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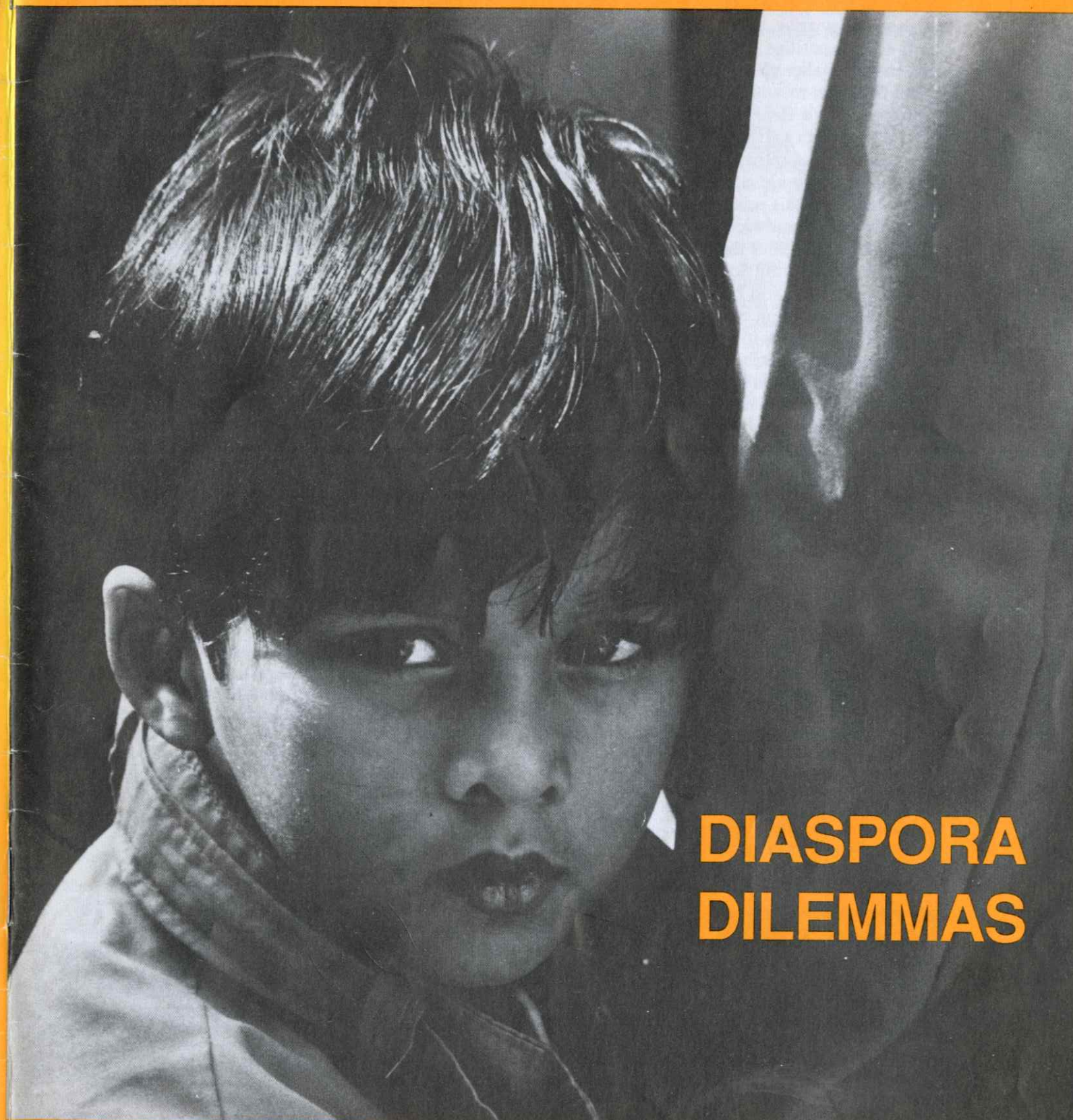
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JEWISH SOCIALIST

The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 27 September-December 1992
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DIASPORA DILEMMAS

Also in this issue

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- Lesbian and Gay Jews speak out
- Good riddance Columbus
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Editorial

THE chaos and carnage in what was Yugoslavia continues. As broken ceasefire follows broken ceasefire, as reports of atrocities compete with each other for tales of savagery, as we look on the suffering of the people of Sarajevo, where to join a bread queue can be to put yourself at risk from a shell or a sniper's bullet, the question must arise, is there a better way? Must multi-ethnic entities fragment themselves into smaller and smaller pieces?

The tradition to which *Jewish Socialist* looks for inspiration had a clear solution to the problem of many nationalities in a particular territory. This stressed a cultural, rather than territorial, definition of nationality. It would not be too hard to sketch out a version of how this would apply in Yugoslavia. It would be naive to advocate a return to the former state of Yugoslavia, but the future of the area must depend on the different South Slav peoples enjoying the right to speak and be educated in their own languages whilst being citizens of a wider entity.

Why does this seem to be a utopian solution? One could suggest any number of answers. Some would say that the old Yugoslavia was always from its birth Serb-dominated. Others will point to the long history of mistrust between the different South Slav peoples or to the position of Serbian minorities in Bosnia and Croatia. Overlaying this is the revival of a specifically territorial nationalism, a nationalism that leads directly to the murderous euphemism of 'ethnic cleansing'.

The Europe of the 1990s is bringing to life uncom-

fortable spectres of the past. The Nazi-sympathising tradition of the Ustashe was kept alive in Croatian communities outside Yugoslavia. One of the most telling television images of the conflict was of Croatian soldiers goose-stepping to show their sympathy for Germany. It is arguable that the EC's premature recognition of Croatian independence, at German instigation, was an important element in precipitating the bloodbaths in Croatia and now in Bosnia.

In Germany itself, the neo-Nazi attacks on the hostel for asylum-seekers in Rostock has been followed by other incidents in both parts of Germany. Particularly chilling was the way that the inhabitants of Rostock stood and cheered as the neo-Nazis perpetrated a pogrom. Just as disconcerting is the way that German politicians seem determined to give more weight to the demand for curbing asylum rights than they do to curbing the lineal descendants of the perpetrators of Kristallnacht.

The revival of a territorial nationalism, which looks to Germany for its model, poses a threat to non-territorial minorities, including the Jews. Hand in hand with attacks on refugees in Rostock go attacks on Jewish memorials or cemeteries in Berlin. It is no accident that Sarajevo, a multi-ethnic city for over 500 years, is where Jews found refuge after their expulsion from Spain. All we stand for as Jewish socialists is under threat from ethnic exclusivism; we have to look to other minorities, and to democrats and socialists in the various majority communities, to make alliances to resist it.

Contents

NEWS

David's earning while Andrew kneels: anti-fascist protests	3
Spart Rib: magazine defends exclusion policy	3
Bone breaker or peace maker? Israeli election analysed	5
In or out? questions for Helpline after the walkabout	6
Gay parée: international conference	7
Hard travelling: Gypsies under attack	7
Don't ask the rabbi	13
Dybbuk's Diary	8

FEATURES

Chosen people: Marian Shapiro investigates the demand for 'Jewish' sperm	9
Poor transmission? Karen Merkel urges a radical rethink of popular notions of cultural inheritance	11
Letters: Jesse Jackson, circumcision	13
Gay gezunt: Marian Shapiro interviews film-maker Ros Haber	14
Goodbye Columbus: Judy Branfman reports from America on the impact of anti-Quincentennial protests	15

Where were you in '82? David Rosenberg remembers the Jews who spoke out against Israel's invasion of Lebanon	18
Home is where I am: Brad Lander says Jews can draw on contemporary black diaspora experience	19
Babes in arms: Simon Lynn uncovers the fate of a teenage Jewish war resister	22

REVIEWS

Left behind: Philip Mendes reviews <i>The Socialism of Fools</i>	24
Peace in our time? Michael Heiser reviews <i>Walk the Red Line</i>	25
Well chosen, Rosen: David Rosenberg enjoys <i>Mind the Gap</i>	26
Beyond Beattie: Adrienne Wallman reviews the <i>Women of worth</i> exhibition in Manchester	27
Repossessed: Frances Rifkin compares two new versions of Anski's <i>Dybbuk</i>	29
Don't play it again Sam: Paul Collins reviews <i>Sam Saturday</i>	30
Rhythm 'n' Jews: Steve Ogin hears the Klezmatics	30
On the shelf: round-up of new books	31
Cover photo: Bengali child in Tower Hamlets/Paul Mattson	

David's earning while Andrew kneels

Fascism can be successfully combated by militant and public action, as the *Sunday Times* learned to its cost in the recent David Irving debacle. The paper had promised a massive sum to the revisionist 'historian' to translate sections of Goebbels' diaries for serialisation.

Successful pickets of the paper's Wapping offices by the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA); direct action by anti-fascists to deface the offensive billboards promoting the diaries; and a high profile campaign led by the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe (CAFE) to expose and oppose Irving's political interventions, combined to isolate Irving and fuel public anger against the shabby opportunism of the *Sunday Times*. This has resulted in widespread boycotting of the paper, especially in Jewish areas, and forced its editor, Andrew Neil, to make grovelling apologies to anti-fascists.

In separate letters to

JSG signatories of protest statements handed in by the ARA and ANL, Neil describes the row over Irving as 'unfortunate'. When you consider how much his sales have plummeted, that's an understatement. Neil adds: 'It has brought the *Sunday Times* much unfair and inaccurate criticism.' In the letter to ANL signatories, Neil thought it worth mentioning, presumably by way of justification, that some articles published with the diaries were penned by Jews! That's all right then. We'll forget the £75,000 that Irving is said to be picking up – a sum that will no doubt help him pay his next batch of air fares to import international Holocaust doubters to spread

their lies in Britain.

While Neil scrambled pathetically to cover his tracks and excuse his paper's gutter journalism, his highly valued translator was busy translating his own regressive ideas into action by hosting a seminar in central London on Saturday 4 July to refute the 'Holocaust myth'.

A vigorous protest led by Jewish organisations took place outside Irving's home on the Friday and many mainstream Jews defied sabbath restrictions to join hundreds of anti-fascists in a militant protest outside the seminar on the Saturday. The police made outstanding efforts to aid the smooth running of the event, providing Irving with a free



lift and escort to the seminar, lending him a police hat(!) to help disguise him as they approached the building, and violently disrupting and dividing the anti-fascist protest. Police arrested seven protesters, including one member of the Jewish Socialists' Group who is charged with using threatening behaviour and language. At the time of going to press the outcome of their trials is unknown.

Finally, a warning. Next time you ask a policeman the time, take a good look at his face – you may get a lecture on the history of the Second World War.

Help pay the legal costs or any fines imposed on the defendants by sending cheques/POs to CAFE (SI), PO Box 30, London SE15.

Join the protest at Irving's 2nd revisionist seminar. Meet outside his home: 81 Duke Street, London W1, Saturday 19 September.

Spart Rib

The feminist magazine, *Spare Rib's* refusal to publicise the launch of Jewish Women's Arts & Education and its associated club, Gertrude and Alice's, unless they outlined their policy on Israel, has resurrected an old and, it seems, un-reconstructed, debate. Julia Bard reports.

