon**, **Marvel**, **Reasoner** and **Chopper**. And diarist Dybbuk became **Debauch**.

MINNIE KATZ

# In a bad state

## Legitimising torture

Mustafa Abdullah al Akawi died in February while under interrogation at Hebron prison. This was widely publicised in the Israeli and international press, and a report by Don Meiri of *Hadashot* exposed the existence of 'torture units' in the Hebron district. This at last forced a disbelieving Israeli society to recognise what the Palestinian Human Rights Information Centre (PHRIC) and the March 1991 report from *B'tselem*, the Israeli centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (see JS24), have consistently asserted: that Palestinian detainees are regularly subjected to brutal and sustained torture in Israeli jails.

Akawi died of a heart attack after repeated beatings and being forced to stand for long nights in the freezing cold. The police verified they had beaten him but that 'this was the employment of reasonable and legitimate pressure' (*Ha'aretz* 14 February 1992). This echoes the 1987 Landau Commission, whose report about abuse in detention, instead of challenging torture, has come to regularise and legitimise it. The report's conclusion was that 'non-violent psychological pressure through a vigorous and extensive interrogation, with the use of stratagems including acts of deception' and a 'moderate measure of physical pressure' are acceptable means to use against Palestinian 'security subjects'. In a secret appendix the Commission sets out types of physical pressure that could be used. An indication of what this appendix condones was given recently by army judge Yonatan Livni, who declared that while 'he was personally opposed to the use of electric shock in interrogations, it was permitted by the Landau Commission report'. This was said during the bail hearing of Nidal Abu Asab, aged 21, who

was severely tortured, including having electric shocks to his stomach and testicles, while he was held in the military administration building in Hebron. To Paul Kremnitzer of the Hebrew University, 'the assertion that it is permissible to beat people is becoming part of our culture'. He holds the Landau Commission responsible for the death of Mustafa Abdullah al Akawi.

More than 1,500 people participated in an impressive and dignified procession to the Al Aqsa Mosque for Akawi's funeral.

## Sub-verse-ive

'A judge yesterday convicted the Israeli Arab writer Shafik Habib of inciting violence with his poetry collection *Return to the Future* and sentenced him to three years' probation,' according to *The Guardian* (27 April 1992).

## Civil wrongs

The new Political Parties Law currently being rushed through the Knesset, building on the Basic Knesset Law 1984, bans the participation in elections of lists that explicitly or implicitly deny that 'the State is Israel is the State of the Jewish people'. The law prevents a list being openly based on opposition to all discrimination and arguing that Israel should be a 'state of all her citizens'. There is a joint Jewish/Arab initiative on the left to make this demand central to political activity in Israel.

## Brain washing

According to a document put together by a special Education Ministry team, new immigrants are going to be given an enrichment course which is supposed to ease their cultural absorption. On the five-month programme, 14 hours are allotted to getting to know the geography of the country, 24 hours to studying

civics, and ... 92 hours to the study of Judaism.

## Fighting back – non-violently

On the 25th anniversary of the Occupation, from 5-10 June, a Walk For a Peaceful Future in the Middle East will follow a route through Israel and the Occupied Territories, ending in Jerusalem. Based on principles of non-violence, the walk will protest against violations of human rights and call for the Palestinian people's aspiration for self-determination to be met. The organisers hope for broad participation and, despite a somewhat watered down statement of aims, has won support from a wide range of Palestinian, Israeli and international organisations.

A delegation of Jewish Socialists' Group members is joining the walk. They badly need financial support to cover their travel and other expenses. Please send donations to BM3725, London WC1N3XX, for the attention of Michael Feinberg or Julia Statman. (Cheques should be made out to JSJG.) Further information from Walk for a Peaceful Future in the Middle East, c/o 55 Dawes Street, London SE17 1EL; tel 071-703 7189; fax 071-708 2525.

Thanks for the information in this section to *The Other Front* and *News from Within*, published by the Alternative Information Centre, Box 24278, Jerusalem, Israel.

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# Line of defence

Hassan was on his way to work when the police stopped him and his mates, in Ramat Gan, Israel. Their papers said they had permission to work on a site just outside town. They pointed out they had to go through Ramat Gan to get there. They were taken in and held for 62 hours for being in the wrong place without a permit. Hassan was released after paying a 350 new shekel fine, and banned from working in Israel for two months.

Halil had worked for 20 years at the marble works in Rishon LeZion, an hour and a half's drive from his home in Gaza. Only the Gulf War curfew stopped him getting to work. After the war, there were new restrictions, you needed to be over 30, a father, with no arrests, and have a permit fixed by your employer. Fine. Halil telephoned his old boss. No joy. No job – the government was telling firms to hire new immigrants – and no redundancy pay. 'We didn't fire you, you quit.'

After 20 years' toil and sweat, paying insurance and Histadrut union dues, Halil called the labour exchange and wrote letters to the Histadrut. He then turned to Kav La'Oved, the

Workers' Hotline, and they took up his case. Since it was launched in 1990, Kav La'Oved has acquired bulging files of Hassans and Halils, whose cases it fights.

Palestinian trade unions are not recognised, and union activists often get detained or deported. The Histadrut accepts dues deducted from the pay of workers from the Occupied Territories, but isn't so keen on giving them representation or rights. Histadrut-owned co-op supermarkets sacked all their Palestinian staff last year. Another Histadrut company, *Yakhin Hakal*, routinely refused to sign accident claims for Palestinians injured on the job.

Although seeing Palestinian workers' rights as its particular responsibility, and working with Palestinian unions, Kav La'Oved is not exclusive. Its pamphlet, advising workers of their rights, is published in Arabic, Hebrew, Russian and Amharic. Exploitation is exploitation, rights are rights.

Kav La'Oved/Workers' Hotline is at 78 Allenby Street, Tel Aviv, POB 2319, Israel 61022.

CHARLIE POTTINS

# Shut up for talking peace

Veteran Israeli peace campaigner Abie Nathan, who was jailed for 18 months for meeting Yasser Arafat, has been released from jail after a campaign for his release to which the mayor of Tel Aviv, Shlomo Lahat, added his support. However, David Ish-Shalom, an Israeli peace activist who has met the PLO leadership several times, was

jailed for seven months on 9 April. On 20 April he started a hunger strike to protest about prison conditions.

Requests for a pardon should be addressed to President Chaim Herzog, Beit Hanassi, Jerusalem, Israel, and to Justice Minister Dan Meridor at the Ministry of Justice, Hakiryah, Jerusalem, Israel.

# International initiatives

The International Jewish Peace Union, to which the Jewish Socialists' Group is affiliated, has recently been working on a number of fronts. It was active in attempting to prevent the deportation from Holland of ex-Soviet Jews who had attempted to emigrate from Israel back to that country (see report in JS25). The IJPU branch in Israel has been assisting those who were

deported back.

*Israel & Palestine* magazine, which is associated with the IJPU, continues to provide a regular briefing on events in Israel and the Occupied Territories as well as the Palestinian diaspora and the fight for Middle East peace in Jewish communities worldwide. It can be obtained from MAGELAN BP130, 75463 Paris Cedex 10.

# Going spare again

*Spare Rib* has run into a new row with Jewish feminists for refusing to publicise the launch of a new national women's organisation, Jewish Women's Arts & Education and its associated club, Gertrude & Alice's. Amanda Sudic, one of the founders of JWAE, got no further than asking for *Spare Rib*'s deadline when she was quizzed about the group's policies on Israel. She felt no need to answer that particular question above all others, but did send *Spare Rib* JWAE's objectives, which include an equal opportunities policy.

*Spare Rib* claimed that they use the same set of criteria for all groups asking for space in the publication, and require statements of their opposition to all forms of imperialism, racism and Zionism. This was not the impression received by two groups we spoke to who said that *Spare Rib* had never asked for any such credentials.

The stormy history of relations between *Spare Rib* and Jewish feminists goes back many years, and specifically to the time of the Lebanon War when the magazine published an article perceived by many to be antisemitic, then refused to publish replies from Jewish women. The dispute was never resolved, though it generated fruitful debate about racism, feminism and the politics of minority communities.

We believe that this latest conflict between *Spare Rib* and Jewish Women's Arts & Education should be used to generate a debate - to develop political positions which go beyond reciting litany of qualifications for inclusion or exclusion. In the next issue we will open this debate, drawing on a long statement from *Spare Rib* which we don't have space for in this issue but which they have demanded that we print in full or not at all. We welcome letters from readers either now or in response to the debate feature.

The next Gertrude and Alice's event is on 27 June, when DJs Esther Kahn and Ritu will bring music from around the world. Further details from Jewish Women's Arts & Education, London Women's Centre, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU. Tel 071-272 8177.

**Jewish Socialist welcomes news articles about current issues and campaigns. Send your news to Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX. Please supply a contact number.**

# No justice for Vichy victims



Paul Touvier, the wartime chief of the Vichy militia in Lyons, has been cleared by three French judges of the crimes of which he was accused. These included the murder of seven Jews at Rillieux-le-Pape in 1944 by militiamen acting under Touvier's orders, the facts of which are not in doubt.

Touvier has escaped justice for 45 years. When he was arrested in 1989, the then French Minister of Justice promised that the trial would take place as soon as possible. It took three years for a preliminary trial hearing to decide that there were no charges to answer!

The transcript of the judges' remarks consists of 215 pages of historical analysis, parts of which might have come straight

from the pen of revisionist historians. For Touvier to stand a chance of being found guilty of crimes against humanity, it was necessary to show that he had 'carried out actions according to a concerted plan of action in the name of a state which practised systematically a policy of ideological hegemony'. In other words, it had to be shown that antisemitism was as intrinsic to the Vichy regime as it was to that of Nazi Germany.

In the eyes of most people this is not in question. Among many other acts, they cite the Statute of the Jews passed in 1940 'in the name of the Marshal of France' and laws 'arianising' Jewish belongings passed in 1941 and the setting up of a Commission

for Jewish Affairs, as well as the involvement of the police and militia in round-ups and deportations of Jews.

The three judges did not agree. 'There was no declaration that Jew was an enemy of the state, as there was in Germany. No speech of Marshal Pétain contains antisemitic remarks.' The militia, a part of the Vichy state, 'did not adhere unreservedly to Nazi ideology'.

Thus the judgment consists not only of an absolute of Touvier, which is scandalous enough, but effectively of the whole Vichy state. It comes in a climate where the increasing support for Le Pen has rehabilitated those who served Vichy. The *Nouvel Observateur* (16-22 April 1992) remarks that a pro-Touvier lobby called 'Right

and Justice' had been active among the judiciary in Paris since last June. One of its founders is Henri Gleize, a Paris judge who has also been active in right-wing Catholic groups. Of the three judges responsible for freeing Touvier, one had passed most of his life in former French colonies and another was a member of a right-wing magistrates' association.

The judgment has created outrage in France, and an appeal is now in progress. However, it is one more sign of how political truths that we have taken for granted in the last 50 years, such as the antisemitism of the regimes under Nazi occupation or influence, are subject to the corrosive slow drip of revisionist erosion.

relating to the Nazi occupation of the Channel Islands is under lock and key until 2045 and was not even available to the War Crimes Inquiry set up in 1988 which resulted in last year's War Crimes Act. According to one of a series of major reports in *The Guardian*, the paper which discovered Klebeck living peacefully in Hamburg, 'Any cover-up must have been ordered at the highest level to prevent the emergence in court of humiliating details of Nazi death camps on British soil and the extent of Channel Islanders' collaboration.'

David Cesarani is the

author of *Justice Delayed* (Heinemann, £17.50) which exposes the Attlee government's policy of recruiting thousands of East European workers without screening out easily identifiable Nazi collaborators and war criminals. He welcomes *The Guardian's* revelations but accuses the paper of hypocrisy in thumping the table over the Channel Islands while expressing little outrage over the much greater crimes committed in the east. 'If their concern stops 20 miles from the coast of France,' he argues, 'it actually erects barriers to Britain coming to terms with its past.'

powerless to bring to justice Nazis who committed atrocities on British soil. A cover-up by the post-war government delayed until recently the discovery of Kurt Klebeck who, according to military intelligence, was deputy commander of a slave camp on Alderney where at least 350 people died. Klebeck was held in a PoW camp in Germany for the two years following the war and was tried by a British military tribunal in 1947, but not for crimes committed in Alderney, despite his own admission during the trial that he had been there.

Much of the information

# DYBBUK'S DIARY

## ON REFLECTION

Arthur Scargill has sportingly assured one of his chief persecutors - Terry Pattinson of the *Daily Mirror* - that if the Mineworkers' Pension Fund is allowed to take over the *Mirror*, he'll see Pattinson's pension is all right.