The last time round, during the Lebanon war, the kneejerk anti-Zionists unthinkingly agreed with the Zionist establishment on fundamentals: that Israel speaks for Jews the world over and that the terms 'Jew' and 'Zionist' are interchangeable. Nothing seems to have changed. The struggles of Jews for

justice, for autonomy and against oppression, on their own behalf and in solidarity with others, are irrelevant. The backlash against feminists, socialists and other progressives from growing fundamentalist forces is of no interest. The commitment of organisations like Gertrude & Alice's to equal opportunities and to the expression and development of autonomous Jewish women's culture is insignificant. They are Jewish, and so they must jump a series of hurdles set by the guardians of our political morality in apparent ignorance of the meaning of the word 'Jewish'. *Jewish Socialist* has many years' experience of this version of anti-Zionism which, in our view, is music to the ears of a Zionist establishment that is actually now beginning to worry about its grip on the Jewish community.

In fairness, *Spare Rib's* autocratic tone is applied to others who take issue with its politics. Its letters page was once a space where feminists could develop debates, where writers were trusted to present their ideas in good faith and readers were trusted to evaluate the merits of an argument. Now it is more of a platform for the *Spare Rib* collective whose responses routinely take up more space than the letters they are replying to.

This didactic tone was reflected in a long telephone conversation I had with Marcel Fakhry, a member of the current *Spare Rib* collective. Our intention was to open the debate in good faith, in sisterhood and solidarity. But we were treated to a lecture on how we ought to be formally distancing ourselves from Israel and concentrating our energies on the plight of the Palestinians. (Thanks for the advice. It *had* occurred to us. Please see *Jewish Socialist* issues 1 to 27!) Towards the end of the conversation, Marcel Fakhry forbade me to quote any of what she said, but told me she would send a statement which we must publish in full or not at all. She then informed me that she had taped the entire conversation. This seemed to contradict the high moral tone she had taken on international issues, but I let it pass on the grounds that, unlike *Spare Rib*, I feel myself to be accountable for everything I say and am happy to be quoted and argued with.

Amanda Sudic of Gertrude & Alice's gained a further insight into *Spare Rib's* motivation from a subsequent interaction she had with them. She had sent a petition signed by a large number of women protesting about the way they had been treated. They heard nothing and eventually contacted *Spare Rib*. A member of the collective shouted at her down the telephone, accusing her of 'having something against *Spare Rib*' and implying that she was behind a number of phone calls they had had, accusing them of antisemitism. Not exactly a conspiracy... A few days later she was told they couldn't publish the petition because it didn't explain why Israel doesn't speak for all Jews.

Probably for the same reason that *Spare Rib* no longer represents feminists - because it doesn't trust them to speak for themselves without guidance from a higher authority!

Here, in full, are *Spare Rib's* answers to our questions.

JS What are your criteria for giving space to organisations in *Spare Rib*?

SR All that is required for an organisation to be given space in *Spare Rib* is that they be opposed to imperialism, racism and Zionism.

JS Would you ask an Asian women's group for their position on Sikh separatism or an Irish reproductive rights group for their position on the British occupation of the North?

SR The Irish reproductive rights groups given space in *Spare Rib* have all made their opposition to British occupation of the North of Ireland clear. If they had not, we would have asked them to do so. With regard to Asian women's groups, we would of course ask them whether they were in opposition to those colonial and imperialist governments throughout Asia. With regard to Sikh (sic) separatism, the issue is a little more complex. On the one hand, although the people of the Punjab have suffered a terrible oppression at the hands of the Indian government, some sections of the Sikh (sic) separatist movement are considered by many Asians to be reactionary. So if an Asian women's group did not support the Sikh (sic) separatist movement but supported the struggle of the people of the Punjab, they would get space in *Spare Rib*. The thing is, we do not usually need

to inquire about such things, since most groups we deal with clearly and openly state their political views.

JS What specifically would you ask of Jewish groups?

SR We would ask them about their position on Zionism, the state of Israel, and the Israeli regime's activities throughout the Arab World and beyond.

JS Why do you feel that Zionism is the acid test of their political credentials?

SR It is our feeling that this matter between Gertrude & Alice and *Spare Rib* has brought into the open some serious misunderstandings. Some Jewish women have said that they feel that it is unfair to ask Jewish people living in the diaspora to have a view on Israel since it has nothing to do with them. Also they have said that they feel it is only Jewish women who are asked for their political opinions in this way. In addition, the organisers of Gertrude & Alice have said that the group is a 'cultural' group, and therefore is not 'political'.

On the first point, as a collective of African, African-Caribbean, Arab, Asian and European women, we disagree that it is only Jewish women who are asked for their political affiliations. We are all asked for our standpoint regarding imperialism, racism and Zionism. In particular, each of us is asked for our views about the activities of governments who are committing atrocities in our names. We do not believe that in 1992 any of us can afford the luxury of divorcing ourselves from what is happening globally, wherever we are born or are living. For many of us, Zionism and the state of Israel is a threat to the very existence of our peoples, and we feel we have every right at this particular time in all of our histories to ask everyone, and in particular Jewish women, to take a stand.

Secondly, we do not believe that it is possible to make the division between cultural and political. Any expression of any people's culture carries within it that culture's underlying ideology and understanding of the world. Therefore it is a political act for any group to explore and celebrate their culture.

JS If we felt that *Spare Rib's* actions made our position as progressives in our community more difficult, do you think that you would have a responsibility to change the way you operated with reference to us?

SR The *Spare Rib* Collective is very committed to the principle of self-determination. So it is not for us to comment on problems that Jewish women may have in their community, or how they should deal with these problems. That is for Jewish women to decide. We would try to offer any support or assistance we could. From our own experience, we understand the problems and tensions that can arise when you stand out against racism and reactionary ideas in any community. However, at this time in our histories, we are faced with a fight for our very survival. Whether we like it or not, the lines have been drawn, and we believe that a stand against the oppression of imperialism and Zionism must be taken, despite the consequences.

Marcel Fakhry on behalf of the *Spare Rib* Collective

Women in action

A new alliance of Jewish and non-Jewish women in support of the Palestinian struggle will be launched at a meeting on 5 October in London. Details of the meeting and the group from Women's Action for Palestine, c/o Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8.

Bone breaker or peace maker?

What is the meaning of the Israeli elections held on 23 June? To what extent is it a real victory for the peace process? Commentators on the Israeli left vary in their assessment, but the note of cautious optimism is undeniable.

Adam Keller, writing in *The Other Israel*, calls his piece 'The Hawk in the Dovecote'. He details the paradoxical way in which Yitzhak Rabin, the defence minister who gave instructions to break the bones of Palestinian demonstrators during the Intifada, is now leader of the peace camp.

'In early 1992,' writes Keller, 'Labour's 160,000 strong membership participated in primary elections to select a new party leader and the party's parliamentary candidates. The results were rather puzzling: Rabin was elected party leader, beating Peres by a considerable margin; but most of the top slots on the Labour slate went to prominent doves, whose views were far different from those of Rabin.'

'The answer to this seeming paradox soon became evident: many of the doves themselves supported Rabin, having become convinced that he was the only one who could lead the party to victory. He did also make statements such as: "For the sake of peace we will have to make concessions and they will be measured in kilometres rather than centimetres."'

However, once the election campaign got underway, Rabin was presented as a national leader, a war hero, the conqueror of East Jerusalem. He was even portrayed in broad hints as the 'natural successor to Menahem Begin'. When the stabbing to death of an Israeli teenage girl by a Palestinian from Gaza led to

days of anti-Palestinian riots Rabin's reaction was to blame the Shamir government for failing to ensure security of daily life in Israel. He did not condemn the racism of the demonstrators.

In short, says Keller, Rabin presented himself to Likud voters as 'a tough negotiator; he would negotiate with the Arabs from a position of strength while continuing to fight terrorism; he would reach an interim agreement with the Palestinians within nine months and get the loan guarantees and improve relations with the US.'

The results appear to have vindicated this strategy. However, says Marcello Wechsler in *News from Within*, the victory was Rabin's, not the Left's. Labour won 44 seats, the Likud slumped to 32 and Meretz, a bloc made up of three dovish parties with widely varying views on socio-economic issues, won 12. However, the extreme right increased its strength by 45%.

'The people wanted Rabin as prime minister', writes Wechsler, 'first and foremost in order to punish the Likud. The two most urgent social issues, from the voters' point of view, were the need for trustworthy leadership and for solutions to pressing societal problems. The Likud earned its comeuppance primarily due to its inability to satisfy these two needs... Make no mistake. The rejection of Likud positions by the electorate does not mean recognition of the Palestinian people's right to an independent state. Rabin is part of the right wing of the Labour Party, the security obsessed wing of the Zionist labour movement. He is

perceived by defectors from the Likud as representing sufficiently rigid political and security-related positions, but as someone who will accelerate the peace talks.'

With Rabin Prime Minister, attention now shifts to precisely what political settlement is on offer. Rabin was careful to distinguish between what he considered to be 'political' settlements and those which he considered 'strategic'. In the latter category come those on the Golan Heights, most of which were established by the Labour Party from 1967 to 1977. An agreement with the Palestinians may be more attractive to Rabin than one with the Syrians.

Adam Keller writes, 'Rabin declared himself ready in principle to accept general elections in the Occupied Territories. However, this is meaningless without an agreement with regard to the elected

Palestinian body's authority.'

Keller poses the most fundamental question as follows. 'Once the Palestinian autonomy comes into force, would the Israeli army retain the right of patrolling Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps; the right of shooting, arresting, imposing curfews, blowing up houses? If the answer is "Yes", then autonomy is nothing but a sham, a mask for the continuation of the Occupation.'

'If the answer is "no" then the Palestinian population centres would at last be free of the oppressive presence of an occupying army. The Israeli army would still be present at camps throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the area would still be ... inhabited by armed settlers. Nevertheless it would be a real step forward on the long and hard road to Palestinian independence.'

MICHAEL HEISER

**PALESTINE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN
PUBLIC MEETING**

**Israel's Occupation of Lebanon: 10 years on
Tuesday 6 October 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1**

Israeli preoccupations

Hundreds of Bedouins who served in the Israeli army were not able to vote in the elections. The reason for this, according to a spokesperson for the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, is that they did not register as citizens in the early 1950s. Anyone who did not register then is not considered a citizen even if they possess an identity card.

Rabbis of Yesha (the religious authority of the settlers in the West Bank and Gaza) have issued a religious ruling permitting the continuation of con-

struction of houses on the sabbath, because in their opinion the settlements are a manner of saving life and saving life overrides the sabbath. The work will, of course, be performed by Arabs.

David Ish Shalom (see JS26) was released in early July after serving three months of an eight-month sentence for violating the law against contacts with the PLO.

(News taken from *The Other Front*, published by the Alternative Information Centre, Jerusalem.)

In or out?

The ban on Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline from the Chief Rabbi's 'unity' walk-about provided important lessons for dissidents in the community.

Exclusion of the charity from the parade in London's Hyde Park betrayed Jonathan Sacks's fundamentalism on key issues of women's rights and sexuality. It also exposed the naivety of reform and Liberal rabbis who, seduced by apparent pluralism, found themselves compromised when Sacks maintained the ban, despite widespread protests.

Radicals and Leftists outside religious and Zionist circles need to rethink their strategy for a possible repeat of the apartheid event next year. Already, the non-orthodox rabbis, fingers burnt, have been forced to warn that their synagogues will refuse future cooperation, unless the ban is lifted.