Pergamon striker Anna Wagstaff highlighted the way the media focused hypocritically on 'Maxwell the foreigner, Maxwell the Jew', when they were all as bad. Some years ago, when Anna tried to expose her bosses' peculations with pensions, not one paper or programme wanted to touch the story.

Kevin Maxwell was represented at the Court of Appeal by Gavin Lightman QC - the same who enquired into the NUM following the *Mirror's* tales - but not for love, I hear. There's speculation as to who is paying the Maxwell brothers' legal bills. I expect Sylvia Rosen would like to know, too, so she could meet this benefactor. Sylvia, 62, is Maxwell's sister, reunited with him after surviving the Nazis. Having worked at his Macdonald publishing house producing Noddy books, she has heard that her entire pension entitlement has gone.

## DO AS I SAY...

And from Maxwell Communications group security policy:

### 3. CASES OF SUSPECTED FRAUD

The company will not tolerate dishonesty of any kind. It is an invariable policy to dismiss dishonest employees without notice, to press for prosecution and to make financial recovery through the Civil Courts.

In the event that a Finance Controller identifies possible fraud or misappropriation of assets, or suspects the existence of fraud or theft, the Head Office Internal Audit, Director of Risk Management and Group Security Adviser must be contacted before any action is taken.

## DON'T MENTION IT

One lot of ex-Maxwell employees still hasn't got over the shock of seeing their old boss receive something like a state funeral from Israel.

When Maxwell owned the now-defunct Caxton's Encyclopaedia, staff were instructed to remove all references to the State of Israel so the work could be sold without hindrance in some sensitive Arab countries. A friend had to rewrite the section on Islam, he remembers, stretching it out to fill the space left by the departing item. I hope no one feels that's an omen.

## DUKE AND THE DUCHESS

Lacking feudal trappings of their own to decorate their ill-gotten gains, over-privileged Americans fawn on foreign royalty and erect barriers against racial 'inferiors'. Those worried what the world would make of ex-Klan wizard David Duke, or equally reactionary Pat Buchanan, must be pleased that the British embassy in Washington advised the Duchess of York that it was quite okay to attend an event at Florida's Everglades Club.

Though not a klansman's white sheet and hood may be seen among the white ties at the Everglades, the snob club still bars Jews and blacks. Personally, I wouldn't patronise a club that hired the awful Fergie as a barmaid, never mind had her as a special guest. But those of my fellow Jews who pray devoutly each Shabbes for the welfare of 'All the Royal Family' will be saved from having to protest by news of her divorce. And I'll be able to stop paying towards her frocks and frolics, which the tax people have forced on me until now. Lord Goodman has told the duchess to take her legal business elsewhere.

When Groucho Marx heard his children had been barred from a swimming club because they were Jews, he rang the secretary to ask whether, since his kids were 'only half Jewish', they couldn't go into the water up to their navels.

A friend who grew up in Florida says she and a school pal used to take turns calling a local hotel that discriminated and asking them to page 'Mr Schwartz' or 'Mr Goldfarb', assuring them he'd definitely left word at the office that that's where he'd be staying, and it was urgent he be contacted. Me, I'd have called the manager later: 'I'm so sorry, it's silly of me to forget, Mr Goldfarb is probably staying at your hotel under a pseudonym, now let me think, what was it...?'

## RABBI-D ADVICE

Former Israeli chief of staff Rafel Eytan says the country's Arab citizens should not have the right to vote. Rabbi Ze'ev Feldman, chair of the Knesset Finance Committee, is another prejudiced man. As he told a television interviewer: 'If it were up to me, we should not have even given women the right to vote. Woman is noted for her abilities in managing the home, and the man has the qualities to be Foreign Minister...' (So much for Golda, *ole vesholem!*)

Knesset member Shulamit Aloni (Citizens List) commented on the Rabbi's wisdom: 'The trouble with these sort of people is that they think their intellect is situated in their male sexual organ, and

not in their head or education...' She might have added: when we see how some of them carry on, we wonder what they're carrying between their ears.

## SIDELINES ON SIDELOCKS

In Oxford, I call on the Lubavitchers, asking to look at their Ronald Reagan Chair in Jewish Ethics, but they decline my offer to fix the wiring. What next, I wonder, a Margaret Thatcher Lecture-ship in Social Justice? Whatever attracts large donations, I suppose.

This recalls the incident in 1982 when Haifa Technicon's dean of physics, Asher Peres, was reprimanded by his Senate for recommending Menachem Begin for the Nobel prize in physics. Professor Peres pointed out, 'Mr Begin is at least as worthy for the physics prize as he was the peace prize he won in 1978.'

## OXFORD BLUE TURFED OUT

Still in Oxford, I drop into the Turf Tavern for a quick one and enquire after my old chum, Professor Norman Stone, only to be told tersely that he's been barred. And him a stalwart of the Thatcher Foundation! Will the pub ban affect his prodigious journalistic output?

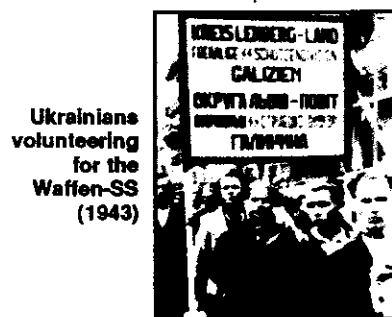
A few years ago, reviewing Simon Wiesenthal's book *Justice Not Vengeance*, Professor Stone warned against bringing Nazi war criminals to justice. 'Do friends of Israel want to face the acrimony with Ukrainians and Balts...?' Apart from the slur on Ukrainians and Balts, I couldn't see why murders in Russia, by criminals now living in Britain, should be assumed to only concern 'friends of Israel' - but I'm no Oxford professor.

In December Stone reassured *Jewish Chronicle* readers that they needn't worry about antisemitism in eastern Europe. 'There is no evidence that the Jewish issue is affecting politics - no sign, for instance, of anti-Israel activity.'

Oxford students were upset last year by an *Evening Standard* article, 'The gays who protest too much', in which Stone warned that if homosexual marriages were legalised 'the only people to get married will be the gays, and the only people to have children will be the Kurdish immigrants'.

Asked about the student union's complaints, the good professor told the *Sunday Telegraph* (26 May 1991): 'They made fools of themselves over the Gulf war. The poll tax is gone and no one gives a toss over student loans. I think they're looking for an issue.' I used to sneer at 'saloon bar pundits' but if pubs are going to bar people like Norman Stone, I'll have to find a new byword for bigotry: like 'Professor of Modern History at Oxford'.

# Protection racket



Ukrainians volunteering for the Waffen-SS (1943)

The War Crimes Act, which became law last year after a five-year campaign, seems



# Slaves to nationalism

**In Yugoslavia far right forces are threatening Jews and other nationalities in the name of national liberation, says Ben Cohen**

A recent edition of *This Week*, Thames' current affairs programme, looked at the British mercenaries who fought for Croatia. Not motivated by money (pay is about £20 a week), some were seeking life-experience, some enjoyed what they called 'soldiering', others simply had nothing better to do.

All in all, the programme was as much an indictment of British society as of war. But one voice did stand out: a young Welsh man from a mining family, whose grandfather's stories about the Spanish Civil War inspired him to look for a contemporary national liberation cause. In Croatia, he claimed, he'd found it. The analogy is, to say the least, inappropriate. It is not just that Croatian independence has attracted the support of reactionaries from Margaret Thatcher to the Vatican. The war that has engulfed the former Yugoslavia is fundamentally an expression – on all sides – of a narrow, vicious nationalism that threatens the entire Balkans.

While most of the left has been very confused about the war, there are those who present Croatia in classic 'national-liberation-struggle' terms. If socialists are to intervene in the debate on the future of the Yugoslav republics, they need to do so honestly. Crucially, they need to do what the EC won't do and the UN can't do: go beyond the nationalist framework.

There are specific reasons why Jewish socialists should be heard. Croatia has become a rallying point for the European far right. Many have joined with HOS, a far-right paramilitary organisation led by former dissident Dobroslav Paraga, which models itself on the war-time Ustase. The ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) is itself immersed in racism and antisemitism. Last year President Franjo Tudjman suggested that 'only' 30,000 had died at the notorious Jasenovac concentration camp, while his Minister for Culture proposed that the camp be turned into a wild bird sanctuary. When the leaders of a state nurtured by the EC imply, following Le Pen in France, that the Holocaust was just one of history's minor details, that alone is cause for concern.

On the surface, talking to people in Yugoslavia is a bit like being caught in a time warp. In Croatia, Serb guerrillas are labelled 'Cetniks'; in Serbia, Croat fighters are called 'Ustase'. Looked at more closely, the focus on the Second World War experience is very relevant, and even explains much of the current conflict.

The last time Croatia was independent was in 1941. Dismantling the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, first

created in 1918, was one of Hitler's key aims. Vojvodina was divided between Hungary and Romania; Montenegro came under Italian control; Kosovo and Macedonia were annexed by Albania; most of Serbia was under the direct occupation of the Germans. The largest territorial unit was the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which was divided into German and Italian spheres of influence. In order to overcome the political and technical problems this posed, the Croat nationalist, Ante Pavelic, was appointed Poglavnik (Führer) of the NDH. On 15 April 1941, Pavelic arrived from Italy in the capital, Zagreb.

Some of the most appalling atrocities of the war were carried out in Croatia. One-third of the NDH's 6.3 million population were Serbs who, alongside Jews and Gypsies, were the main object of Pavelic's 'purification' programme. The Serbs were to be dealt with in three ways: one-third exterminated; one-third deported; one-third converted to Roman Catholicism. Around 700,000 Serbs were slaughtered by Pavelic's Ustase, in a process deemed as 'genocide' by the Nuremberg tribunal. The methods of the Ustase were horrifying. In June 1941, all the male inhabitants of the village of Glina were rounded up into a church which was then set alight. Anyone trying to escape the flames was shot by the Ustase, who waited outside with their guns at the ready. The SS, worried by the growth of the communist-led partisan movement, concluded in a report of February 1942 on Ustase atrocities against Serbs: 'The atrocities perpetrated by the Ustase units against the Orthodox in Croatian territory must be regarded as the most important reason for the blazing up of guerrilla activity. The Ustase units have carried out their atrocities not only against Orthodox males of military age, but in particular in the most bestial fashion, against unarmed old men, women and children...'

Repression of the Jews began in all the Yugoslav republics. The Yellow Star was introduced in 1940, and September 1941 saw the first deportations to concentration camps. By March 1945 only 16,000 of the pre-war Jewish population of 75,000 had survived. Just 2,300 of Belgrade's pre-war Jewish population of 12,000 remained. Some 8,000 of Sarajevo's Jews perished in the camps; before the war, the community numbered 13,000.

In the wake of the war, Yugoslavia was welded together by the victorious partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito. Under communism, Yugoslavia was distinguished by its break in 1948 with Stalin and the Cominform. From the 1950s onwards, the League of Communists (LCY) attempted to introduce a system based on workers' self-management. Yet Yugoslavia's development was always hampered by a weak economy and external debt. By

the time of Tito's death in 1980, the gap in wealth distribution between the north and south of Yugoslavia was rising.

Nationalism was encouraged by the economic crisis. During the 1980s there was constant unrest in Kosovo, an autonomous province of Serbia and one of the poorest parts of the country. It was in Kosovo, where the majority Albanian population has been denied the right to develop its culture and identity, that the first cracks in the Yugoslav federation began to show. The elections of 1990 confirmed that the break-up of Yugoslavia was on the way. Under Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian Socialist Party (SPS), Belgrade firmly resisted any attempt at decentralisation or a looser federal structure. In June 1991 Yugoslav troops unsuccessfully fought Slovenia's secession. There then followed the bloody war in Croatia.

Serbia did launch a war of aggression on Croatia. Milosevic consistently refused proper negotiations, and the Yugoslav army – which is now referred to as the Yugo/Serbo army – backed Serb paramilitaries in Croatia as it is doing now in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Milosevic's commitment has never been to Yugoslavia, but rather to Greater Serbia. Yet such an understanding of the war ignores one decisive fact. Croatian President Tudjman is Milosevic's ideal enemy. Both leaders mirror each other in their national chauvinism and refusal to compromise. Both need each other to justify their actions and maintain power.

Croatia is now an independent state where the far right has flourished. Popular culture has been permeated with a nauseating pro-Germanism; given Germany's role in pushing the EC to recognise Croatian independence on 15 January, it was hardly surprising that a song entitled 'Danke Deutschland' rose to number one in the local charts. The press and TV are tightly controlled, and anything mentioning Germany's role in the Second World War is forbidden. Meanwhile, as a recent Helsinki Watch report showed, there have been numerous assaults on Serbs which have gone unpunished. In Zagreb and Split, Jewish community centres have been attacked. There is also a rumour that members of HOS have daubed the gates of Jasenovac with the slogan, 'Death to Communism! Death to the Jews!'

For many Serbs, it seems as though their old enemies are once more ranged against them: an independent Croatia, Germany and Austria, and the Vatican. Croatia has refused to guarantee the minority rights of its 600,000 Serbs. (It is worth noting in passing that the EC's Badinter Com-

mission, which examined human rights in the Yugoslav republics applying for recognition, concluded that Croatia did not meet the necessary standards, while Macedonia did; the EC has recognised Croatia and not Macedonia.)

Thanks largely to the brutality of the Milosevic regime, and the subtlety of Croatian leaders, international condemnation has focused on Serbia. Certainly Serbia does bear prime responsibility for the war now raging in the mixed Serb-Croat-Muslim republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but Croatia stands to benefit from Serbia's plans. If cantonisation is realised – which can occur in Bosnia only through extreme violence and population transfer – both Zagreb and Belgrade will have consolidated zones of influence in a republic previously renowned for its ethnic tolerance.

For the Jewish community, the war has been a deeply traumatic experience. Nationalist leaders, particularly in Serbia, have attempted to harness

Jewish support. In the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, ceremonies marking Sepharad '92, which commemorates the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, face disruption by the war and by the evacuation of most of the children of the community. Sarajevo's Jewish leaders emphasise that they have refused to take sides. According to Ibrahim Spahic, President of the Sarajevo Centre for Peace, the community has launched



about one-quarter of the peace activities which have mushroomed in the city over the last few months. Even so, the future of Sarajevo's Jews, who number 1,500, is uncertain. Support from Jewish organisations outside has been minuscule, and the Jewish Agency's only interest is in resettling Yugoslav Jews in Israel.

Like the other nationalities, the Jews of Yugoslavia have been the victims of a nationalist war. As Jews, we need to offer them moral and practical support. As socialists involved in fighting racism and fascism elsewhere in Europe, we have a duty to expose the reality of Croatia without backing the Serbian leadership. The memory of war and genocide will never be forgotten, no matter how much Tudjman denies it and Milosevic exploits it. Within that memory is a basic lesson: nationalism, aided by outside intervention, has ripped Yugoslavia apart on two occasions in the last 50 years. Equality and justice will only be possible when its legacy is broken. □

Ben Cohen is one of the editors of *Yugofax*, a critical briefing on the conflict in Yugoslavia, available from 7 Bury Place, London WC1A 2LA. Telephone 071-404 2525. Fax 071-404 1075. He has recently returned from Sarajevo.

# Bound together

**Resurgent nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe is increasingly directed against the Jewish people's historical partners in persecution, the Gypsies, says Toby Sonneman**

Like antisemitism, anti-Gypsyism has been around for centuries. Both peoples have been persecuted in the same areas of the world for remarkably similar reasons. Although Gypsy (Romani) and Jewish origins and cultures are very different, the xenophobic reaction to both non-territorial, distinctive and unfamiliar peoples in Europe linked them together for centuries. Persecution that culminated in the barbaric murder of Gypsies and Jews alike under the Third Reich bound their destinies together inextricably.

An April 1991 survey on democracy and economic reform in Eastern Europe conducted for Freedom House and the American Jewish Committee revealed that antisemitism persists in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but 'Jews are regarded less unfavorably in all three countries than several other groups studied, particularly Gypsies' and 'the strongest negative attitudes by far were expressed toward Gypsies'.

Gypsies, who prefer the name *Roma* or the *Romani* people, have become convenient scapegoats for the ills of Eastern Europe. In Romania particularly, where enslavement of Roma is only a few generations away, prejudice is commonplace and Roma are slandered by accusations of theft, black marketeering, and informing for the *Securitate*.

Romanians expressed the pervasive idea that Roma are genetically inferior, and adoptive parents from the United States frequently report that Romanians are incredulous that they will accept a Romani baby.

Popular racist attitudes are legitimised by the media which portray Roma as generic 'suspects' in the rising tide of crime and black market activity. In April 1991 the editor of *Romania Mare*, Romania's

largest weekly, demanded the expulsion of all Gypsies.

These deeply rooted prejudices have laid the foundation for violence against the Romani population and pogroms, organised by ordinary citizens, often with the encouragement and participation of police and government authorities, have escalated since the June 1990 assault on Roma by miners in Bucharest.

A distinct people, Roma retain their language, *Romani*, and strong cultural traditions. Because the Romani population was fragmented by hostile external factors after their arrival in Europe seven centuries ago, they lack a single cohesive culture, and few generalisations accurately characterise all Romani groups. While Roma in the Balkans were held in slavery from the 1300s until the mid-19th century, the other half of the Romani population dispersed, reaching every country in northern and western Europe by about 1500. The two separate diasporas account for the diversity of Romani groups.

Distinct Romani groups do retain a shared cultural and linguistic core. Together with a strong sense of family and respect for elders, the continuum of Romani cultural identity revolves around a complex system of pollution taboos, derived from India's caste system.

Roma migrated from India a millennium ago, reaching Europe by about 1250. Christian populations, who confused the dark-skinned Roma with Islamic invaders and associated darkness with evil, soon developed suspicions and racial prejudices. By the 1600s, laws in Germany, Finland and England made it a hanging offence simply to be born a Gypsy.

Methodical persecution of Gypsies in Germany began with the establishment of the Central Office for Fighting the Gypsy Nuisance in Munich in 1899. By the time Hitler came to power in 1933, the Romani population was under constant surveillance and anti-Romani laws were already well entrenched. From 1934 onwards, numbers of German Roma and

Sinti Gypsies were sent to camps at Dachau, Diselstrasse, Mahrzan and Vennhausen to be sterilised by injection or castration.

In 1935 the Nuremberg Law for the Protection of Blood and Honour made unions between Gypsies and non-Gypsies illegal, and a party statement issued in the same year read, '...only Jews and Gypsies come under consideration as an alien people'.

'Clean up week', during which hundreds of Gypsies were brutally herded together and arrested, took place during 12-18 June 1938. In the same year, Nazi race scientists determined that if two of an individual's great-great-grandparents were even part Gypsy, he or she had too much 'Gypsy blood'. This categorisation was twice as strict as for Jews.

In 1939, Johannes Behrendt, speaking for the Nazi party, called for 'elimination without hesitation' of the Romani population. Gypsies began to be transported to concentration camps in Berlin and Poland. In the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France, Italy and the Balkans, large-scale roundups were in effect by 1943. By April 1943, over 10,000 Sinti and Rom were incarcerated in Sachsenhausen for later extermination. Thirty thousand Gypsies deported to Poland perished in the death camps of Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor and Majdanek. On 1 August 1944, four thousand Roma were murdered in Auschwitz in a single night.

Although the total number of Roma who perished was smaller than the number of Jews, losses to the Romani people were proportionately similar and possibly greater. The independent findings of several scholars, mainly in Germany, have placed the total losses between 1,200,000 and 1,500,000.

After the war, no 'Promised Land' awaited the survivors; no government or humanitarian organisation attempted to reorient them. Re-establishing themselves in the same nations that had collaborated in their destruction, Romani survivors found few non-Gypsies who cared to hear their story. No invitations were extended to Roma to testify at the war crime tribunals. The first trial for wartime crimes against Roma, that of Ernst August Koenig, accused of beating his victims to death in Auschwitz, did not take place until December 1990. Few survivors received reparations – and then only after years of waiting and where there were many non-Gypsy witnesses.

The defeat of the Nazis did not end the deportation, sterilisation and extermination of Roma. In 1976, a government proposal in Czechoslovakia recommended sterilisation of the Romani population as an act of 'socialistic humanity'. As recently as 1981, police systematically rounded up and expelled Roma in Poland, abandoning them at sea.

The Communist regimes of Eastern Europe

pressured Roma to assimilate – an attempt to destroy the Romani people in what Bulgarian Gypsy leader Manush Romanov describes as 'cultural and ethnic genocide'.

Bulgaria was typical. In the early 1960s, Roma were forced to change their names from Turkish to Bulgarian names. Romani cultural institutions, such as the Gypsy Theatre and Gypsy orchestras, were prohibited. Roma were fined for playing Gypsy music and prohibited by some local authorities from speaking Romani in public. Beginning in 1959 and continuing through the 1980s, the government dispersed Gypsies living in compact Romani communities to Bulgarian communities.



Caricature from a recent Bulgarian Socialist Party election poster depicting Gypsies and Turks advancing under banners of democracy

Consistent with its bitter legacy of Romani enslavement, Romania is the most flagrant violator of human rights for Gypsies, both before and after Ceaucescu's overthrow. The Ceaucescu regime denied Roma the rights to graze animals and camp – rights that were protected by law before 1939. Although up to 80% of Gypsies in Romania led a nomadic life before 1945, now only 3% are still nomadic.

In 1977, the Romanian Communist Party initiated a programme for social integration, forcibly breaking up families and relocating individuals. Razing of Romani villages was planned; pending this action, the government halted all services such as water, electricity, schooling and medical care.

Romania is still wrapped in the shroud of Ceaucescu's grim legacy. Dismal orphanages throughout the country house over 120,000 children – innocent victims of a population plan to create a large, uneducated labour force. By denying access to birth control and abortions, forcibly requiring

pregnancy tests, and giving tax incentives for more children, Ceaucescu sought to swell Romania's workforce. Destitute parents, unable to feed so many children, had to relinquish them to state institutions, where they suffer neglect and abuse.

Three-quarters of these children are Gypsies, though they constitute only 10-15% of the population. The disproportionate number of Romani children is a symptom of the persecution, says Dr Ian Hancock, International Romani Union representative at the UN. 'For anyone familiar with Romani culture, the fierce devotion with which Gypsy parents regard their children is no revelation, and the emotional struggle facing those parents who surrender their children to strangers, rather than letting them grow up in contemporary Romanian society where they face persecution and murder, is agonising.'

Although education is available to Gypsy children, parents consistently stated that their children were labelled as either stupid or slow learners, put in the back of the class and ignored by teachers. As a result of these attitudes, and the effect of seasonal travel, many Romani children don't attend school.

Discrimination in employment follows the same pattern. Gypsies are denied employment on the sole basis of their ethnic identity. In the reform process, Gypsies have been the first to lose jobs in mass lay-offs. Living in abject poverty, many Gypsies have resorted to begging, subsistence theft, and black market activity to survive, reinforcing ancient stereotypes and prejudices.

In Romania, brutality against Roma followed a particularly violent revolution. When miners were called in to put down anti-government demonstrations in Bucharest in June 1990, Romanian citizens and uniformed police led miners to Gypsy neighbourhoods, where they looted homes and beat residents. Since these events, which received scant media attention, organised pogroms are escalating.

Perhaps no group of people held higher hopes for the democratically-elected National Salvation Front than the Roma. But by June 1990 these hopes had turned to dust. After the miners' savage attack, Prime Minister Petre Roman held a press conference in which he justified the miners' actions by saying the Gypsies were 'instruments of fascist rebellion' during the Second World War. Roma, who remember only too well the mass murders and deportations of their people under Antonescu's fascist dictatorship from 1940-1944, were outraged.

The six Gypsy political parties are united under the umbrella group, Democratic Union of Roma, but they have not won any elections. One Gypsy representative was appointed to Parliament, which requires one representative for each minority, but there are no other Gypsies in higher levels of government.

The Peasant and the Liberal parties in Romania,

which claim to support minority issues, have been slow to condemn the violence towards the Romani minority. Until recently, the assaults were ignored by the government as well. However, after a series of assaults, a commission to investigate the attacks was formed but declined to prosecute participants in the violence.

In Hungary, only the Free Democrats include Gypsies in their party platform, and one Free Democratic supporter, a veteran dissident, speculated that support for the Roma might be 'the kiss of death for the party'. In Bulgaria, not a single party defends the interests of the Gypsies, and Gypsies are prohibited from forming their own parties.

In the disintegrating multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia, thousands of Gypsies have been forcibly prevented from voting in elections. In Hungary, walls are defaced with the slogan 'OMC', which stands for 'Oldd Meg A Cigányt', or 'Kill the Gypsy', and a pop song by the group Mosoly proclaims, 'I will exterminate all Gypsies, adults and children...' In Czechoslovakia, Romani children are afraid to go to school because skinhead street gangs roam the streets hunting down Gypsies and beating them up.