Besides the reluctant ministers, large numbers of ordinary Jews displayed a mixed approach to the park stroll. Many participants – from youths to pensioners, representing national and regional bodies – stepped out with keenness in the bright sunshine. But large numbers of walkers expressed backing for the Helpline, as protesters

handed out leaflets and persuaded supporters to wear sympathetic ribbons.

Some reactionaries abused the protesters. One, though, floundered in the face of the response from a gay man charged with scolding the Old Testament. He said: 'The Bible says man should not lie with man like man lies with woman.'

'Not me. I do it better,' came the response.

It was still not good enough for Rabbi Pinchas Rosenstein, one of the Talmudic ostriches who shepherded the walk into a fractured wilderness. The incongruously-monikered Pinkarse said participants afforded official status had aims consistent with the interests and sensitivities of the overall community. The Helpline 'does not, in the broadest sense, meet the criteria for inclusion'.

The event's coordinators also proclaimed that Judaism rejected 'the modern liberal view of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, or as a role model for our children'.

Nonetheless, the positive reception for the demonstration has been reflected in increasing calls for help and advice to the Helpline since the controversy erupted. Helpline Secretary Jack Gilbert said: 'Enquiries have



come from across the age spectrum – including teenagers and parents.'

Myrna Julius wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle*, after resigning her subscription to the United Synagogue over the Chief Rabbi's walkabout veto on the Helpline. She told how the ban 'humiliated' her gay son, Mark, and she urged other parents to 'stand up and to be counted'. She added: 'I remember being a member of a minority group during the war and what it was like to be made to feel different – and that was because I was a Jew.'

The Helpline has run workshops on lesbian and gay awareness for Miyad, the Jewish crisis line, Mapam, youth groups and Jewish societies. However, some of the Helpline's allies believe its leaders could be more convincing in their avowed commitment to a pluralistic community.

Jewish Socialist magazine has campaigned over years to extend lesbian and gay rights – not least among Jews. A Helpline speaker addressed a recent JSG meeting and JSG members joined the protest in the park. They helped circulate a leaflet which listed diverse supporters. These included

the Union of Jewish Students, the Association of Jewish Sixth Formers, Hanoar Hatzioni, B'nai Brith Youth Organisation, RSY-Netzer, Habonim and Jewish Women's Arts and Education. Yet these are mainstream organisations – and there was no reference to the JSG, which, to quote the Helpline about its own plight, suffers 'bigotry and ignorance' from the Jewish establishment.

The Helpline refused to resist ancient regulations which police invoked to outlaw its banner in the park. There was no concerted attempt to take part in the walk. At its conference earlier this year – with non-Zionists present – a sprawling Israeli flag hung above the speakers. The meek excuse that another body required the flag for a later function at the venue heightens doubts about the Helpline's independence.

The Helpline must decide whether its goal is to become 'respectable', or to 'come out', loud and proud, together with all those mounting a sustained challenge to a narrow and regressive Jewish leadership.

PAUL COLLINS



Gay Paree

Jewish Gay and Lesbian Conferences are held annually, World Conferences alternating with European Conferences. Our last conference was held in May in Paris, where about 140 men and women gathered from all corners of Europe. For the first time there were participants from the former Eastern Bloc – from Russia, Hungary, Poland – as well as from the Netherlands, Israel, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Great Britain and, of course, France itself. Some even travelled specially from the USA.

Participants from the UK came from, Beit Kial, the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group, the Jewish Helpline and Hineinu.

The programme was very varied with workshop sessions alternating with social events. The keynote speech was made by Paullette Goodman, President of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and a French Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. She spoke of the difficulties encountered between parents and gay and lesbian children, society's attitude to homosexuality and the work she has been doing in this field.

Workshop sessions were held in French and

English and covered a range of themes, including women rabbis, having children and raising them Jewish, the French response to Aids, parents and their gay and lesbian children, homosexuality and adolescence. Of particular interest to many was the workshop led by participants from the former Eastern Bloc countries.

Shabbat services were held on both Friday evening and Saturday morning in *shuls* in Paris, with a choice of venue – either liberal or orthodox. It is always very special going to *shul* with other gays as you do not feel so isolated within your own community.

There were, of course, the less serious, more touristy aspects of the weekend with a boat trip on the Seine and a great disco on the Saturday evening, finishing in the wee hours of Sunday morning. A great time was had by all.

The next conference will be the World Conference which will take place in London's Docklands from Friday 30 April to Monday 3 May 1992. If you are interested in attending or in helping with the organising, please leave a message on the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group answer phone, 071-224 9037, or write to the 13th International Conference, BM13 Conf, London WC1N 3XX.

DAVID RUBIN

Hard travelling



Gypsies in Britain face increased repression if new government proposals to scrap the limited Caravan Sites Act come into force. Local authorities will be released from obligations to provide sites and will be able to enact speedier evictions. Meanwhile politicians and the media condemn the violent outbreaks in Germany targeted at refugees – particularly Romanian Gypsies.

New year greeting to friends and comrades everywhere from Manchester Jewish Socialists

Wishing you a good inscription for a Socialist New Year from Nottingham Jewish Socialists' Group.

New Year greetings from Irene and Alvin Rosenberg and family.

Frank Fisher wishes comrades and friends happiness and fulfilment in the New Year. May we find renewed collective strength in 5753.

Don't ask the Rabbi

I am outraged by the new fashion of toe sucking. I am sure our young people are not observing *kashrus*. Can the Talmud give any guidance?

THE RABBI REPLIES

Toes are considered *fleyshik*, though some scholars argue that unwashed toes could be classed as *stilton* and therefore *milkhik*. As with any food, the correct preparation must take place and the toes must be koshered. Salt the toes, then leave to soak in cold water for half an hour. After the appropriate *brokhe** the toes are ready to be sucked. (Koshering other parts of the anatomy may not be quite as straightforward.)

*Blessed art thou O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, whose bounteous grace hath bestowed upon us these digits that we may sucketh whilst guided by the Toerah.

Kol Nidre appeal

Nowhere has the recession affected us more than in Europe's poorest borough – Hackney. Most worrying of all is the news that Stamford Hill *mikvah* may soon have to close through a lack of funds.

Those of you who contribute to this year's appeal may take comfort in the knowledge that although you are unable to protect your family from poverty, poor education and bad health care – your wife will always be clean for sex. Please give generously.

Julia Bard, David Rosenberg, Jacob and Reuben wish Jewish Socialist readers, friends and relations a year of revolutionary upheaval and progress *tsu bafrayen un banayen unzer alte velt*

PIT BULLS AND PRESS BARONS

In a free country, if you don't like a newspaper's opinions you can buy another paper, they say. Or, if you're rich enough, you can buy the paper. The *Jerusalem Post* escaped Robert Maxwell's clutches only to fall into those of Conrad Black's Canadian-based Hollinger corporation, and have its previously liberal-Labour inclinations adjusted accordingly.

Black, proprietor of *Telegraph* newspapers and owner of a stake in the *Star* and *Daily Express*, hasn't been as successful as the late Captain Bob in all respects. When he took over Dominion stores in Ontario, shutting shops and sacking workers, he announced that with fewer staff there needn't be such a big pension fund, so the surplus could be transferred to the company. Canada's shopworkers' union didn't go along with this, and successfully took Black to court for the money.

Black's a generous chap, though, really. He gave his friend Margaret Thatcher a directorship to supplement her pension. He has helped out fellow-canucks at Olympia and York by moving the *Telegraph* to Canary Wharf. After his divorce came through in June he wed thrice-married Barbara Amiel, though not quite making an honest woman of her. Last November, Canadian-import Amiel was writing in her *Sunday Times* column how 'We' (British) 'give tolerance to newcomers', but must make it clear we won't alter 'our principles' to resemble 'the habits,

principles and cultures of the region from which they come'. The following month, scorning feminists for notions like marital or date rape, Amiel wrote that if women were 'overpowered and forced to have sex', this was merely part of 'normal courtship patterns'.

Guesting in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Amiel took umbrage at the TUC for attempting to oppose antisemitism. Jews could do without trade unions, she advised, and, if they encountered problems at work, could always set up on their own. Amiel also attacked moves to outlaw dangerous dogs like rottweilers and pit bull terriers. Now she's given her hand to the man whom Ontario's premier Bob Rae once called 'that most symbolic representative of bloated capitalism at its worst'. I'm sure they deserve each other.

KLAYNE IRVING, KAYNE MEYVIN

The nicest ham sandwiches I ever tasted were served at a Jewish function in Paris. 'Back home, folks would say this was antisemitism,' said the American tucking in next to me. So I was almost prepared for Irv Kline's letter in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 19 June:

'The Kach party is denied a place in the Israeli ballot because it loves Jews and hates Arabs,' complained Irv, of Ilford. 'If Kach is "racist", what are we to label the Left, who arrogantly, sans *kipot*, delight in eating ham sandwiches, while strolling outside the synagogue on Yom Kippur?'

I used to suspect that 'Irv Kline' was

a fictitious, satirical character invented by a mischievous Jewish Socialist. Not so. Our grandparents left Russia for the *Goldene Medina*, and landed up in Gateshead. Irv's an American whose Love of Zion has led him as far east as Essex. So maybe he gets confused between the bacon-freeding antics of East End anarchists in the last century and the tactics of today's Israeli Left?

Somebody who thinks Meir Kahane's disciples are found guilty only of 'loving Jews' (like the British National Party 'loves the white race') might regard leading anti-Arab pogroms (provided you wear a beard and *kippa*) as only a minor misdemeanour, if not actually a *mitzva*. But I'm not clear on eating *treyf* at Yom Kippur. Would it be less, or more, heinous if 'the Left' wore *kipot* while munching their bacon butties? And what about saying a *bracha*?

At the time of the Tianenmen Square massacre, Irv Kline wrote to the *JC* demanding to know what Jewish Socialists had to say about it. A Jewish Socialists' Group member replied that if Irv had been up west that weekend he'd have seen us with our banner, marching with Chinese students, and he could have discussed it with us.

Back came Irv's prompt retort: the JSG was once again busying itself with other people's causes that were no concern of Jews. I hope no one wasted time protesting that they wouldn't eat ham, because they are vegetarians. They would only be accused of hating good chicken soup.

Chosen people

Deciding to have children is a momentous event in peoples' lives. For many of us it calls into question issues about family and culture; how we relate to our own parents and the ways in which we wish to bring up our children. As secular Jews, the relation we have to the Jewish community and how we will transmit Jewish identity to our children is particularly important. While not wishing to suggest that these issues are unproblematic for heterosexual Jewish couples, those of us having children with non-Jewish partners, with same-sex partners or no partners at all face particular problems. Theoretical discussions around family, fatherhood and culture become real issues, especially when the role of biological fatherhood is separated from that of day-to-day parenting. For Jewish women exploring this way of having children, a key area is whether the man donating sperm should be Jewish.

Rachel and Lynne had discussed this with friends and partners. Lynne thought it could be 'to do with wanting your children to look Jewish. You might think that if the child has two Jewish parents, there's more chance of the child looking Jewish.' Rachel felt the important factor was 'whether the donor is going to have anything to do with bringing up the child. If he is involved as a father, then being Jewish might be a positive contribution towards creating a secular Jewish identity. If he's not going to be involved, then I might want to choose someone who'd give me the kind of looks that will fit with my wishes for this child. Yet even on that level it's illogical; we all know about blond and blue-eyed Jews.'