Desperate to escape oppression and destitution, Roma are streaming out of Romania and other Eastern European countries to seek asylum in Western Europe, particularly Germany. An estimated 80,000 Gypsies have entered Germany over the last two years, mainly from Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland and the USSR.

In the 1950s and '60s, hundreds of thousands of Turkish workers came to help rebuild the war-torn nation. Although the Turks are still treated as second-class citizens, they are settled and organised. In contrast, the newly arrived Gypsy families have nowhere to live, are in miserable health, impoverished and frequently illiterate. They have little in common with the 60,000 more integrated and affluent Gypsy families who have lived in Germany since the 1950s or earlier.

Germany's liberal asylum laws were an attempt to distinguish the West German democracy from its Nazi predecessor. Although many Gypsies claim German citizenship on the grounds that they were forcibly deported during the Second World War, the German government denies their claims because they lack documentation. Roma usually apply for political asylum but, since Gypsies have been tormented for racial rather than political reasons, they rarely qualify. Many in Germany and Austria have been deported, and Czechoslovakia no longer allows Romanian refugees to pass through on the way to Germany.

A Gypsy woman originally from Germany, who now lives in the United States, said: 'In Germany everybody knows you are a Sinti.' Her family, settled in Munich for over 400 years, had found

ways to live comfortably through independent businesses. Although subject to discrimination, they manage to coexist with 'ethnic Germans'.

The same is not true for the recent immigrants. Germany's harsh treatment of the Romani refugees is eerily reminiscent of its gruesome history. In Saarland, several thousand newly arrived Gypsies were rounded up and put in an overcrowded camp surrounded by barbed wire.

Rudko Kawczynski, chairman of Germany's Rom and Sinti Union, points out that Germany has stubbornly refused to implement the EEC resolutions calling for settlement rights for travelling and stateless Gypsies.

The critical situation of Gypsies in Europe has strengthened their political organisation internationally. In 1971, the International Gypsy Committee organised the first World Romani Congress near London, with representatives from 21 countries. The Second World Congress in Geneva in 1978 gave rise to the International Romani Union, linking over 70 regional and national Romani organisations in 28 countries. Gaining United Nations approval in 1979 and UNICEF approval in 1986, the International Romani Union organised the Third Congress in 1981 in Germany and the Fourth International Congress in April 1990 in Poland.

The most recent Congress, for the first time, was carried out primarily in the Romani language, and included for the first time delegations from Eastern Europe, arriving fresh from the ferment of revolution. But these achievements also brought internal tensions, as delegates from Eastern Europe debated ideology and strategy with West German delegations.

Despite differences, the Congress elected officers and formed special focus commissions to work on issues such as language standardisation, war crime

reparations, the compilation of an exhaustive Romani encyclopaedia, and addressing the dangers facing Roma in Eastern Europe.

Now the major organisation representing Roma, the International Romani Union, seeks reunification of long-divided Romani groups, recognition as a distinct population with a legitimate history, culture and language, and self-determination as a nation without geographic territory. These goals have never been more urgent or more critical, as the Romani Union challenges the forces of assimilation and prejudice, and seeks improvements in the situation of Roma in Eastern Europe.

I am frequently asked why I have such a strong feeling of compassion for the Romani people. Although my answer is deeply personal, I feel that the ties that bound our peoples together in the Holocaust are, if not eternal, at least historically profound.

My father escaped from Nazi Germany in 1939, but many of my relatives were murdered in the Holocaust. Like so many other Jews, they suffered and died next to Roma. I cannot forget this bond, even though it is a generation behind me. And I believe that the bond between the Jewish and Romani peoples extends far beyond my personal family connection.

I found this feeling mirrored when I met a Sinti Holocaust survivor who wore a gold Star of David on a chain around her neck, next to a cross. 'For my Jewish friends who died in the concentration camps,' she explained to me simply. She wasn't referring to specific Jewish friends, but to all the Jews who died with her people. I wished only that my people could feel that same kind of compassion toward the Roma, as they face more prejudice and violence in Eastern Europe. For many reasons, past, present and future, both our peoples should know we are not alone. □

## FIFTH COLUMN

**Be part of the Fifth Column.** Deadline for listings in the next issue of *Jewish Socialist* is 30 JULY. Please keep listings as brief as possible (50 words max) and send them to *Jewish Socialist*, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

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

**Manchester Jewish Socialists** Contact Adrienne on 0204-591460.

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

**Norwich Jewish Socialists' Group** Write to PO Box 73, Norwich.

**Red Rabbi** offers services: for naming ceremonies; secular bat/bar mitzvah

celebrations; commitment ceremonies; weddings; divorces; funerals; as well as counselling and home tutoring - all with an egalitarian, humanistic and progressive approach. No job too small! Fees negotiable. Phone Michael Feinberg on 081-349 3236.

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

**Palestine Solidarity Campaign** welcomes new members at London Branch meetings on the third Tuesday of every month. Next meeting 7.30pm on 16 June at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube). Further information from PSC, BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX.

**The Israeli elections Confused?** Or can you put everyone straight? Join in the discussion with Greville Janner MP, June Jacobs, Henri Stelman, a Palestinian representative and many more, with Asger Wallfish and Eric Silver via SKY-CNN satellite link from Israel. At the New Synagogue, 39 Essexborough Road, Harrow, Middlesex, 8.30pm on 23 June. Admission £5 or £3.50 (concs).

**Are they taking over?** The rise of the Lubavitch in the Jewish community, and Hasidism: Has peace got a chance? The Israeli elections and a report on the Walk for a Peaceful Future in the Middle East. Two forthcoming meetings of the London Branch of the Jewish Socialists' Group in June. Further details from JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.



# Equal rites

In letters to each other Paul Collins and Karen Merkel give personal thoughts on living political lives, and explore how secular Jews, socialists and activists commemorate and deal with death.

Dear Karen,

So. Here we go... Not the demise of the historic miners' strike from neglect by the labour movement. Alternative rites of passage. Personal thoughts for collective action. Why do such large numbers, including Jews, dismiss single experience as 'selfism'? Perhaps the failure to link radicalism with individuals speeded its decline and omission from the general election campaign?

First, the last rites. Catholic with a small 'c' - not those from a faith which demonstrates no loyalty to gay priests and raped girls needing abortions.

It may appear strange to some readers that our correspondence exchange concerns the end of life, given your newish childbirth (mazeltov). However, people who have just reproduced are often said to experience paradoxical obsession with mortality. Death is supposed to be the great leveller. Remember the man who spotted a poor woman's flower-covered grave? 'Now that's what I call living,' he said.

Many Jews, like me, acknowledge the looming prospect of the passing of one or both of their parents. The most telling comment from those who have already suffered this grief describes a double trauma. Bad enough to lose a loved one. Their ordeal was rendered more debilitating through family pressures denying the wish for a meaningful funeral.

Reinforced identification with this frustration came last February on the anniversary of the death of my aunt Rae (Rachel). With my grandmother, parents and brothers, Rae shared our small, rented home in London's East End, which lacked a bathroom and indoor toilet. Daytime, she worked in a clothing sweatshop and by night helped raise her sister's three sons. Lonely after divorce, Rae showed total commitment to her nephews. In particular, this was true with food served at every hour for young boys conditioned by their father to be sexist at home and outside.

Her sadness mirrored the low status of childless and unmarried (my computer suggested 'unarmed' as the alternative) older women - not least in the Jewish community. But my recollection of Rae also evokes a wry humour which some believe she enabled me to develop. My latent appreciation of women's strengths and talents was planted in observing her own resilience against the odds. And Rae - a pianist who once played at the famous Guildhall in the City - encouraged my anti-racism with her affection for black musicians Louis Armstrong and Winifred Attwell. Yet her burial was symbolic for its concealment of her virtues under the mask of Jewish orthodoxy. Doubtless Rokhele - the Yiddish name for her on a Lithuanian mother's lips - whirled in the grave. Countless years' subscriptions to a synagogue brought a Hebrew-only service and crass demands for tips from cemetery staff.

Two recent examples stressed this cursory sendoff is by no means inevitable. Both involved female socialists, whose dependants and friends defied convention to mark their worth amid premature departure. One was novelist Angela Carter - her verdict on Tory rule since 1979 was 'a trip to hell in a hand basket'. Mishpokhe and companions hired a favourite cinema and presented the Desert Island Discs radio programme she was due to record. At the cremation of the Jewish Debby Hall, her left activism was celebrated as fellow anti-apartheid campaigners sang the African nationalist anthem.

Religious despatch? How can this be reconciled with paying last respects? Where there's a will - or without one - there must be another way. During our existence, we should participate fully in the struggle for justice and equality. Those of us, though, who advocate socialist planning might start arranging their ideal parting shot. Nu?

Fondest wishes,



Dear Paul,

I'm replying to you on April Fools' Day - quite a fitting date to attempt to grapple with this terrain. I can almost hear the yawns as the dreaded personal and political stuff rears its ugly head again. I don't believe it has to be touchy feely though. (Not that I mind a bit of 't and f' on a good night!) So, onto my 'personal thoughts for collective action' - good phrase that, Paul! I don't believe that anger over injustices is the only emotion activists and comrades feel. I know it isn't - I've been there when the laughter has collapsed meetings. I've also been there when many people have agreed that our action must be seen as cultural too.

So, what are the implications of this? I believe that there are wider issues of celebration. These have to take on in some respects the other concerns that motivate us - love, sex, birth, death. As you say, 'looming prospects of death face us all'. Why then is it so impossible to imagine that we could actually take some control over the commemorations and celebrations of the lives of our loved ones? I have a nasty feeling that for many the Jewish rituals take over with such implacable force that any notion of celebrating that which has been different remains only a notion. So, we are left with lives that are spent struggling to exert change - ending by seeming to return to the fold.

Your Auntie Rae is one of hundreds who have been so steeped in but also let down by 'the Jewish experience'. I have a very close family friend who fought and campaigned for unionisation and then women's union membership within the Civil Service. She too has never married and as her very old age has arrived, she has been increasingly and now totally ignored. Ignored by socialists and Jews alike - I can only presume because her infirmities made her immobile and her rather proud spinsterhood made her threatening. And yet her life has been one of quiet passion, consummated in ways that are too complex to describe or consider at Party meetings and friendship clubs.

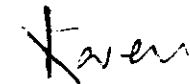
I've never been comfortable with the idea of 'alternative' ceremonies, too hidebound I suppose. I confess to attending and witnessing at a 'wedding' in a forest, and in old 70s Street Theatre days to letting off whatever the collective pronoun for white pigeons is at naming ceremonies. I've also been to a socialist/humanist birth celebration with red cakes and poems. And yet the thought of my Pyrotechnician partner creating a fiery display to celebrate the birth of our baby made me cringe with embarrassment. Why though? I suppose I've never been to an alternative celebration of these bits of the passage that haven't at the end of the day left me thinking they were twee, poor copies and ultimately and, perhaps cruelly, wishing people hadn't bothered. (Not that I'm arguing for a wedding dress, although I probably would have liked the party!)

So, what about the other end - the dispatch bit? I have to say I'm writing all this as someone who has, in fact, been 'satisfied' and comforted by Jewish burial rites and rituals. But, more importantly, I've also been as satisfied by secular memorials of comrades and more recently and most significantly of people dying from AIDS. It seems to me that we have to consider these secular events as meaningful funerals in a wider context. The common elements these occasions have had - have been that people have died young, they have been operating against the system and in some senses outside of it. They have died in adversity and that hardship has made them brave. People have attended with respect, sadness and even awe and have wanted to, in some way, make sure that those lives have counted.

Each event I have attended has taken a familiar framework - the spoken testimony, eulogy, poem, music and quiet. The most important facet, I believe, has been that they have been personal. As you in fact suggest, people (usually socialists) have come together to plan these events in minute detail. In so doing, they are actually personalising what have been political lives but doing so in order for others to share in those achievements.

That was what your Auntie Rae needed - but how could you have done that? In the context of her probably contributing to her own burial costs and so on, it is highly unlikely that you would have been able to remove yourself from your own grief to make a fuss at Woburn House, or wherever. I suppose what I am saying is that I believe there is a need for a kind of collectivism around deaths, where are you allowed to experience the pain whilst others organise to help you to celebrate the person's life in the most appropriate way possible.

QED really, Nu?



More and more people are questioning the ritual of circumcision, but this has provoked defensive rather than convincing responses from the religious establishment. *Jewish Socialist* believes it is in the interests of individuals and the community as a whole to explore and discuss the issues openly, publicly and with intellectual honesty. On these pages we look at three aspects of the debate.