If you accept that there is such a thing as 'looking Jewish', then asking for a Jewish sperm donor starts to sound logical. But the concept of 'Jewish sperm' as separate from Jewish fatherhood only makes any sort of sense if you believe that Jewishness is genetically transmitted. The idea of Jewishness being genetically transmissible has very uncomfortable echoes. Rachel agrees: 'I might feel differently if I was living with a woman who was Jewish who was going to be involved in bringing up the child. If you're not going to have anything to do with the donor then it is completely irrational to want him to be Jewish. So what are we saying? Are we saying that we think Jewish genes are better? In the end you have to say that this is unacceptable and it needs working through in order to discard it.'

The confusion felt by individuals is reflected

by those clinics offering donor insemination (DI) as a service. Until recently DI has not been covered by legislation at all. However, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1991 forced clinics to examine their practice, and placed particular emphasis on issues to do with consumer choice. One area was that of matching donors to recipients, especially in areas of culture and ethnicity. In the main, clinics used a rule of thumb that the resulting child did not look so unlike its family as to cause embarrassment. However, this was not done in great

Insemination clinics in London are reporting increasing demands for Jewish donors. Marian Shapiro investigates the politics of identity behind this demand



depth and basically meant matching up for what was seen as ethnic origin, hair and eye colour, and general build. Although on the surface the idea was to go on physical characteristics, this was not always consistent. Afro-Caribbeans were matched with Afro-Caribbeans, and Asians with Asians. However, when it came to Jews, practice was much more varied, reflecting differing ideas about the nature of Jewish identity. When asked by Jewish clients for Jewish sperm donors, some agencies would match and some wouldn't. At least one agency would accept requests from Jewish women for Jewish donors while refusing Asian clients' requests to match donors by caste or religion. Agencies which would match for Jews did so only on request, and sperm from Jewish donors was routinely given to non-Jewish clients. Most demand for Jewish donors came from London,

Beit Klal Yisrael
wishes all members, friends and
Jewish Socialist readers
a happy and creative
New Year

PAUL COLLINS and LYDIA MELLECK
wish all *Jewish Socialist* readers a feast of
radicalism in the New Year.
We look forward to 'Safe Sacks' - the Chief
Rabbi atoning for his sins of sectarianism.

Now, as never before,
Need for Comradeship and Partnership,
we must prevail.
A wish for health and yikhes in the New Year.
Diana and Chaim Neslen

HAPPY NEW YEAR
Peace in the Middle East and all over the world
and an end to racism and fascism.
Good wishes to Jewish Socialist
Zelda and Sam Bard

HAPPY NEW YEAR
to *Jewish Socialist*
from
Sue, Bill, Clara and Annie Gutteridge

Ruth Lukom, Mike Gerber and Lillian
wish comrades
a Happy New Year

reflecting a larger Jewish community there. Some clinics report that the majority of clients requesting Jewish donors were Jewish lesbians.

It is no coincidence that those who are asking for Jewish sperm donors are those who feel most isolated from the traditional Jewish community. Married heterosexual couples who wish to be part of the mainstream Jewish community have fewer problems on this front than Jewish lesbians or single women. For Jewish lesbians who feel strongly that they want to carry on being Jewish, that they want to be a Jewish family, having a Jewish father for their child, even in the weakest sense, can be an important way of making a statement. Lynne felt that 'it's about hoping to find a link into the community. People feel excluded because of choices about lifestyle and sexuality.' Rachel commented: 'If you feel that you are excluded by the community already, you may be hoping to create that little bit more of a link. The question arises, what is the best way to give this child a positive Jewish identity? If it doesn't "look Jewish", then if it's a boy and he's not circumcised, if it doesn't come from a conventional nuclear family, how can you take yourself away from the mainstream Jewish community and still say my child's a Jew? ... I don't want the Jewish identity to be difficult. I want it to be straightforward.' Lynne felt, 'This doesn't work as a strategy. The establishment is not going to accept Jewish lesbian parents whether or not the donor was a nice Jewish boy.'

And if acceptance by the Jewish community is important, then it is also important to consider who is a member of the Jewish community. Rachel felt that women were more likely to feel rejected if they had a religious background. 'I've never been a member of a *shul* so I don't worry about that, although I can understand other people's worries. We can create another part of the Jewish community, but the fact is if you're a single woman – either heterosexual or lesbian – having a child by a donor, you're never going to be acceptable to the establishment. And anyway, do you want to be? If you've already decided to have a child that way then you must surely reject the sort of misogyny which dictates that women should be married to have children.'

Most people do not need to consider biological fatherhood and day-to-day parenthood as separate issues. Women having children without fathers are forced to unpick the two. People closely involved with children will have an important role in many areas of the child's life, including transmitting a cultural or ethnic identity. For those conceptions where fathering is severed from parenting, if the sole contribution is the sperm, then to argue that in some ways this makes the child more Jewish is

to be on shaky ground.

Lynne thought that 'having a Jewish donor makes sense if an actual person is going to play a part in the bringing up of the child. Then you're talking about cultural transmission which is to do with human beings, not to do with genetic material. If you've got a situation where the donor has absolutely nothing to do with the bringing up of the child, it's at that point that I fail to see why it's so important.'

Despite this sentiment, having a Jewish donor is clearly important for many Jewish lesbians when choosing a father for their child. This is not an easy area and women who have chosen to use a Jewish donor can feel wary of talking openly about their reasons. This wariness may simply reflect the debate in the wider Jewish community about the nature of Jewish identity. On the other hand, it may be a measure of the isolation from the established community that Jewish lesbians feel. Whatever the concerns on a personal level, the issues that women face when making these difficult decisions could open this debate for us all.

● With thanks to Tara Kaufmann, Rachel and Lynne. (Rachel and Lynne's names have been changed as they requested anonymity.)

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1991 arose originally from the 1984 Warnock Report. The Act set up a statutory body, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which regulates all treatments given by clinics involving human eggs and sperm, including DI. The legislation touched on areas of high public anxiety and highlighted entrenched ideas around parenthood. This was exemplified by media hysteria around the 'virgin birth' issue. Parliamentary attempts to prevent single women and lesbians having access to DI fell narrowly and the law now states that doctors must prioritise the future welfare of the child, including the child's need for a father.

The other major change was the law covering sperm donors. Previously, donors used by clinics were completely anonymous. Now, children have a right at 18 (or 16 if they're getting married) to ask the Authority if they were born by DI. If they were, non-identifying genetic information about the father can be released to them.

Since 1 August 1991, all sperm donors have had to sign a consent form and, as clinics started distributing them, numbers dropped to the extent that in the summer of 1991 some clinics introduced differential charges for black clients because they had to buy in sperm from other clinics.

Poor transmission?

Karen Merkel confronts the challenge of passing on secular Jewish culture

Life seems to be organised around the idea of belonging. Broadly speaking, people either happily 'belong' or vigorously protest that they don't, but are something else instead. The whole problem with the idea of 'otherness' or the outsider is that it presumes a norm; a universal set of standards by which behaviour and people are judged. I realise it's ludicrously simplistic to assume it is an idea easily flouted but it is important to contest it. At the heart of belonging is rooted a deep seated view of authenticity. No matter how xenophobic people are, they'll usually acknowledge that some peoples are more the real thing than others. Being a paid-up member of a tribe of course is complex and yet it is also straightforward. You have to look the part, you can be born to it, you agree a value system, you adhere to its rules and you adopt its mores.

Sixteen years ago, together with my partner and a very close Jewish friend, I lived and worked for a year with Travellers in the East End of London. On the sites where we taught, we met many many people. There was a common feature in their conversations which always emerged very quickly. This was a strong compulsion to express 'who' they were, ie people were either *real* 'Romanies' or 'Gaojos' (not Gypsies). Although I believe this insistence on definition was fuelled in part by a kind of hierarchy of oppression, I think it illustrates an interesting aspect of this issue of authenticity.

At first, we found it impossible to tell who was on the road but previously had been a house dweller, who had been born and bred on the road and was a Traveller (and probably Irish) and who had been born and bred on the road and was Romani. However, we were quickly inculcated into the politics of definitions. 'Traveller' was used as a public term rather in the way that 'Black' has been used as a political definition of people of colour. There was such a plethora of naming terms that it seemed compulsory to 'self-identify'. These endless descriptions were used as codes to explain exactly who people were by where they came from. In other words, these codes ensured that they were always on the outside in relation to others. Not surprisingly, they were and are used

against Travellers too.

Gradually, we were able to tell people's roots and in my view the distinctions were entirely cultural. There is a Romani word, 'mokadi' (dirty), which is used exactly in the same way as 'non-kosher'. For example, the ways in which people washed their clothes, bodies, crockery (a deft and complex arrangement for some) was a clear indicator of people's roots. However, these were possible to learn and we did. In other words, whilst people might have been born and bred on the road, their language, and indeed whole way of life, was open for adoption and indeed appropriation.

If we are to own our future, we must also own our histories and the question of inheritance usually besets us at some stage in our lives. Whatever our sexual orientation, we yearn for children to pass on our stories to, just as we enjoyed hearing them. Then, in turn, it is our children who will carry on our families. Or else, of course, we eschew the whole thing entirely. Whatever people's position (and there is rarely indifference), the really interesting question to me is 'how does it matter?' The fact that it is of such significance gives credence to the plethora of arguments in praise of family values which are in such an ascendancy. Whilst we may hotly dispute them, in this right new world of ours, we are not easily removed from the arguments. Feeling part of something bigger than yourself is an important way of understanding that you matter. Respecting the past and its myriad of struggles and successes is one way to do that, but deciding on which past to choose is not necessarily straightforward.

I have a friend who is lesbian and became a mother at the same time as I did. She asked me if I was going to bring up my baby boy as a Jew. I asked her why she was asking me and she said, '...because it's really important for him to be able to identify with something other than white heterosexual Tory norms'. I have enormous problems with this kind of negative identification process. I want him to feel able to opt in to his cultural histories from a positive volition rather than as an oppositional stance. Also, her assumption denied his father's history completely.

There is, of course, a strong attraction to 'not

belong'. The role of the dissident is essential, but protest isn't always the reason for people to 'opt out' of their cultural milieu. After all, you can have a better view of a community if you're not deep in the middle of it. What I fear is that we will never pass 'beyond the fragments' whilst we allow ourselves to be commentators and to offer endless critique. Along with the wave of depression that has beset the broad Left in Britain at the moment has come a deep and disturbing cynicism. Although understandable, this is an easy option and one that really is available only to those of us who have a certain kind of social and cultural mobility. The hard task is to *build* cultures, to posit other standards by which we can judge our own morality and celebrate our achievements.

I cannot imagine many people arguing against the idea of cultural self determination. However, culture has to be seen as a living idea, with infinitely flexible boundaries, providing these are based on the understanding that people can forge *contingent* and *conditional* alliances. The idea that culture is definable in the same way as race is to ensure its ossification. It is an absolute tragedy that the idea of integration as opposed to assimilation has so little currency. The shocking ways in which fundamentalism is working so effectively surely gives us warnings that being born into a line misses a crucial point, it's how you self-determine thereafter that counts. This of course requires a measure of self-esteem. Too many people have the idea that there is something wrong with who they are; in other words, there is a 'right' person to be.