### Choice, not submission

Circumcision, the symbol, supposedly, of the covenant between God and the Jews, is increasingly being questioned within the Jewish community. Since we published 'Circumcision: tradition or coercion?' (*JS* 16, Spring 1989), the debate has continued, both informally and publicly. Prospective parents have discovered that they are entitled to take their own decision about whether or not to have their sons circumcised; that they do not have to be coerced or conned into it.

The debate itself is seen as a challenge not only to the religious establishment, but also to the social cohesiveness of the Jewish community. It is the assertion that questioning the tradition will destroy the Jewish people, rather than the claimed divinity of the commandment, which sanctions the massive pressure on parents to agree to a ritual

# Fighting the cuts

which contradicts their responsibility to protect their baby from injury.

People are reluctant to express their feelings publicly for fear of exposing the community to accusations of barbarism and primitive practices. But they are not convinced that a Jewish future rests on baby boys being submitted to a painful ritual. Their concerns about the meaning of and justification for circumcision are forcing even the *Jewish Chronicle* to take up the debate. An article by Peter Baker (27 March 1992) typifies the classic arguments – medical, social and theological – used to pressurise parents into conforming. It quotes Dr Morris Sifman, medical officer for the Initiation Society, the organisation which registers orthodox *mohelim* (men who perform circumcision). He 'doesn't deny that circumcision causes pain, but points out that "many people have remarked that they have noticed no change in the tone of the baby's crying when the actual cut is made"'. (My own experience was that my babies were quiet and content before they were circumcised, and screaming, frightened and ashen afterwards. I have to admit that I did not register whether or not their screams changed in tone.)

The article argues that 'everything

is done to minimise any discomfort for the child', which must be the case since, Dr Sifman says, 'There are few people in the world who are more concerned than Jews for their children's welfare, or more concerned to save them from suffering.' 'Everything', apparently, does not include leaving their penises intact.

After a brief excursion into the medical benefits, Dr Sifman invokes the spectre of the Final Solution. Jews who decide not to circumcise their sons are 'guilty of a bigger Holocaust than Hitler caused because over the generations they have killed off the Jewishness of more Jews'. If there's any sacrilege here, it's against the victims of the Nazis whose memory is being cynically used to censor debate and stifle the worries of thinking Jews.

We will not be threatened into silence. We will not suppress our fears. We would all be relieved if the practice could be justified on social, or even religious, grounds as a symbol of Jewish identity, and on medical grounds as improving a child's health. Threatening us with guilt as great as Hitler's merely undermines confidence in the existence of any such justifications.

JULIA BARD

### Medical myths

Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK circumcise their sons, almost invariably, for religious and not medical reasons. It is a ritual, a ceremony, not an operation. Nevertheless, whenever the practice of ritual circumcision is criticised today, so-called medical arguments form part of its defence. These arguments are very recent defences of a very ancient practice, and as such they constitute postfacto rationalisations, not the real reasons for the practice. However, it is necessary and possible to answer these arguments on their own turf – on medical grounds.

The main medical argument for circumcision is the statistical finding that the female partners of circumcised men have a far lower incidence of cervical cancer (almost zero) than the female partners of uncircumcised men. Similarly, cancer of the penis, though very rare anyway, is virtually unheard of among circumcised men. I do not dispute these facts, but I think they bear close scrutiny and the

application of some biological common sense to the statistics.

There is a substance secreted on to the surface of the penis, which goes by the unfortunate name of smegma. Smegma, the theory says, can be carcinogenic (cancer causing) and can accumulate under the foreskin; then, when introduced into a woman's body during intercourse, it increases her risk of cervical cancer. This theory immediately raises two questions: firstly, how can a natural secretion of the human body, such as sweat, tears or smegma, be carcinogenic? Secondly, why does it accumulate?

To take the first question first: if you live in the polluted 'civilised' worlds, and especially if you work in a mine or factory with toxic chemicals, then these pollutants enter your body through your mouth, nose and skin, to dissolve and emerge in body fluids such as sweat, grease, breast milk – and smegma. Also, smegma can become indirectly carcinogenic if it carries a viral infection such as genital

herpes or warts, which can be sexually transmitted to a woman. Such viral infections in women have been linked to the development of cervical cancer.

All this applies only if the smegma remains on the penis, 'trapped' under the foreskin. Which leads to our second question: why does the smegma accumulate? I'll answer with a not-entirely-serious analogy. If a person never ever washed behind their ears, all sorts of dirt would accumulate there. It might set up an infection, and the chronic irritation might, just conceivably, lead to cancer. Such a tragedy could, of course, be prevented, by cutting off the ears at birth. A simpler alternative would be to wash regularly behind the ears.

The foreskin of the penis is retractable by the time a boy is about four years old. If uncircumcised boys were taught to retract it in the bath and simply wash underneath it, there would be no accumulation of smegma. This is an elementary piece of male hygiene, and I suspect that if it became

### A considered decision

*Two parents speak about the issues facing them*

One of the unrecognised effects of circumcision is on parents' feelings during pregnancy. During the second half of Sharon's pregnancy, we knew that we were going to have a boy: we asked for the amniocentesis result because we wanted to have more than a few days to think about a *bris* (circumcision). We spent those months alternately thinking about nothing else or avoiding the issue completely, and swinging wildly between thinking we would or would not have it done. The issue cast a shadow over the whole period, but having the time to think helped us to reach a decision we felt happy with.

In the end we came to the same decision, though via different paths.

Stephen I was initially pro-circumcision. I couldn't see what all the fuss was about, although I was always clear that it must be painful. A difficult discussion with my parents left me confused: their vehement insistence that it did not hurt the child made me more critical of the pro-circumcision arguments. Being completely irreligious, I began to ask why I should suddenly enter into a religious ritual with no meaning to

me – I began to feel religiously coerced. For me, the main point in favour of circumcision has been the likely discrimination against our son, Alexander, from other Jews, and in particular the question of whether he can get married (should he want to, God forbid) in *shul*. (This is apparently possible in a reform *shul*.)

Sharon I was always against circumcision, especially once I felt assured that it has no significant health advantages for men or women. I never felt that Alexander's Jewish identity would be in any danger from his being uncircumcised. However, I felt considerable obligation to my father, who had been very supportive to me, and I knew he would feel strongly that Alexander should be circumcised. I didn't feel able to resist his wishes and thus cause him further suffering; and I wasn't sure at that stage that circumcision was necessarily painful.

After Alexander was born, the decision was in some ways quite simple.

Stephen I was sitting in a café near the hospital, thinking about Alexander lying in his cot asleep. He was a very beautiful child from the moment he was born, with a definite personality – I already felt attached to him. The idea of some man coming anywhere near his penis with a sharp

knife was simply too outrageous to contemplate. He was, and is, absolutely fine. All the intellectual arguments, pro and con, pale into insignificance besides this simple emotional response.

Sharon After a pain free pregnancy, the labour was the most traumatically painful experience of my life. Afterwards I needed stitches, and was very sore. The final straw was that breastfeeding was a nightmare of agony. After a couple of days of all this pain, I was certain that I could not take any more. I was simply not prepared to submit my miraculously perfect baby to an unnecessary medical intervention.

When we told our parents there were tears, but this was quite short-lived. They still feel we have made a dreadful mistake, but they are just not the sort of people who would let this get in the way of their relationship with the grandson they have been awaiting for years.

When Alexander was three months old we had a welcoming party for him, which included a ceremony with some Jewish content. We chose what felt right for us, despite our parents' ambivalence. The party was not a substitute for a *bris*, since a *bris* cannot be seen as a welcoming occasion.

We were relatively lucky in having some support from friends to help us think about circumcision rationally. For many prospective parents, facing the decision alone, with extreme pressure from both family and community, it must be very hard to think about it clearly. A rational decision can be either for or against; what matters is how the feelings and arguments are worked through. It is important not to wait until after the birth to discuss it, because then it is impossible to think about the issues with any clarity.

*We would be very happy to talk to any parents about the decision and/or ongoing issues. Ideally we would like to set up a network of parents to support each other. Please write to: Sharon and Stephen, c/o JATC, PO Box 175, London N4.*

**Jewish Socialist would welcome further contributions to this debate. Write to us at Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX**

DR JENNY GOODMAN



# Behind the Bush

**Are the politics of Pat Buchanan so radically different from those of George Bush? As the American Presidential elections draw nearer, Brad Lander takes a look at Republican ideology.**

'On the Buchanan campaign trail, we are watching the emergence of a distinctive American kind of fascism,' announced Martin Walker in *The Guardian* (9 March 1992), 'as he abandons the ideology of conservatism [and] moves into territory that is eerily familiar.' The same line was taken by the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe, who initiated a Campaign to Stop Buchanan following on their Campaign to Stop Le Pen. It is true that Buchanan preaches a thinly-veiled, populist racism, neo-isolationism and homophobia, and that his journalistic history is peppered with antisemitism. His surprising, though limited, success in the Republican primary points forcefully to much of what's wrong in American politics and society. However, to label this a new American fascism is on the one hand to misread his support by equating US politics too easily with those of Europe, and on the other to underestimate the extent to which Buchanan is, as he loudly claims to be, a true heir to the politics of Reaganism. The news from the Republican primary is thus both not as bad and also much worse than it might seem.

First, it is important not to misread the support Buchanan has been getting: his voters tend to be neither more conservative nor more fundamentalist than Bush's. In Massachusetts, Bush and Buchanan voters labelled themselves in identical political terms (54% conservative, 46% liberal). And in Florida 40% of Buchanan's voters say they will vote for whatever Democrat runs against Bush in November. I have no love for Bill Clinton, but he's not a fascist. In general, Buchanan's voters tend to be those white, working class supporters of Reagan who have suffered most in the recession. They are not voting for anything new, but instead for what they thought they had been voting for in Reagan. Buchanan has not become an advocate of populist state intervention overnight; but he is caught between his new Right, Reaganite ideology and hurting Reagan supporters. Yes, Buchanan is more openly a populist racist and homophobe; and even conservative American columnist William Safire considers him antisemitic. But a shift to slightly more explicit code words does not constitute a new fascism.

However, it is precisely the fact that his racism,

antisemitism and homophobia are considered so incidental – both to those who support him and to those Republicans who oppose him – that reveals what is truly frightening. Only one Republican of any prominence (Governor Williams of California) has directly attacked him on these issues; and none will complain in the general election when Bush makes only slightly more subtle, race-baiting adverts. What the US has seen in the last 12 years is a broad shift in the ground of racism – particularly, but not confined to, the Republican party. While David Duke says it loudly and Bush a bit more subtly, playing the 'race and values' card has become absolutely central to Republican politics.

African-American and Latino groups, as well as feminist, reproductive rights, and gay and lesbian activists, have not focused upon attacking Buchanan because they are staggering under the continued barrage of Reagan and Bush legislation. Blacks and Latinos struggle against the perpetuation of the real racial terror of highly racialised poverty on a scale unlike anything in Great Britain, with staggering rates of unemployment, poverty, crime, and drug abuse and violence. The policies of Reagan and Bush have not only exacerbated this terror, but simultaneously managed to 'blame the victims' for their own plight and that of the country at large.

And feminist and civil rights activists now face decades with a Reagan-Bush appointed Supreme Court as conservative and interventionist as anything Buchanan could imagine (the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, which legalised abortion, is expected to come from the Court this summer). The primary threat of an American Republic of Gilead (Margaret Atwood's vision of a fundamentalist Christian American state) comes not from the immediate bang of Buchanan's campaign, but from the continued legitimisation of the policies of Reagan and Bush. Yes, we need to denounce Buchanan loudly. But in the process we must not help Bush distinguish himself from Buchanan's 'ugliness', only to veer further to the right if he's re-elected.

## THE JEWISH RESPONSE

This is a bizarre election for the American Jewish community. Despite a gradual movement to the right over the last 15 years (though at a significantly slower rate than almost every other group except African-Americans), I believe a larger majority will vote for Clinton than for any Democrat since Roosevelt, who took more than 80% of the Jewish vote. But I suspect this has less

to do with their maintained progressivism or abhorrence for Bush's racism than with the peculiar history through which the traditional importance of Jewish support for Democrats has led to consistent Democratic support for Israel. Every Democratic candidate promised to pass loan guarantees with little or no stipulation. Ironically, the one thing which Bush has done which Jewish socialists might actually support (albeit for reasons very different from ours), 'getting tough' with Israel on the issue of settlements in the Occupied Territories, will be a central reason why many Jews won't vote for him.

To be fair, American Jews, as individuals and as a community, remain quite vocal in their opposition to racism. In recent months many Jewish groups have written and even demonstrated against not only Buchanan but also David Duke. Some Jewish leaders see in this kind of antiracism a possibility of healing the 'black-Jewish rift' of recent years.

However, their desire to build an antiracism which paints Buchanan and Duke as qualitatively different from Reagan or Bush is doomed to fail. Most American Jews, especially the so-called leadership, remain stuck with the antiracism of the 1960s, an epic struggle in which Jews played an important role. But the racism of the 1990s has subtly and structurally changed from that of the 1960s. What we need now is an antiracism which can adequately fight not only the coded racism of Bush's commercials, but the persistent, increasing racialisation of poverty. American Jewish struggles against racism must not become a centrist attempt to equate and exile overt racists (respectable or otherwise) like Duke, Buchanan and Louis Farrakhan – and then leave a level playing field for Bush and Clinton. Racial justice lies also in revealing and reversing the policies of Reagan and Bush, not in helping the president to demonstrate that his hands are clean. □

## A POSTSCRIPT ON THE DEMOCRATS

*Don't be fooled by the fact that Bill Clinton's votes are coming from the 'Franklin D Roosevelt coalition' of working class white and African-Americans, into believing that he has anything like FDR politics. He is neither pro-trades union nor antiracism. His idea of 'equal opportunities' is refusing to grant a stay of execution to a black American condemned to die – already lobotomised when he shot himself in the head after murdering his victim – because the previous two executed criminals in Arkansas had been white ... and heaven forbid Clinton be seen as a supporter of 'positive action' life-granting. He continues to support the death penalty, even in the light of a recent Supreme Court investigation which reveals, yet again, that there is substantial discrimination against blacks and Latinos at every step in the judicial process along the way to a death sentence. He has supported right-to-work legislation, backed strike breakers, and kept Arkansas one of the three worst states in which to work.*

*True, American workers (including minorities) were wise to oppose Paul Tsongas, who promised continued help to their employers rather than to them after a decade in which two-thirds of the economic growth went to the top 1% of households. And they cannot be faulted for not supporting Tom Harkin, the only candidate with historic support for labour – he ran a truly lacklustre campaign and systematically refused to allow activists to play any role, relying instead on political hacks. Mostly, working class Democrats want Bush out, and like many others they think that Clinton is the candidate who can accomplish this. Nonetheless, there is every reason to suspect that Clinton will betray this 'FDR coalition' as soon as he's in office. He promises to provide economic support for the middle class rather than the upper class who have fared so well under Reaganbush; but he will leave the bottom third literally out in the cold, without even decent national health care for their pneumonia.*

## Don't ask the Rabbi

which could be recited after the services:

Dear Rabbi,  
I was saddened by the news of the break-up of the marriage between the Duke and Duchess of York. It seems only yesterday we added her name to the board in our synagogue which lists all the members of the Royal Family for blessing. Should we mention her name in our traditional blessing?

THE RABBI REPLIES:  
I'm sure I speak for all Jews of Britain when I say that this separation is a tragedy not just for Her Majesty and the Duke of York – but particularly for the children Princess Armani and Princess Marbella. As the Royal Family continues to grow I suggest an abbreviated blessing

'We ask you Lord to bless the government of Great Britain. We thank them for allowing us to stay in this country and not placing us in concentration camps. In return we are happy to be depicted throughout the media as money-grabbing and greedy. And please bless each and every member of the Royal Family.'

# The Empire strikes back

**Jews in the Ottoman Empire welcomed the ideals of the Young Turk movement. However, as John Bunzl recounts, the practice did not always live up to the theory.**

The Ottoman Empire welcomed many of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1496. These 'Sefardim' transformed many existing Jewish communities which had previously spoken Greek. By 1498 Ladino-speaking Sefardim had become the majority of the Jewish community in Istanbul. As the Ottoman authorities welcomed the Jewish influx, the Jews themselves became so pro-Ottoman that they overlooked the hardships they had to share with other parts of the population. Mostly Jews had both their own courts, which functioned according to Halachah, and their own system of taxation. The community then paid the money over to the state. This form of autonomy gave the leadership of the community extensive power over its members. The Jews became part of the Millet system, which governed relations between non-Muslim minorities and the state. Though originally conceived as a way of dealing with religious communities, in the 19th century the Millets, under growing European influence, gradually became 'nations'.

Sefardim were the only non-Muslim community that had become part of the Ottoman Empire voluntarily. They soon lost their European orientation and role of mediator to their Christian competitors. They replaced the Roman script of Ladino with Hebrew script. With reduced immigration from the Iberian peninsula, they lost demo-

graphically compared to the Christian communities from whom antisemitic accusations came.

Rivalry became more pronounced in the 19th and 20th centuries with the development of bourgeoisies in connection with European colonial powers. Foreign, Christian and, to a lesser extent, Jewish communities benefited from the new arrangement. They could improve their material position, their education and their professional skills. Their political demands now went beyond their second-class *dhimmi* status and, in 1856, individual equality was granted to all citizens. This was, however, seen as a threat to the privileges of the Christian minorities who continued to profit from European penetration into the Ottoman Empire.

The Young Turks, a mostly middle-class movement, proposed reforms in order to preserve the empire and transform it into a constitutional, independent state. In Salonica they were organised as the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). This brought about the 1908 revolution and the consequent downfall of Sultan Abd Al Hamid II. Their original vision of Ottomanism as a new 'nation' consisting of all peoples and religions residing in the empire did not survive counter-revolution and other difficulties with the non-Turkish, non-Muslim sections of the population. After 1909 it became a Turkish nationalist movement

oppressing minorities. This was especially the case after the takeover of Enver Pascha in 1913. However, not all minorities were affected in the same way.

The Greek minority was not interested in Ottomanism or, much less, Turkish revival. They were either loyal to Athens or to the idea of restoring the Byzantine empire. This led to clashes with the Young Turks. In the course of the Balkan War of 1912 Ottoman territories were conquered by Montenegro, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. This led to expulsions and forced conversions of Muslims. Conflict with Armenians was initially less pronounced. Divided between Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire they had no state of their own. Their nationalist movement, the Dashnaks, shared some goals with the Young Turks. However, at a later stage of World War One they were persecuted during the genocide of the Armenian people.

Jews, on the other hand, supported the Young Turk movement, though they were even less represented in the leadership of the mostly Muslim CUP than other minorities. They were visible, they knew foreign languages, they were protected by foreign powers and thus less liable to be searched by the Ottoman police. This made them a suitable cover for conspiratorial activity. Freemasons were used in the same way. The fact that the CUP was strong in Salonica, which had a large Jewish population, was also

relevant. The revolution of 1908 stimulated Jewish political and trade union activity. The Jews had received modern education in the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) and were thus receptive to the original ideas of the CUP. Their Ottomanism was attractive to the Jews since it did not link national identity to a specific territory. This allowed them to identify with supra-national Ottomanism, with the Austro-Hungarian empire as a model. It promised emancipation on the western model supported by the AIU. However, the turn towards Turkish nationalism reduced the readiness of Jews to identify with the regime.

Within the CUP leadership there was one Jew: Albert Carasso. There were also two members of the *dönme* community (followers of Shabbatai Zevi): David Pasha served as minister of finance and Djavid Bey was one of the three ministers of the first CUP

government.

Another reason why Jews sympathised with the Young Turks was fear that the loss of Ottoman territories to Christian powers would worsen the status of Jewish communities and confront them with Christian antisemitism. The middle class within Jewish communities could also support CUP economic policies. Jewish socialists soon clashed with the new regime over anti-strike laws and the detention of union leaders. However, the Jewish middle class profited from CUP measures which restricted privileges of the Greeks and Armenians, since they were seen by the Young Turks as part of the indigenous bourgeoisie they were interested in promoting.

All this was used as ammunition by antisemitic agitators against the CUP. Although in fact the Jews played a minor role in comparison with other minorities, conspiracy theories soon emerged,

especially regarding the period before 1908. It was said that Jews were behind the freemasons and that they had created the CUP in order to undermine the Ottoman institutions and force a European constitution on the empire. Through the freemasons in the CUP, Jews wanted to come to power themselves and rule over Muslims. These allegations were spread by an opposition that was mainly Muslim, anti-Jewish, anti-Christian and anti-European. Although Zionism had not succeeded in recruiting Ottoman Jews in any significant numbers, antisemitic and anti-Zionist themes soon overlapped and were used to discredit the CUP. It was claimed that there was a de facto alliance between the CUP and the Zionists and that the latter served German interests in the empire. The presence of CUP headquarters in the half Jewish city of Salonica was also used as 'proof' for these allegations. □

**Debate on Jewish socialism ... Debate on Jewish socialism ...**

## Rootless cosmopolitans

**Les Levidow and Roland Rance claim that the circumstances are ripe for Jewish socialists to launch a high profile and direct confrontation with the Zionist movement.**

The recent debate in *Jewish Socialist* has illustrated some inherent difficulties in defining, let alone developing, a specifically 'Jewish' socialism. In JS24, Adam Lent advocates 'recreation of a progressive Jewish identity'. Yet he offers no definition of this identity, merely the fetishised tautology that Jews who are socialists will somehow get converted to something, or reach a stage, labelled 'Jewish socialism'. Even then, his specific proposals blur any ultimate purpose for trying to reach a broader constituency.

First, he calls for scaling down 'any high-profile attempt to win the hearts and minds of the community to anti-Zionism'. Since there has not been any such attempt, his call evades even asking what anti-Zionist potential might exist among Jews. Reading his plea for more factual information on Israel's injustices to the Palestinians, one might not know that such information has amply appeared in the mass media in both Israel and Britain, especially since the start of the intifada. What is needed is a strategy for urging Jews to act on that information, while overcoming their attachment to Zionism. Yet he says little about the obstacles, and less about solutions, apart from attributing Zionist loyalties to antisemitism.

Second, he calls for

'democracy and pluralism in the community', which turns out to mean demanding formal representation within the Zionist institutions of the Jewish elite. After a decade in which left activists have burned themselves out in the Labour Party's factional conflicts, shall they incite others to do the same in the meetings of the Board of Deputies? Such a project would seem far removed from building a truly independent movement which might offer a contending version of Jewish identity and practice – the sole basis of any authentic democracy and pluralism.

Third, he calls for encouraging Jews to support the Labour Party (which he vaguely conflates with 'the Labour movement'), thus making them 'more accessible to radical left intervention'. He says



nothing about what the party has to offer – presumably because it has promised to sustain military spending, employ more police, continue anti-union legislation, discipline workers to meet market competition and, in general (as Leon Rosselson puts it), to ‘reform the country bit by bit, so nobody will notice it’.

In summary, Adam Lent proposes unimaginative bureaucratic manoeuvres around oppressive institutions, in which we would tactically refrain from saying – or even discovering – what we really believe. Although nominally anti-Zionist, he treats that issue as excess baggage which can be reclaimed at some future stage. But, in such a scenario, who would be using whom? After all, we are ultimately what we do, not what we believe.

In his rejoinder (JS25), David Rosenberg rightly criticises Adam Lent for saying little about the form or content of a ‘progressive Jewish identity’. He conceptualises Jewish socialism as a process of developing a movement in which we say what we believe, and argues against ‘diluting or jettisoning aspects of our ideology’.

While agreeing with much of this article, we must take issue with David’s comment on ‘the ease with which some [anti-Zionists] have been labelled “self-haters”’. During the Gulf War, we came across activists who had been labelled ‘self-hating Americans’, and we have even met a historian of fascism who has been labelled a ‘self-hating Italian’. Such cheap personal jibes are frequently made by a hegemonic culture when rattled by criticism from those it considers to be traitors. Indeed, the same phrase has been levelled often enough at the JSG, and clearly says more about the abusers than about their targets. It is unfortunate that David, instead of confronting this attempt at

delegitimation, gives the impression of accepting the accusation.

He correctly views Zionism not merely in its Middle East context, but as a problem for Jewish politics overall, and comes close to the heart of the problem by recognising that the loyalty of Jews to Zionism, and thus their failure to support Palestinian rights, stems from a sense of insecurity which mere information cannot overcome. As he argues, participation in broad-based anti-racist activity may provide both a means for some Jews to overcome this insecurity and a political context for challenging their attachment to Israel.

However, in confronting the ‘abiding myth of “Israel as refuge”’, David Rosenberg fails to ask why there is a psychological need for such a ‘refuge’. This arises less from antisemitism than from an insecurity about who we are, and/or from identification with the western powers as defending ‘civilisation’ against ‘barbarism’. As many Jews can accept neither religious tradition nor assimilation, they undergo a crisis of identity.