In 1986, two well known radical American cultural activists, Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams, told a telling story to a conference in England which they used to illustrate how hegemony works. 'At home, we've tried to help people realise how dominant culture works by posing a set of questions, usually to groups of artists or students. Among other questions, we've asked whether they grew up feeling like "real Americans", and whether they feel that way now. This has proven to be a very rich question, because it calls upon people to bring to consciousness ideas which have been deeply internalised since childhood. To produce an answer, each person has to summon up his or her idea of a "real American" and make a personal comparison. We've found, over and over again, that the internalised real American is pretty much the same person for everyone: white, Christian and probably Protestant, middle class and probably suburban, deeply ensconced in a nuclear family - this is undoubtedly familiar as the commercial-TV American of the 1950s. This version of the "real American" leaves aside the vast majority of the population by virtue of race,

class, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, place of residence, family status and general demeanour. In one group of twenty art students it meant that only two or three people felt welcomed by birth as full partners in their society, and that the other seventeen had lived out their lives thus far with something less than full citizenship. Even these two or three later came to feel alienated from society by individual decisions to move against the grain.' *Crossroads: reflections on the politics of culture* (published by DNA Press).

This issue now has become well understood, if little acted upon. However, those of us to whom the definition of the 'real American' also would not apply still must be mindful of how that particular hegemony works within our own communities. The definition of eugenics is 'pertaining or adapted to the production of fine offspring' - interestingly reasonable providing you understand 'production' to be a continuous process and not a complete task at birth. There is a real danger that in our collective search for greater recognition and identity, we will tread down a genetically determined road as if we can be immune to the prevailing politics of 'authenticity'. If we are not very careful we'll be colluding with them instead.

About ten years ago I met a woman, whom I now know well, and felt the most extraordinary instant rapport with her; it was as if I had known her all my life. She is the opposite of me to look at - small, slight and 'English Rosy'. She is a similar age and works in the same field as I do. She is a famous wit and has the rare ability to hold forth in the most wonderful quiet dry way whilst reducing those around her to tears of laughter. The mystery was solved when I discovered some years later that she had been adopted at birth by a large Jewish family in Manchester. She doesn't identify as Jewish, but she might just as well do so given how imbued she is with Jewish culture.

It seems to me that even if your politics are progressive, to engage actively in the idea that you can pass on your culture through a process of reclaiming religion and race is in a way being an unwitting player in a fundamentalist scenario. It's as if people are saying, 'Yes, I do have politics about organised religion, but I must put them to one side when it comes to my most personal decisions about my culture and my children's.' Ultimately, the powerful force of the eugenically based position will overwhelm and incorporate the most reformist of participants. I realise this sounds apocalyptic, but I am scared. I am fearful when we try to appropriate some religious trappings, operate independently and believe we can remain somehow unaffected by the new fundamentalist mainstream. Hard as it is, surely this is the point when our politics matter most?

End of the rainbow?

Jesse Jackson has made a public reconciliation with American Jews by hailing Zionism 'as a liberation movement whose object is to secure a state for its people ... not with negative connotations attached to it'. This truly is an interesting development. My confidential sources tell me that the leaders of the World Jewish Congress didn't want Jesse (we all call him by his first name) to speak at all, but that Edgar Bronfman invited Jesse himself and forced the Congress to hear him. I suppose we should be grateful.

My sources also tell me that Jesse has been trying to engineer this for quite some time. For years he has been speaking about rebuilding Black-Jewish ties and the need to combat antisemitism along with racism, but representatives of the 'major' Jewish organisations have refused to hear it from him. Nearly two years ago I heard him give a terrific talk to around 200 Black and Latino union members right here in New York, where this was a key part of his message. This is not a new position just to please his audience.

Needless to say, the WJC did not exactly 'embrace' Jesse back (after all, he still mentioned Palestinians in his speech), but they do seem willing to tolerate him for the moment. Jesse has been treated shamefully by these men for years. Keeping him at a distance continues to send a message to African-Americans that Jewish leaders just don't care about them, even when Jesse bends over backwards to kiss and make up.

Sadly Jesse has lost a good deal of his own political base, both in the Black community and among other progressives. He should have been the independent third party campaign here and not that neo-fascist in liberal clothing, H Ross Perot. But he rejected the strong sentiment to transform his Rainbow Coalition into a third party after '88, and instead we were treated to the sight of Jesse Jackson making a moving speech on national television, not for himself, but for Bill Clinton. He has been campaigning all over the country to woo the Black vote on behalf of the Bill and Al Show (Clinton and Gore) and it is a hard sight to see.

It seems that Jesse has sold his soul to the Democratic Party for personal ambition. And if Jesse is campaigning for the Dems, he has to make up with the Jews. They are major campaign contributors to the Democrats, and he better make nice or they'll be too nervous to fork it over - truly a bleak tale of political opportunism at its worst. We want the old Jesse back.

On the other hand, the Israeli elections provide a much more entertaining political backdrop. Picture these same Jewish leaders, who for decades would not even say the word 'Palestinian' as if anyone saying it would immediately become one, now faced with having to support a new dovish government in Israel moving towards genuine dialogue. Can you imagine Rabin embracing Yasser Arafat? (US Jews are always watching who is embracing whom, as in 'Jesse embracing Yasser Arafat', 'Nelson Mandela embracing Fidel Castro', etc.) Well, perhaps not Arafat, but certainly Hannan Ashrawi. It simply flies in the face of 20 years of Arab demonisation and anti-communist invective. In the progressive Jewish movement here we are positively thrilled that there might actually be a fragile Middle East peace in our lifetimes. But better than that will be the rub-their-noses-in-it glee that we will be politically vindicated, even as we have been reviled for so long. Revenge will be sweet indeed!

The final irony in all this is that, by withholding \$10 billion in loan guarantees, George Bush assisted the Labour victory, while Bill Clinton has been supporting the distasteful position of making no demands on the Israeli government in exchange for the loan guarantees, 'as a friend to Israel'. On this single issue, the 'liberal' Democrat is supporting a very conservative position, while the 'conservative' Republicans ignored the desperate pro-Israel lobby to promote a much more politically correct position.

Our political landscape is in a shambles, I'm afraid. We fervently hope that George Bush will be put out of his misery; the prospect of four more years is truly terrifying. I am not thrilled with Clinton but I suppose with him in office we will be spared more Clarence Thomas debacles, Panama invasions, or gag orders on information about abortion or contraception. But there is truly no telling. Perhaps I can arrange to take an extended vacation - say, for the next four years or so.

Nan Rubin
New York

The unkindest cut

I was very pleased to see your articles on circumcision in JS22 but less than delighted to be misquoted in Julia Bard's comments on my articles in the *Jewish Chronicle*.

Julia implies that my article referred only to pro-circumcision arguments and approved of the sentiments of Dr Sifman of the Initiation Society. This is not the case. The bulk of my article was in fact anti-circumcision, reflecting my personal view. The first part described the experiences of a Jewish man in New York who had decided against circumcision and had subsequently spoken out on the issue inside and outside the Jewish community. My article then assessed the medical arguments and suggested that there are no clear health grounds for circumcision. Only the last third of the article described Dr Sifman's point of view.

You may be interested to know that I first approached the *Chronicle* to write an anti-circumcision piece. However, they were concerned about the controversy this might cause and would only publish a more balanced article. I decided to go ahead on this basis since there appeared to be no other way of getting the debate aired in the newspaper.

I am very pleased that you are raising this issue again.

Peter Baker
London N15

Thanks

I wish to thank the Jewish Socialist Group as such and all the comrades individually for the magnificent way in which they celebrated my 80th birthday. Please accept, everyone, my sincere thanks for the presents you gave me.

Comradely,
Majer Bogdanski
London E1

Gay gezunt

Oy Gay, the first film on lesbian and gay Jews to be shown on national television in Britain, was broadcast in July on Channel 4's 'Out' series. Marian Shapiro of *Jewish Socialist* talked to the film's director, Rosalind Haber.



JS What was the background to the film?

RH I've been making films for some years, and had already made some items for 'Out'. Lesbians and gay men from other ethnic minorities had made programmes for 'Out' and I felt it was time to make one about lesbian and gay Jews. The commissioning editor was very enthusiastic and committed. I wanted to do the programme for this year but as the 12th International Conference of Lesbian and Gay Jews was held in San Francisco in May 1991, she commissioned the film in advance. I went to San Francisco with the cameraman and I filmed at the conference. The conference organisers were very enthusiastic and very welcoming. I interviewed some American rabbis of both genders, Hungarians, two women from Russia, some people from Holland.

JS But they weren't in the final film.

RH The film had originally been commissioned to be one hour. For budgetary reasons it was cut to 31 minutes. This was a bit of a problem as I'd conceived a different film. You can't just cut a one-hour film in half. I had to jettison a lot of the international element and make it much more

an English programme. I'd wanted to look at how it's easier or more difficult to be Jewish in some countries, and how in others it's easier or more difficult to be lesbian or gay. For example, in America it's relatively easy to be out as Jewish but not so easy, unless you live in San Francisco, to be out as lesbian or gay. In Holland, it's no problem to be out as lesbian or gay, but to be out as Jewish is more difficult. In England it seems to be problematic all round! I wanted to include that to look at the dual processes of coming out. People have to come out as Jewish, and as lesbian or gay. For some people, one informed the other.

JS Were there other constraints on the film?

RH I had originally wanted to divide the programme up to look at what it is to be lesbian or gay in the Jewish community and what it is to be Jewish in the lesbian and gay community. But most people wanted to talk about their relationship as lesbian and gay Jews to the Jewish community because that was an area of greater concern.

JS One of the interviewees said that for him it was a matter of embracing his gay identity and abandoning his Jewish one.

RH That was one gay man's personal experience, because the gay community was welcoming to him. Ten years ago there was less awareness of the importance

of cultural diversity. As he said: 'You could discover yourself on the dance floor of Heaven.' This is changing now. Identity politics has been fed in along the way from various sources: the feminist movement, which had an enormous Jewish lesbian input; black and working class lesbians and gays, all looking at their origins and culture. It's made that space for Jews to come out a bit more.

JS Who made the final decisions?

RH Obviously, I discussed things with the producer. It was quite helpful to work with a non-Jewish, straight editor, and also a non-Jewish producer. It stops you taking things for granted. I had to remember all the time that this was an 'Out' programme. It was a challenge making a programme for three potential audiences: a straight Jewish audience, a lesbian and gay gentile audience, and Jewish lesbians and gay men. I didn't want the programme to be anthropological but you do have to explain certain things to non-Jewish viewers. I also wanted to develop the idea of a small community which sees itself under siege, and look at the way in which it sees differences within the community as a threat.

JS I found it problematic that shots of gay and lesbian Jews were intercut with people going into bagel shops in Golders Green and so on. I felt it was possible to read the film as if they were the 'real' Jewish community which is keeping out gay and lesbian Jews.

RH You're assuming that I was saying that all those people queuing at the bagel shops were straight. I was saying that no viewer can take that for granted. I meant to say that this is an aspect of the community that some of the people interviewed in the film come from and operate in. I wasn't setting them up as being separate from that community.

JS How difficult was it to get people to appear in the film?

RH In San Francisco lots of people were quite happy about being out on television, but some of them may have thought it wasn't going to be shown in America, so there was a certain safety! I found some people by advertising in *New Moon*, the *Pink Paper* and *Capital Gay*, but a lot of it was through my own contacts and word of mouth.

JS Was it difficult to get a balance between men and women?

RH There were many more men. I also found that the younger people were much more out. There were some people I met with for research who I really hoped could be in the programme, but none of them was prepared to appear because they weren't out. It's a serious problem for people.