In Zionist fantasy, this internal threat is experienced as persecution by an external force, a transcendent antisemitism, currently embodied in ‘uncivilised Arabs’ who seek irrationally and hatefully to destroy Israel. For its adherents, Zionism also provides an imaginary global community of Jews, even while it undermines all other Jewish identities, thus intensifying the very insecurity it exploits.

There are no simple alternatives. Identification with Yiddish culture, although rightly continuing a valuable heritage, cannot restore or sustain the socio-economic basis which originally produced it. That culture can no longer mediate a distinct way of life for a Jewish community, much less define ‘Jewish socialism’.

For the small number of consciously anti-Zionist Jews, we seem to have provisionally resolved the tension by reappropriating Stalin’s antisemitic codeword and identifying ourselves as ‘rootless cosmopolitans’. In the words of Edward Upward, we have ‘No home but the struggle’. In effect, we locate ourselves more as a Jewish fraction of an anti-imperialist network than as a socialist section of ‘the Jewish community’.

For us, the Israeli Law of Return represents more than an injustice for the Palestinian people; it provides a means for antisemitism (including the Zionist version) to threaten our security, to deny our right to live how and where we choose. In recent years, a group of former Soviet Jews has been deported from Holland in handcuffs and forcibly transferred to Israel; an English court has apparently accepted (in the case of South African draft resister Steven Miller) the Zionist argument that a Jew can no longer qualify as a political refugee, since there is now a Jewish state; and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl has promised Israeli Foreign Minister David Levi that he will help prevent the granting of refugee status to Soviet Jews arriving in Germany.

This threat, not merely to our ‘sense of identity’ but to our very existence, is a direct consequence of Zionist imperatives. It surely provides a basis on which we can agitate and attempt to mobilise against Zionism within the Jewish communities. In fact, only such a direct, high-profile confrontation with the Zionist movement and its apparent hegemony over Jewish life and affairs (taking account, as David Rosenberg says, of language and approach) will enable socialist Jews to transform theory into practice, and to step beyond consciousness-raising to the articulation of a different vision and practice of community. □

# Restricted view

**Berlin was the new centre of Hitler’s Final Solution, but a major exhibition there avoids the challenge of the Nazi era, says Michael Heiser**

On 20 January 1942 SS Commander Reinhard Heydrich held a conference at a villa just outside Berlin which he had taken over, in not the clearest of circumstances, from the German industrialist, Friedrich Minoux. Representatives were there from all branches of the Nazi bureaucracy. In the room overlooking the wooded slopes leading down to the Wannsee they laid out plans for the Final Solution to the ‘problem’ of European Jewry. All that remained in the following two years was to carry it out.

Fifty years later my impression on a flying visit to the city was that in Berlin it is not easy to avoid matters Jewish. The villa at 56-58 Am Grossen Wannsee has just been opened as a permanent museum and memorial site. An exhibition in the house tells the story of the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis, with an account of the Wannsee conference as its centrepiece. Text is kept to an explanatory minimum and images are used to telling effect, from pictures of boycotts of Jewish shops, through images of burning synagogues to mass graves and Auschwitz. The message of the exhibition, laid out in historical sequence, is clear and unequivocal, as clear in purpose as (*lehaodil*) the Wannsee conference itself.

The house overlooking the Wannsee is intended as a permanent memorial. In the middle of Berlin, next to the quaintly counter-cultural, graffiti-ridden remains of the Wall, there is what is advertised as the largest Jewish exhibition ever. Its subtitle indicates the scope of the exhibition: Jewish Thought and Beliefs, Life

and Work within the Cultures of the World’.

The exhibition is only the centrepiece of a four-month long *Kulturfest* of music, drama, talks, seminars and colloquia. During the time that I was in Berlin you could have taken in Yiddish theatre and cinema, Daniel Barenboim conducting the Berlin Philharmonic in a work of the Israeli composer Yosef Tal, Barbra Streisand in *Yentl*, a discussion featuring the French philosopher André Glucksmann and Art Spiegelman on cats and mice. And that was just four days.

But back to the main exhibition. From fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls, the visitor progresses through richly gilded Torah arks and spice boxes. Illuminated pentateuchs stand for the development of Ashkenazi life in medieval Germany. Then to the Vilna of the late 19th century, with the red banners of the Bund and the Vilna troupe giving performances of *The Dybbuk*. A succession of everyday objects, objets d’art, paintings and photographs whizz us on a Cohen’s tour; now Berlin in the salon era of Rahel Varnhagen; now Turkey under the spell of Shabbatai Zevi. After passing through 30-odd rooms packed with exhibits and explanatory text, one has a feeling of having experienced many conflicting and kaleidoscopic parts.

Over all these parts, however, hangs the whole. A blue canopy hangs above the open courtyard in the centre of the museum. On it are painted the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and directly beneath it is an exhibition of various manifestations of the (religious) Word. In the conception of the organisers of the exhibition, it is the religious Word which provides the unifying thread within different conflicting patterns of Jewish lives in different eras.

It is interesting to compare this with the organising principles of the Amsterdam Jewish Museum, which in many respects covers the same themes as the Berlin extravaganza. Jewish identity, according to the guide to the museum has five aspects: religion, the bond with Israel, persecution, the way every Jewish person can ‘feel part of the Jewish community’ in their own way, and lastly the relations between Jews as a minority community and the majority communities in the countries where they live. One may criticise this conception for omitting the conflict between these different aspects, how in effect they have fought each other for hegemonic status. However, it contains a plural conception missing in Berlin. The logic of the Berlin exhibition, for all its multifarious parts, is that their one unifying whole is the religious Word. This is a view of Jewishness which many of the secular Jews who do feature in different parts of the exhibition would reject.

On the other hand, for all its colossal size and scope, there are important things missing in the Berlin exhibition. Perhaps the most noted of these is persecution. Is it really credible for the centrepiece of what claims to be a comprehensive survey of the different aspects of Jewish culture to deal so cursorily with antisemitism, in Berlin of all places?

Certainly that is the opinion of Jewish groups in Berlin. The ‘Jewish Group of Berlin’, containing both secular Jews from west and east Berlin and the orthodox Adass Jisroel community, has put out a strongly worded statement pointing to what is missing. There is nothing, for example, about Jewish life in Germany after 1933. Not only is the Nazi period not covered, but practically the only feature of Jewish life in Germany today

We welcome further articles from our readers on this debate. Send articles (up to 1,000 words) to ‘Debate’, Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX

which is mentioned is the restoration of the great synagogue on the Oranienburger Strasse in what was East Berlin. There is nothing about relations between Jews and other minorities. There is no attempt to draw lessons from the Jewish experience for minorities, including the Jews in Germany today.

What is the point of the exhibition? they ask. For whose

benefit is this rather wide-angled snapshot of Jewish culture and history? Culture has always been political in Berlin, they answer. Now the Berlin authorities are co-opting Jewish history to make the claims of Berlin as a capital city. 'From the myth of Prussia/Germany to the Jewish myth to the myth of the Olympic City of the year 2000.'

Can Berlin come to terms with its Jewish past by sanitising it? they ask, and point to one telling anecdote. A leading Israeli hotel group held a gala to celebrate its 'Israel week'. But there was not one word about the fact that the very building where the gala was held had been confiscated by the Nazis from its Jewish owner, who was subsequently murdered. □

### Museum piece by Tony Blend

Post-Wall Berlin, April 1992. The fact that Berlin is now reunited is, in many respects a cause for celebration. But the resulting economic, social and identity problems are enormous. Will Germany overcome them, without slipping back into old, nationalist ways? And what of Jewish Berlin, now?

Every facet of Jewish life in Berlin seems double-edged. The mere fact that a Jew can walk down a Berlin street might appear strange, when one thinks of the history of Nazi Germany. I took away with me from my recent trip an ambivalent picture of life there.

On the positive side, Berlin seemed to take a good deal of interest in things Jewish. Go into a book shop and not only is there a Jewish section, but there may well be a special display of books of Jewish interest too. Listen to the radio and you may chance upon a talk on a Jewish topic. The Liberal synagogue on Friday night was full, with Hebrew and German alternating during the service. The community centre in former West Berlin was obviously well-funded and host to numerous activities. It has a well-stocked library. There are the regular lectures and seminars. I attended talks there on antisemitism and the

Marranos, for example.

Especially impressive was the vast state-funded exhibition, 'Jewish Patterns of Life', with items drawn from all over the world.

In short, Jewish Berlin seemed to be thriving.

But now for the down side. Before the War, there



*Birth of Jewish Resistance, Lazar Kreslin, 1905*

were around 120,000 Jews in the city. Today there are about 5,000.

The interest in things Jewish among, in particular, younger Germans is plain – those attending talks at the community centre were mainly non-Jews – and such interest is to be welcomed. However, what of the Jews themselves? Is Jewish life in Berlin anything more than a carefully reconstructed curio, preserved, visited and studied at a distance; in short, a museum-piece, funded by a guilty state?

The famous Oranienburger Strasse synagogue in former East Berlin, like so many others

destroyed by the Nazis, is now being rebuilt. But for whom?

The exhibition on Jewish patterns of life was held adjacent to the site of the former Gestapo headquarters. There, a second exhibition presents the other side of German 'interest' in Jews and Judaism: some of the horror of Nazi Germany, in film and photos.

The Berlin Philharmonic plays superbly amid the architectural splendour of the Schauspielhaus in former East Berlin. Yet I cannot help seeing, in the faces of some of the older concert-goers former – and, for all one knows, unrepentant – Nazis.

Meanwhile, in newly-reunited Germany, as in other European countries, racism, antisemitism, Nazism and nationalism are once again on the rampage.

So finally, how is one to reconcile these contradictory impressions of a city with so much culture, yet a history of such inhumanity? A city in which Judaism is now sponsored by the state, having been starved of its life force. What value is to be placed on German culture alongside Nazi Germany's crimes against humanity? And what use is Jewish culture, without Jews to celebrate it?

# Paradise lost

'We may have to separate Zionism into two levels. There is the level of the dream, a vision of a national revival, and there is the level of a plan of action in the real worlds of West Asia. This plan of action has included, and had to include, the disenfranchisement of the natives.'

Beit-Hallahmi's reflections explore both the dream and the reality of Zionism.

So why the dream? For Beit-Hallahmi Zionism was just one response among several to the Jewish Question – the question of the place of Jews in the modern world. Freedom from the shackles of the ghetto and a right and enclosed Jewish community brought a 'crisis of homelessness' which still pervades Jewish consciousness. Jews were catapulted into a world where the individual, and not the community, was paramount, into a world which was becoming increasingly secular, into a world of rapid economic change, and into a world where the old Hapsburg and Ottoman empires were fragmenting under the burden of budding nationalisms. However, in the early part of this century, only a minority of European Jews supported Zionism. The rise of anti-semitism turned the dream into a reality: 'It was antisemitism, in both its milder and stronger forms, that forced Jews into their own nationalism, and formed the profound pessimism that made Zionism possible. This pessimism about the human condition has remained the hallmark of the movement.'

For Beit-Hallahmi, Zionism was the answer to a twin disappointment – Judaism and assimilation. It offered an

apparent solution to an identity crisis by substituting nationhood for religion. But when the vision of Jewish sovereignty was translated into settlement in Palestine (then one of a number of proposed territories), this was necessarily a settler colonialist presence. It was therefore little different from other European colonialist enterprises in the past – except that Zionists were not preoccupied with exploiting the 'native' population, but with solving the 'Jewish Question'.

Palestinians were seen as a surplus population, without rights or legitimacy – and Palestine was described as 'a land without people for a people without a land'. Transforming the Jewish minority into a majority inevitably meant disenfranchising the majority Palestinian population. It also redefined diaspora Jews as no longer Polish or Russian Jews, but as members of a Jewish nation, destined to be repatriated to their homeland in Palestine. Thus, when the Israeli state was established, nationality and citizenship were separated. A Palestinian living in East Jerusalem is a citizen of Israel, but does not belong to the Israeli nation, for Israel is the state of the Jewish people. Paradoxically, according to the Zionist definition, Jews were foreigners in the diaspora but natives in Palestine. Palestinians became foreigners in their own homeland.

Beit-Hallahmi provides a powerful critique of existing Israeli society. He traces the rise of Palestinian consciousness. Once invisible to the early Zionists, Palestinians became an obstacle and finally an enemy. He points to the fact that most Jews choose to live outside Israel. Beit-Hallahmi highlights

the migration of Israelis to the United States and the growth of religious Zionism – so alien to the early Zionist project which was thoroughly secular. He regards this as both an attempt to revitalise Zionism and an indication of its failure. Israel is not alone in combining this potent but dangerous concoction of nationalism and religion – witness the resurgent nationalisms in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, underpinned by religion. Israel, for Beit-Hallahmi, is a flawed vision and cannot be the answer to the 'Jewish Question'.

If Zionism fails to resolve the place of the Jew in the modern world, then what lies in store for world Jewry? In Beit-Hallahmi's view: 'Emancipation will have its final triumph in the diaspora, and one day the past 200 years will be seen as a detour on the road to complete integration of Jews into their host societies. It is this detour which has created Israel.'

This is where my quarrel with Beit-Hallahmi begins. The problem stems from the fact that he sees only two possible responses to the emancipation of Jews – both in the past and now. One path is integration – either conformist, through joining the bourgeoisie, or non-conformist, participating in radical movements. The other path is separation, and both Zionism and Orthodoxy represent two contrasting forms of separation. Beit-Hallahmi briefly discusses the Bund and Jewish self-rule as one of the options before the Second World War which was destroyed by the Holocaust. This approach seems to lie somewhere between integration and separation, and is not really

*Original Sins: reflections on the history of Zionism and Israel* by Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi (Pluto Press £29.95 hardback, £9.95 paperback)



considered as providing a way forward for Jews today. For Beit-Hallahmi, the separatist road is a cul-de-sac. Orthodoxy offers a Jewish identity to just a tiny minority and is relegated to historical insignificance. Since Zionism is doomed, he argues, the future lies with the diaspora in the integration and assimilation of Jews.

This view about the inevitability of assimilation rests on Beit-Hallahmi's analysis of Jewish identity. He grapples with the fundamental question of what it is to be Jewish without Judaism. The majority of diaspora Jews are, in his words, 'sociological' Jews – largely assimilated, defined negatively by anti-semitism, with a political allegiance to Israel, a view of

themselves as 'outsiders' and united by a kind of tribalism: 'Tribalism, for some people, may be an escape from the alienation and anonymity of modern society, the last chance for warmth with strangers who are defined as kin. Jewish tribalism takes the form of folklore: a few Yiddish words, traditional food and Jewish jokes.'

Above all, Beit-Hallahmi believes that Jewishness would disappear with acceptance by others. His approach reveals some of the problems of adopting a view of society founded on individual citizenship. Of course, he is right to show that the liberal notion of citizenship provides an important critique of Israeli society, where those

Palestinians who are citizens (not mentioning those who are under occupation) do not have equal rights. While citizenship does provide the bedrock of a just society, this is not enough. To view one another purely as individual citizens is to neglect the ethnic, cultural and historical dimensions of complex and varied societies. The vision of complete assimilation, which Beit-Hallahmi offers, is a barren dream. While he is right to point to the substantial difficulties of defining a positively secular Jewish identity which is not Zionist, it should be possible to find ways in which minorities, including Jews, can express themselves within a universalist and socialist framework.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

## Seeing and believing

*Poems and Drawings from the First World War* by David Bomberg (Gillian Jason Gallery 1992 limited edition 250 copies £90). Available from Gillian Jason Gallery, 42 Inverness Street, London NW1 7HB



Section from 'Billet', 1915

This is expensive, a limited edition no less! The poems have been uncovered by the editor in the Tate Gallery archives and are mostly unpublished material. The drawings can be seen more cheaply elsewhere, if not all in one place (see *David Bomberg*, Richard Cork, Yale University

Press 1987). Both the poems and drawings have a fierce energy and draw on David Bomberg's experience of the First World War. They were not primarily intended to end up on the coffee tables of the rich.

They come from a collision. A radical working class move-

ment (in political action, culture, art and writing) broke free from Victorian convention and challenged the ruling class. It met with the brutal blow of the First World War.

David Bomberg's early work was based on the Jewish East End of London; *The Mud Bath*

shows Schevik's vapour bath in Brick Lane. *The Jewish Theatre* is the Pavillion Theatre in White-chapel, and *Jujitsu* portrays wrestling at Judeans gymnasium. Jewish immigrants emerging from the hold of a ship are represented in *In the Hold*. His drawings transformed his subject matter. His interest was in a radical development in the form of painting: 'to emancipate art from romanticism – to translate the life of a great city, its motion, its machinery into expressive art... I appeal to a sense of form – I completely abandon naturalism and tradition.'

In *In the Hold*, for example, he superimposes a grid of 64 squares whereby the subject matter is resolved into its constituent forms, which become the main focus of the picture. His war drawings are not as revolutionary as this

earlier work. He concentrates on active subjects: gunners loading shells; soldiers patrolling or at rest in the billet and sappers at work underground. But still with sparse, angular lines he clarifies the energy and movement of human beings working or at rest. Apart from *War Scene* and *Figures Helping a Wounded Soldier*, his harsh feelings about the war are left to the poems.

He writes with a painter's eye: 'Dimly seen – six wiring stakes driven into the ground – askew some yards apart... Demons dragging strangling wire. Earth and sky – each in each enfolded: hypnotised; sucked in the murky snare; stricken dumb' (from *Winter Night*). In his best poems he writes with vehemence: *Winter Night*, *What's Left of the Soldier-man* and in *Twenty Rounds* he describes the unnerving tension of prolonged

duty in the trenches.

Bomberg's poems do not touch the originality and clarity of imagery of Isaac Rosenberg's best war poems (see JS22). His radical creativity lies in his paintings. But the poems (rescued in this edition from obscurity) show the full extent of his response to the carnage and allow us to understand how decisive an experience the war was for him as an artist. As Richard Cork says in his introduction to this edition: 'Bomberg's prolonged encounter with the armaments of modern war engendered a crisis in his way of seeing. Before the conflict he had viewed the machine as an agent of construction... But inventions like the rapid fire machine gun were deployed with such devastating consequences that his attitude changed.'

The First World War not only killed millions of working class youths, but acted to depress and blunt experimentation and radical vision. David Bomberg's Canadian commission, *Sappers at work; a Canadian tunnelling company*, was rejected on the grounds that 'Cubist work is inadmissible'. He was forced to repaint it in a more naturalist style, a form of painting he had previously rejected. David Bomberg was not to allow his vision to be blunted, but he emerged from the war a painter whose priorities had changed.

SIMON LYNN

### Twenty Rounds

Some shells burst – smashing, crashing, demoniacal banging, slamming doors down corridors, – sulphur fumes, very hell about our heads.

They lie, trenchmen, rigid, apparently not caring, – their souls cowering at the out-go and the in-go of life.

They live a thousand intermittent lives, those trenchmen, – with liquid acids freezing on the heart, – with faces hard, with faces drawn and livid; with eyes as strange as terrors are – And in the night – within the breaking of one screeching shell – before the termination of a flight.

## Vos iz dos?

Those who read Jewish fiction, or *Jewish Socialist* for that matter, and who don't have any form of Yiddish background sometimes need a basic Roman script dictionary of common Yiddish terms to more fully understand the texts. This dictionary goes maybe halfway to being satisfactory. It is much more advanced than the

rather *shlank* Abson Books *verter-buch* you can pick up at Jewish museums, but at 107 pages (and each *zeit* has *vainik* words) is not anywhere near comprehensive enough.

The book claims that you can use it to converse, but as, for example, 'mother' does not appear, nor does 'socialism', *ashmu'es* with

my partner based on this book would be very *kurtz* indeed. The introduction tells a little about the *loshen*, but annoyingly says there are *drei* main dialects and that represented here is the most common, but doesn't tell you which one it is! In short, *nutsik* but *shporevдик*, could be *erguer*, could be *besser*.

R BUCH SOICHER

*English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary (Romanised)* by David C Cross (Hippocrene) £6.50

# Defining lines

***Angels in America***  
by Tony Kushner,  
Cottesloe,  
Royal  
National  
Theatre.

phobic in public, he was finally outed when he died of AIDS in 1986. His presence draws out themes about community and belonging. He might have been gay and Jewish, but to those who are members of one or both communities, he is no hero.

*Yiddishe, feygele but not undzerer*  
(Jewish, gay but not one of ours).

The play seamlessly combines reality with fantasy. Dreams, hallucinations and nightmares have as much validity as lived reality.

**Characters as diverse as Ethel Rosenberg, an angel and two ghosts of cultures past make guest appearances. The action takes place on a bare stage with props, furniture and occasionally members of the cast, wheeled on by the actors. Much use is made of simultaneous**

Directed by Declan Donnellan,

the acting style is naturalistic, but easily encompasses staging that moves effortlessly from the mundane – a men's toilet in the Brooklyn Federal Courts of Appeals, a cruising ground in Central Park – to high camp. One scene is set in Antarctica; others feature heavenly voices, flaming books and angels coming through the ceiling accompanied by triumphal music and overwhelming light. It's a reality that takes the surreal in its stride and in doing so rings emotionally true.

Extremely moving and very funny, *Angels in America* mixes sex, religion and death and in doing so explores vital issues. The show currently playing at the National Theatre is the first part of a two-part work. The National Theatre has shown imagination and some bravery in putting on part one, even if it is at the small auditorium round the back reserved for the *avant-garde* stuff. Let's hope they have the courage and the opportunity to stage part two. Next time in the Olivier?

**MARIAN SHAPIRO**

## Paul Collins went to sample a new line in Jewish comedy

Mounting numbers of pundits claim that while millions of Jews escaped wartime genocide, Anglo-Jewish humour today is cracking up. In *The Guardian*, critic Michael Goldfarb lamented the erosion of American Jewish wit through prosperity and assimilation. Similar affluence for many Jews in Britain has triggered fears that a survivalist jokeness based on earlier hardship appears to be dying for laughs.

extinction are premature. Jack Benny achieved riches and popularity with dubious irony, exploiting, rather than debunking, stereotypical Jewish meanness. And though Mel Brooks's controversial latest film depicts homeless people, the director has refused to confront his poor background in public.

Notwithstanding their perceived greater security in a mass-ethnic society, most funny Jews across the Atlantic seem no more ready or willing to use Jewish material than their British counterparts. The success of two Jewish comedians, Jackie Mason – including his caricature of Jews – and Andrew ‘Diceman’ Clay, demonstrates that their racism mirrors a rising prejudice in society.

But, in the main, the common bond for Jewish stand-ups remains our hallmark: the unifying capacity to fashion amusement from adversity. Audiences identify with this dilemma and, often through insecurity amid spiralling antisemitism, its accompanying need for recognition. The pair unable to join one of the sold-out Jewish nights at the Canal Cafe proved a fitting curtain-raiser: 'We've come all the way from Southend,' wailed the man.

**This quasi-religious ambivalence manifested itself among those who gained admission.**

Dembina – veteran performer from the Red Rose Club in Islington – offered the only political clout on a triple bill.

'Does anyone have a view on how Robert Maxwell died?' he asked. The silence epitomised the straightish crowd and the event sponsors, *New Moon*, the magazine for the lunar right.

Dembina – who has been seen at a Jewish Socialists' Group meeting on the Middle East – made clear his views on the Palestinians' rights: persecuted Jews should not become oppressors. Nor did he ignore antisemitism. The meek-looking Dembina recalled his school-teacher days when he confronted a boy writing abusive graffiti about 'Yids'. 'You know I'm Jewish,' he told the boy. 'Why this?'

managed to combine Jewish guile and guilt – even in a gag on a *heymishe* cat: ‘I put food in his tray and he looks up with an expression: you call this a portion?’ Or against ‘skinflint Jews’ images: ‘At breakfast our clan bulged their stomachs with bagels, cream cheese and smoked salmon. Gentiles confined themselves to All Bran. Vegetarians grabbed a crumb, too.’

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Macho Jewish rituals also came under attack – such as breaking a glass in the wedding ceremony. ‘My husband was so committed, he crushed a paper cup,’ Sad, then, that she resorted to homophobia: ‘Couldn’t you try?’ was her sexual plea to a gay hunk.

**In contrast, Yiddishist David Schneider showed that his skill lies more in acting than in**



**London Jewish comedy. From left to right: Ivor Dembina, Dave Schneider and Leelo Ross.**

'You're not a Spurs fan,' the boy retorted.

Less endearing was Dembina's quip about beggars. "Tenpence for a coffee?"

**'Save your money. You won't get the coffee.'**

His mountainous but self-deprecating successor was Leelo Ross: 'Once I weighed six and a half stones. The midwife had never seen a baby that big,' Ross

“Who else?” she answers.