JS What responses have you had to the film?

RH Every single lesbian and gay Jew that I've bumped into has said they thought it was very good. They were very pleased it had been made and the issue had been opened up. I've also had positive feedback from a non-lesbian and gay audience who found it informative. There were reviews in magazines like *City Limits* and *Time Out*, but apart from a preview in *Capital Gay*,

there was not a sausage from the lesbian and gay media. The response from the straight Jewish community has been interesting. The *Jewish Chronicle* gave it a very good preview. I was also on three Jewish radio programmes, including a phone-in on Spectrum. That was meant to be about 25 minutes and ended up almost an hour long.

JS What were they saying?

RH The most distressing responses were from some orthodox people who said that homosexuality is an abomination and a sin and equated it with murder. There were other comments, like 'why do you have to ram it down people's throats', and so on. One woman phoned up almost in tears. She said she was devastated because the film had shown a drag queen singing *My Yiddishe Mama*. She felt it had defiled the song and was an insult to all Jewish mothers. I did point out that his mother was in the film, sitting in the audience *kvelling*!

JS Has anyone else commented about the Jewish drag queen?

RH Quite a number of people found him very embarrassing because of the issues raised both by cross-dressing and because they found him too schmaltzy. Many Jews want to present a very normative image to the outside world. I wanted to

include him as a way of bringing up the question of who decides who has a voice? Who can belong to a community? He's a gay man, who performs in drag, who's proud to be Jewish. I felt his voice was equally valid.

JS How do you feel about the film now it's finished?

RH I'm very pleased with it. I feel it's got a coherent argument and I'm pleased that there has been a good response. I wanted to raise issues and use the film as a platform for further debate. I would like to make a film where I could develop some of the ideas more fully – about visibility, and around Holocaust analogies, for instance.

JS Is there anything you'd do differently if you could make the film again?

RH The only thing I really would have wanted to develop more is the enormous amount of creativity that has come from lesbian and gay Jews. A few films have been made about the issue of being Jewish and lesbian and gay; this was just one film and there are lots more to be made. It shouldn't be just the token film. I wanted it to break a silence. I hope it's just the beginning.

Oy Gay will be shown in the Jewish Film Festival on 21 October 1992 at 8.30pm in NFT1 with a panel discussion afterwards.

Goodbye Columbus

The Columbus Quincentennial has failed to ignite the enthusiasm of Americans. This is a credit to the diverse campaigners who allied to put the record straight, says Judy Branfman.

Boston

1992 has been rolling across North America for more than half a year now. The promises made by the official US Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission of a Columbus-filled year have fallen flat. This is partly because its first chairman, a right-wing Cuban exile, was an inept fundraiser and corrupt

manager. Equally, it has to do with the widespread grassroots opposition, beginning with early discussions and conferences, including the first Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples in Quito, Ecuador, in 1990. The message was clear that the colonialist Columbus-business-as-usual would not be acceptable.

My own perspective of the Quincentennial has been informed by my involvement with the Alliance for Cultural Democracy (ACD), a 16-year-old national network of community-based and activist cultural workers. In 1988 ACD launched a *Counter-Quincentennial Campaign* with the goals of challenging the official

celebrations of the European conquest of the Americas, providing alternative perspectives, and facilitating communication and networking among the many groups doing related work (through three conferences, an activists' 'manual' called *How-To '92*, and three issues of the newsletter *huracán*). The multitude of groups and projects involved are generally ignored by the media, but they have made their mark, and activists I talked with identified important impacts their work is having.

The official rhetoric has been toned down. That the Barcelona Olympics did not open with, or continue as, a tribute to Columbus, as was originally promised, is testimony to the broad international refusal to accept that proposition. Similarly, Boston's Tall Ships festival, which attracted three million people and was mainly an attempt to reinvigorate a dead tourist economy, relegated the C-word to the tiny text and refocused their overall orientation away from Columbus.

There has been increased sensitivity to Native American issues, as well as issues related to colonialism, history and so on. As 1992 approached, a number of activists talked about whether to focus work mainly on Native issues or look at the broader themes linking all US/American native, immigrant and exploited peoples. The outcome, fortunately, is that both have occurred. Native American cultures and struggles over the past 500 years have shaped the US in numerous ways and provide an important model of cultural resistance, but have rarely received much non-Native support. The coming of 1992 has helped focus more attention on Native issues, among them struggles for rights to tribal lands and waterways, opposition to racist stereotypes in sports team mascots,



resistance to the environmental destruction caused by hydroelectric power plants being built on Cree and Inuit land in Canada, and opposition to forced repopulation imposed on Guatemalan Indians by US corporations. In Vermont, activists are engaged in a two week walk to support the Wobenaki tribe in their fight for tribal recognition and rights.

On the 'official' front, several states (historically racist but with large Native populations) and the city of Berkeley have changed the name of Columbus Day (12 October - an official US holiday) to Native American Appreciation Day. Other states have movements encouraging similar changes.

The wide release of two good semi-Hollywood films dealing with events leading up to the arrest and imprisonment of Leonard Peltier on trumped-up charges on the South Dakota Sioux reservation in 1975 is opening people's eyes to the reality of Native life and jump-starting a serious effort to re-try and free Peltier.

New working relationships and coalitions have formed, often more cross-cultural and cross-issue than in previous efforts. In Boston the '500 Years Is Enough! Coalition', formed to oppose the coming of the replicas of the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria, includes the Central America Solidarity Association, Haiti Communications Project, New Jewish Agenda, Civil Liberties Union, Disabled Peoples Liberation Front and the Earth Drum Council, among many others. In New York a three-hour teach-in will be held at the American Indian Community House and broadcast on WBAI (NY's progressive radio station) - the first such collaboration. A diverse grouping of activists in Long Beach, California, are working to get their city to refuse landing to the three ship replicas this fall, and ACD members and other activists are working with the San Carlos Apache Indians in Arizona to oppose the construction of the Mt Graham Observatory on a sacred mountaintop (the Vatican is one of three remaining partners building the observatory). In many instances it's the first time that progressive groups have worked so closely with Native American groups.

Museums have been called to task on their interpretation of history and treatment of non-European cultures, especially Native Americans. In anticipation of the Quincentennial, the University of Florida and the Smithsonian Institute organised 'First Encounters: Spanish Explorations in the Caribbean and the US, 1492-1992', what turned out to be a controversial three-year travelling exhibition. The Committee for American Indian History, a group linked to the activist American Indian Movement (AIM) and formed specifically to address historical and cultural issues expected to arise in 1992, has organised

protests at all exhibition sites and produced a detailed critique of the exhibits and text.

In Minneapolis the Science Museum comprehended the problem of their having booked the exhibit and pulled together a diverse committee of artists and activists to put together an accompanying, alternative exhibition called 'From the Heart of Turtle Island' (the name for the American continent in Native creation stories). Nevertheless, a spectacular piece of guerrilla performance art occurred on opening night. Standing on the miniature replica of the Nina on exhibit in 'First Encounters', a well-known AIM activist threw blood on its sail to mark the genocide and racism that persists. Well covered by the media, the museum received over 2,000 phone calls and hired several committee members to help talk with the largely outraged public. But with an unusual commitment to presenting all voices, the museum left the blood on the sail, and education panels have been put up explaining the meaning of that act. This sets a precedent for US museums as they face the 21st century.

Headway has been made in the schools and in developing curricula. ACD's recent conference opened with a one-day workshop for teachers, attended by 30 Atlanta public school teachers. The *Rethinking Schools* magazine collective has developed an alternative Quincentennial curriculum, and the state of Wisconsin passed a law in 1989 requiring public schools to teach the history, culture and tribal sovereignty of the state's native tribes.

Some wonderfully creative responses have emerged. The Center for the Study of Political Graphics is touring a show of political posters depicting the colonisation of the 'new world' from the perspective of the 'discovered' / conquered peoples and two Boulder, Colorado, artists published a rollicking bilingual comic book on the Euro-Hero 'Super Colon'. The Minnesota Peace and Justice Coalition's racial justice task force sponsored five billboards on Minneapolis buses by Eva 2-Crow that read: *Real Eyes/Realise/Real Lies/Columbus Did Not Discover America*.

A number of excellent alternative theatre pieces have been produced. The Underground Railway Theatre in Boston is touring *The Christopher Columbus Follies*, linking Columbus with environmental and native issues. Bread and Puppet Theatre (Vermont) and Minneapolis-based Heart of the Beast Puppet Theatre have been working off the Columbus theme for several years. And in Colorado a group is planning a multi-media and participatory 'Columbus on Trial' event.

Other important projects have taken off from themes the Quincentennial raises. REPOhistory

(as in repossessing history), a collective of New York visual and media artists, recently installed the Lower Manhattan Street Sign project. Thirty-six street signs not only mark sites of lesser or little known, mostly 'radical', historical significance, but also attempt to question how history is constructed, to demystify official versions, and to 'provoke critical and multiple readings of "history" '.

The Quincentennial has also provoked a discussion among Jews. While some progressive



Jewish groups like New Jewish Agenda have joined other activists in local actions, most efforts have focused on Jewish history, the Inquisition and its outcome. There have been historical articles in the progressive *Jewish Currents* and a couple of other magazines to date. A conference, 'Expulsion 1492', was held in Los Angeles that looked at the 1492 expulsion/conversion edict and its historical impact (including the crypto-Jews in Mexico and the New World), and I recently saw a compelling, locally devised play called *Columbus* that included Jewish experience related to the expulsion. Unfortunately, the question of whether Columbus was a 'converso' or not appears to be one of the only ways many Jews connect to 1992 and the Quincentennial, leaving aside the critical issues that link us to others in an increasingly diverse country.

Coincidentally or not, 1992 comes at a time when discussions about ethnicity/diversity/multiculturalism, museum and institutional accountability, freedom of speech, interdependence, immigration, treaty rights and increased antisemitism, to name a few, are more than ever in the public realm. Undoubtedly anti-Columbus efforts didn't initiate these discussions. But this movement has utilised the moment to push the issues, heighten awareness, and broaden and make clearer the connections between diverse issues and people. As October rolls around the Columbus ante will be upped, and an interesting battle for US hearts and minds could be in the offing.

Where were you in '82?

When Israel invaded Lebanon ten years ago, Jews in Britain were shocked and divided. David Rosenberg recalls the events that started to crack the Zionist consensus.

In the summer of 1982 an unprecedented protest movement arose in Britain's Jewish community to denounce the war of destruction that Israel was unleashing in Lebanon – a war claimed by former Prime Minister Begin as being waged on behalf not only of Israel but of all Jews.

As protests mounted in Israel, calling for withdrawal, among a public shocked by the speed and scale of the destruction, an informal network here gathered signatures for an open letter condemning the invasion, demanding a just solution for the Palestinians and expressing support for peace campaigners in Israel.

The letter was published as an advert in the *Guardian* under the ad-hoc auspices of 'Peace in Lebanon and Israel' (PILI). Headed 'Lebanon: a Jewish perspective', it was signed by 120 Jewish academics, teachers, lawyers, artists and others, including ten members of the Jewish Socialists' Group.

Within a few days, PILI received nearly 200 letters, all but one expressing support for the stand taken. Several letters came from Jews who had fled to Britain in the 1930s from Nazi oppression. They recoiled with horror from the media images they now witnessed of an armed force inflicting indiscriminate terror and collective punishment on a civilian population. A letter sent to PILI on 12 July was typical: 'As an ex-German refugee with family ties in Israel, including in the Galilee, I wish to associate myself with your advertisement in the *Guardian*. Peace for Israel cannot be bought at the price of innocent suffering.'

Encouraged by this response PILI stepped up its efforts

through further protest letters and statements to emphasise that there was no Jewish consensus here supporting Israel's war in Lebanon. But neither was there a simple divide. Right wing Jewish opinion continued to offer unconditional support from Israel and lambasted those who refused to give this support as 'self-haters' and allies of anti-semitism. Middle of the road Jewish opinion, expressing itself in a flood of letters to the *Jewish Chronicle*, displayed profound anxiety. In some cases this anxiety salved itself with excuses and mitigating circumstances ultimately justifying Israeli aggression but in many other cases the anxiety expressed shame, anger and betrayal. The politically organised Left-Zionist groupings and left-leaning Jewish youth movements continued to support the official war aims – supposedly securing a 25-mile buffer zone. They

LEBANON AND AFTER

A meeting to hear Jewish opposition to the Israeli invasion
and to discuss the implications for Jews in Britain.

SUNDAY, 1ST AUGUST,
7.30 P.M.
COUNTY HALL,
WESTMINSTER

condemned excesses beyond this but urged Jews to keep protests within the 'Zionist consensus'. They specifically denied support to the newly formed 'Yesh Gvul' movement of soldiers refusing to serve in Lebanon in what they saw as an unnecessary and unjust war.

Having established PILI's presence through the advert, a core of around a dozen activists,

including JSG members and expatriate Israeli radicals, set about broadening and deepening the protest movement. On 1 August 1982 hundreds of people attended a public meeting in County Hall, Westminster, sponsored by PILI, the JSG and the Paris-based International Jewish Peace Union. The meeting was called to 'voice Jewish opposition to the Israeli invasion and to discuss its implications for Jews in Britain'. A platform of several outstanding speakers, including Drs Steven Rose and Teodor Shanin, was warmly received by all except for a vociferous and violent minority of far-right Zionists (Herutniks) who sought to disrupt the event through repeated heckling and throwing their fists. They failed to achieve their goal.

PILI broke down a barrier that the Zionist-dominated Jewish establishment has been unable to mend since. The right of Jews here to question and oppose Israeli policy, to operate on their own behalf in response to Israeli exported political priorities, was established as a fact.

Six months later County Hall was the setting for a further public meeting organised by PILI (which had by now changed its name to the 'Campaign for Israeli-Palestinian Peace'). This meeting pulled down a further barrier by presenting for the first time in Britain a public platform shared by a leading Israeli peacenik, Uri Avnery, and a top PLO representative, Dr Issam Sartawi. Six weeks later, Sartawi was dead, assassinated while waiting to address the Socialist International in Portugal. At the London meeting Avnery braved the heckling and physical threats of Herutniks while Sartawi rode the threats and abuse of Palestinian rejectionists who saw dialogue as a betrayal. He thundered from the platform: 'We cannot be

shouted down, nor can we be scared from abandoning our chosen path – the path of peace.'

So subversive was the reality of Israelis and Palestinians sharing platforms in many countries to discuss a common peace agenda that in 1986 the Israeli government passed a law outlawing contact between Israeli citizens and the PLO. Israel's new Labour government has pledged to repeal this law.

The barely concealed agenda of 'Peace for Galilee' was a war

of total destruction on the PLO infrastructure in order to pave the way for the annexation of the Occupied Territories. At great cost Palestinians found ways to resist and retain the cohesiveness of their movement, and in threatening circumstances a minority of Jews in different countries, including in Israel, have found ways to wage the battle to promote a peace dialogue. Ten years from now we may yet see the fruits of our joint efforts.

Home is where I am

Jews need not look to the past for models of international existence and creativity. They can look to the experience of other transnational minorities, says Brad Lander.

It is a sad irony that just as much of the world is struggling to make experiences of diaspora, of transnational identity, into experiences of vibrant possibility – and often turning to the Jewish diaspora as a prototype – the Jewish community itself is in headlong flight from its own diaspora. This over reliance on 'homeland' has perhaps been implicit in Jewish myth throughout the ages – the 'ingathering of the exiles' means an end to the richness of a transnational culture. But if this view has been implied in some versions of our myths, it certainly has not dominated our history. As many of the articles in *Jewish Socialist* about Jews and socialism in the 1990s have argued, it is essential for us to reclaim this diaspora, to celebrate the history of Jewish experience as part of a movement beyond ethnic nationalism. In this quest our past is not the only place we can look: other contemporary

diasporas, and the collective cultural and political efforts to forge meaning out of experiences of displacement and often terror, can help in our efforts to articulate a route beyond Zionist nationalism, towards an internationalism with specificity, rather than a naive belief that all differences can be erased in socialist harmony.

Such a look at alternative 'diaspora consciousnesses' is particularly important now, given the status of many diaspora Jewish communities. As American Reform Jewry leader Rabbi Alexander Schindler has noted, Judaism in the diaspora cannot thrive for long on the 'kidney machine' of Israel and the Holocaust; while the redoubled efforts of religious and Zionist ideologues draw some young people, younger Jews are increasingly likely to be unaffiliated. Judaism often remains 'important', but its content is amorphous. In this context, as David Rosenberg writes (JS25), diaspora dependence on Zionism not only prevents adequate answers to the question of a Palestinian state, but also breeds an insecurity which prevents the possibility of forging an unabashed, vibrant, positive

Jewish diaspora identity. While the answer to the former problem is the political struggle for Palestinian self-determination, the best alternative to dependence on Zionism is not political antizionism, but instead the creation of real diaspora identity. While the dangers of romanticising diaspora experience are substantial, I believe it is territory we must work to define and claim.

The number of increasingly conscious diasporas is considerable. The 'implosion of the third world into the first' began long ago with slavery and indentured labour, and rapidly accelerated after the Second World War in the wake of a temporary European and American labour boom, and cycles of debt, poverty, and violence in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This has created many possibilities for comparison. (This year has seen the birth of a new academic journal, *Diaspora*, as well as the rebirth of *Transition*, an international review focused on Africa and the African diaspora.) The conditions creating these diasporas have been of exploitation, racism and violence, but long-term cultural work, and recently increasing theoretical work, have articulated them as experiences of struggle and possibility as well as oppression.

I focus here on the theoretical and cultural work of British blacks and Asians because it has been substantially written about (eg by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Hommi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie), and particularly British African-Caribbeans, because in certain ways they occupy a similar 'triangular' position to British Jews, disrupting a linear relation between the 'ethnic' community in the United States and the 'homeland' (Israel/Africa). This is not to say that the situations are structurally identical. It is

worse than disingenuous to pretend, as many American advocates of 'black-Jewish relations' do, that the Jewish diaspora continues to face the same kind or level of racism as the black/African diaspora. However, both African-Americans and Jewish-Americans are caught up in the American logic of assimilationist difference/ethnic revival which is not polycentric but *dualistic* – the firm identity of tradition in the past/homeland versus the melting pot/patchwork quilt of modernity in present day US. These are logics which remain quite compatible with exclusivist nationalisms – of the American, Afrocentric, or Zionist variety. The perspective of diaspora life in Britain may help open up a 'third way' towards a more open, polycentric diaspora – a junction point in a web rather than an endpoint along a line.

As Paul Gilroy and others write on the African diaspora, slaves and their descendants have a long history of attempting to constitute a transnational community in the interstices of the slave trade itself, forming bonds between Africa, the US, the Caribbean, and England very early on which have become even more explicit after the 'double crossing' of African-Caribbeans to the UK. Focusing particularly on music, Gilroy shows how performance dynamics and cross-continental circulation have established a broad 'interpretive community' (without forgetting important internal differences of gender, class, sexuality, age, etc). The mix of rhythms, lyrics, signs (costume, body, colours), and the channels of musical flow serve as a site for the constant recreation of diaspora identity – in particular among young blacks excluded from access to other images of 'making it'. Important here is the mixture of 'roots' and 'routes', with pan-African forms cut'n'mixed together to address local issues,

such as when reggae music was mobilised by blacks in Britain (in quite different ways from in Jamaica) as part of a collective movement. Thus various modes of British black identity have come to exist, nested within images of black diaspora identity.

Gilroy is keenly aware of the need not to over-romanticise such movements and, in particular, to see how they too can function to exclude. The hybridity of hip hop style – which implies that 'routes' can be made into 'roots' – has not prevented its use in some instances as a sign of racial authenticity and misogyny. On the other hand, we must not fall for a pluralism which evades questions of subordination and power. The politics are never guaranteed. Nonetheless, the experience which emerges, which Gilroy calls 'hybridity', or Rushdie more romantically describes as the 'love-song to our mongrel selves', does show that meaningful identity can be open rather than closed, and that internationalism can coincide with specificity, rather than a naive view of 'one world'. For the world is not composed simply of interchangeable flows of people, capital, culture – indeed, it is by virtue of our specific positions within those flows that we can become citizens of the world.

One figure who has been drawn upon in developing diaspora identity (particularly by Hommi Bhabha) is Frantz Fanon, whose work, especially *Black Skin, White Masks*, provides the grounding for connecting questions of diaspora/identity to a critique of power. Fanon recognised that much of the identity of the colonised was formed – schizophrenically – in the imposition of the colonisers' stereotypes. Yet, with work, it can be precisely this schizophrenia which opens up possibilities for identity itself to

have a critical function: 'Oh my body,' he writes, 'make me always a man who questions.' Thus Fanon and others in the Negritude movement, centred around the journal *Presence Africaine* in Paris, were able to fuse a movement in culture (especially poetry) with a clear politics of anti-colonialism. Decolonisation was intended not just for African nations; it also meant decolonisation from mindsets of inferiority, and the decolonisation of European racist mindsets as well, as Sartre wrote in his introduction to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. And this concern on the part of blacks in the diaspora to support Africa – before, during, and since decolonisation – has constituted an important part of diaspora identity.

Nonetheless, decolonisation has had limited effects. The inability of the pan-African movements to break from the nation-state structure imposed by colonial rulers has reinforced the centrality and the dangers of nationalism. And Europeans and Americans have often recuperated national pride 'lost' in decolonisation through new racist movements. Work towards acceptance of hybridity and diaspora must continue if we are to contest these remnants of colonialism. While it is not clear exactly where new structures which extend beyond the nation-state will come from, the mindsets fought for through diaspora identity may ultimately develop them from below. And both these mindsets and structures are vital now, as we can see already in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and will increasingly in the future of Israel-Palestine-Jordan. We need better institutional arrangements than the Law of Return or the World Zionist Organisation, which serve to reinforce nationalism in the name of diaspora. And as with decolonisation, the experience

of hybridity is not only for 'members' of diasporas, since the cultural practices of black and Asian groups in Britain have had a profound impact on undermining some absolutist British identities, particularly among young people.

Some caveats are in order in attempting to draw any lessons from such comparisons: first, we must not pretend that identity can ever be entirely open and plural. Such groupings are always based upon distinctions – indeed without them we could never act at all. It will always be easier to remain 'fluid' in academic articles than in cultural practice, though art, writing, music, and theatre certainly form important realms in which plurality can remain broad. And sometimes (perhaps often) people will want a certain amount of solidity: as Edouard Glissant writes of Caribbean discourses, the experiences of slavery and colonialism have resulted in a collective struggle to establish some roots, to feel some certainty. Indeed, the Caribbean in some ways embodies the experience of modernity, born in uprooting, and constantly disrupted by new forms of colonialism. What we need to foster are positions which can create out of displacement enough stability (crucially, but not only, economic stability) to prevent an insecurity which too often leads to essentialism, exclusion and fundamentalism.

Secondly, we must be prepared to deal not only with difference, but with different kinds of difference (and we will not always be in control of how and where they arise). It is better to think about Jewish diasporas. Most importantly, what is our relationship to religion itself? Black British cultural theorists have not been as attracted to creolised Christianity, despite its role as a central site for the creation of another set of African diaspora identities (from

Brazilian slaves worshipping African deities in Christian saints, to the current vitality of black pentecostal churches). Can we, as Jewish socialists, nurture critiques of much of what is done in the name of religious practice without becoming anti-religious?

Finally, not everything in the expression of diaspora will be as 'socialist' or as 'political' as some on the left might want. One of the messages of the struggles of people in diasporas to overcome their subordination, in particular of the black diasporas in which the initial conditions were not only of uprooting but of slavery, is to insist that human beings cannot be reduced to their work – that they can maintain celebration, ethics and images of a better world. I for one stand with Emma Goldman: I do not want a revolution, a socialist movement, or a diaspora that I cannot dance to. This of course does not mean jettisoning socialist politics or settling for culture-fairs or dialogues which skirt the issues of domination; but it does mean creating a broader space for a Jewish diaspora community. We will be no more successful than mainstream Jewish movements if we impose our own cultural (or anti-cultural) orthodoxy.

In conclusion, I suggest a few brief ideas about what this might mean for Jewish socialists, which I hope others will expand. Many of them are exactly the strategies of the Jewish Socialists' Group which can be extended; hopefully others can be created. Firstly, we must embrace a politics not only of anti-racism/anti-fascism, but of explicit diaspora-support, not only in our specific campaigns, but in declaring clearly that diaspora life is not some second-rate substitute for a 'real homeland'. I believe that the Sanctuary Movement (for political refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala)

galvanised the American Jewish left in the early 1980s precisely because of this connection. One thing which left-wing Jews in Britain can teach their counterparts in the States, who generally remain concerned (as left Jews) on domestic politics and Israel, is to extend this more into international politics.

Secondly, we have to devote attention to Jewish diaspora history. Again, we will need to remain open: for us this may be mainly Yiddishkeit and Jewish labour history; but we must be prepared for it to involve many other elements (finding a place not only for non-European Jewries, which contests their subordination and homogenisation in Israel, but also for Hasidic storytelling which often involved a longing for 'return').

We must also focus on the expressive media which can promote our images of Jewish internationalism. For example, we can use the popularity of international Jewish film to further promote real diaspora-isation (as the JSG has done recently with films about the International Brigade and *The Dybbuk of Princelet Street*). What could we learn here from the film and video practices of the Indian diaspora? Can we promote more international Jewish left intellectual and textual production (another long-standing Jewish cultural form) in magazines, conferences, etc, thus creating our own international networks? It will not be possible to plan all of this, since often the worst cultural forms are those that are the most planned, but we can attempt to make some strategic interventions.

None of this is to argue that we should focus any less on our role within local and national socialist communities and politics. On the contrary, we could strengthen that role in the context of reclaiming our diaspora.

Babes in arms

Shot At Dawn
by Julian
Sykes and
Julian
Putkowski
(Wharncliffe
Publishing
Ltd,
47 Church St,
Barnsley,
S Yorks
S70 2AS,
£17.50)

Ruthless class interest led to the execution of innocent young men in the First World War. Aby Beverstein was one of them. Simon Lynn says it's time to expose the injustice.

Beneath the heading, 'Executed East London Boy's Fate', *The Women's Dreadnought* (published by the Worker's Suffrage Federation of Sylvia Pankhurst) of 22 April 1916 tells the story of Aby Beverstein, a young Jewish private in the British army executed by firing squad for 'absenting' himself from the trenches.

His execution, along with 311 others, has been painstakingly researched, despite British military secrecy, by Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes in their book, *Shot At Dawn*, first published in 1989 and now updated in a new edition. The book is a savage indictment of the British ruling class, their war, and the ruthless injustice they meted out to the working class youth swept up in its midst.

Aby Beverstein, son of orthodox Jewish parents Rebecca and Joseph Beverstein of Anthony Street, Whitechapel, signed up as Abraham Harris in September 1914. Sylvia Pankhurst's article gives his age as 18 years 3 months. The authors of *Shot At Dawn* believe he could have been as young as 14 when he was executed. They assert that more than 20% of soldiers were under age (supposedly 19 for service overseas). It may seem incredible for the army to have recruited a 13-year-old but there are other examples. There was 'The strange case of Myer Rosenblum', reported in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 21 April 1916, in which Myer was 'claimed out' by his father after being injured at Gallipoli at the age of 14. The army undoubtedly falsified the age on his death certificate after his execution to cover the fact that he was under age.

Aby signed up without the knowledge or consent, and to the great distress, of his family. Because he never signed the relevant paper, his mother didn't even receive the money the army should have paid her. When he found this out and asked to sign the paper, the army told him it was too late.

In a letter home which his mother showed to Sylvia Pankhurst, he writes: 'I have been to the trenches four times and come out safely... We go in for six days and then we get relieved for six days' rest. We get 2d for every 2 weeks. When I get my money I buy bread and other things. It is very dear and money doesn't last long... Dear Mother, I do not like the trenches...'

His letters home are painful in their understatement. On Christmas Eve 1915 a massive landmine exploded near his trench in the front line at Givenchy, followed by an attack with mortars, shells and grenades. Aby was badly wounded in the back and shocked. He writes: 'I am sorry I did not write before now, but we were in the trenches on Christmas Day. We had a lot to do. Also I was taken ill and went to the hospital. I am feeling a little better... Dear mother I know it will break your heart, this, but don't get upset; I will be alright. I would very much like to see you, I will try my best...' Now in its third year, the western front was hungry for men, and within three weeks Aby was discharged from the hospital as fit for the front.

Less than four weeks later, a grenade burst very near him in the trenches. Deafened, and suffering from shock, he left the trenches and reported to the quartermaster, QMS Simpson, who later testified to his shocked and 'nervous condition'. The Medical Officer, however, in his pompous statement at the trial, said: 'I found the accused suffering no appreciable disease and marked him "duty"'. Aby was ordered to return immediately to the trenches.

'I felt nervous and lost my head, I wandered around town towards Bethune, into La Flanderie.' Tired, hungry and cold he took refuge in a farmhouse where he had previously been billeted, 'thinking to rest a few days then return to my regiment'. Aby was arrested the next day.

In his last letter home, while under arrest, he makes clear he did not know his life was at stake: 'We were in the trenches and I was ill, so I went out and they took me to prison and I am in a bit of trouble now and won't get any money for a long time. I will have to go in front of court, I will try and get the best out of it.'

Though soldiers facing court martial had the right to an advocate, a 'prisoner's friend', Aby faced a court martial that was utterly hostile in purpose and composition (it was presided over by three officers). There was no independent legal adviser, and hearsay evidence was readily accepted. Aby would not have been aware of the criteria that determined his fate, nor of the consequences of what he might say. There was an 89% conviction rate at court martials during the First World War.

He tried to explain about the grenade, the shell shock and deafness: 'My nerves had gone a bit.' This was confirmed by the quartermaster. A

further witness from his regiment testified to his character, courage and willingness to share in the duties of the regiment. Despite this, after a hearing of about 30 minutes, he was sentenced to death by firing squad.

Aby's court martial was on 4 March 1916. No appeal was allowed but the sentence had to be confirmed. In deciding whether to uphold or commute a death sentence, two criteria were considered: firstly, 'the character, from a fighting point of view as well as behaviour' of the prisoner was determined by class and race prejudice. The second was that of 'intent' with regard to the act committed. Whether sentences were upheld was a lottery. Out of 3,080 people sentenced to death, one in 10 was executed, and the decisions had more to do with officers making examples of deserters at expedient moments, for example after a defeat, than with any consistent principles.

One-third of the British army was drawn from the colonies, including Chinese and Egyptian labourers, Indian regiments and black South Africans. These soldiers were regularly 'summarily executed' on the orders of officers. Egyptian labourers were beaten to death working at Suez; Chinese labourers had machine guns turned on them while on strike.

Most of Julian Putkowski's research has been into mutiny, including the research for Alan Bleasdale's *The Monocled Mutineer*. An example of the antisemitism that may have contributed to Aby's death is recalled in his book, *The Kimmel Park Camp Riots* (Flintshire Historical Society, 1989), concerning the mutiny of a Canadian regiment, based near Rhyl in Wales, frustrated at the slow pace of demobilisation back to Canada at the end of the War. Private Rufus Simon, a former New York tailor, was maliciously and wrongly identified 'by his Jewish accent and look' and sentenced to five years in prison.

Aby was shot at 5.29am on 20 March 1916 at Labourse, and is buried in a communal grave. The authors of *Shot At Dawn* assert that 'without doubt the execution of this lad was a despicable miscarriage of justice'.

The first his family knew was in a note from the army records office: 'Sir, I am directed to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that No 11/1799 Pte Harris, A 11th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment was sentenced after a trial by Court Martial to suffer death by being shot for desertion and the sentence was duly executed on March 20th 1916.'

Aby was one of three Jewish soldiers whose execution is known to the authors and recorded in *Shot At Dawn*. The other two were Louis Harris, remembered by AJEX (Bradford Branch),

and Louis Phillips, a 23-year-old, born in Caistor, Norfolk, who went missing for four days after sustained and bloody fighting at Ypres. The court martial, while sentencing Phillips to death, recommended clemency because he had been suffering from 'mental distress'. The reviewing officer gave this scant consideration, and he was shot at 4.15am on 19 August 1915 on the ramparts at Ypres. Like Aby, he is remembered in the British Jewry Roll of Honour.

The authors of *Shot At Dawn* have campaigned for the exoneration of all 312 people executed after court martials, as well as the lifting of the secrecy surrounding the executions. The army at the time kept the executions secret for fear they would damage recruitment, and have kept a lid on them ever since.

The injustice meted out to Aby and the others has been taken up by the *Hackney Gazette* and the *Northern Echo*. A Private Member's Bill tabled by Andrew Mackinlay, Labour MP for Thurrock, calls for the exoneration of 307 named soldiers, including Aby Beverstein (Harris). Urge your MP to support it or amend it. Its political weakness is that it excludes 'murderers, traitors and mutineers'. A central point of *Shot At Dawn* is that the class justice that executed these soldiers was utterly flawed and corrupt, and that all should be exonerated. Excluding mutineers and traitors would mean excluding the executed leaders of the Easter Rising in Ireland, as well as all those who rebelled and organised, collectively, politically, in anger or in desperation.

On 1 July 1916, 60,000 British soldiers alone were killed on the Somme. While the wounded were still straggling back to their trenches, the firing squad commenced its deadly duties with three executions. Though Aby and the others executed during that war were a tiny minority of those that died, they remind us like nothing else that the war, patriotism and the national interest serve the ruling class and not the Abys of the world.

Aby's response to his experiences, to his injuries and shock, was no crime punishable by death, no lack of courage. But to the British officers, 'waverers' must be dealt with ruthlessly. Walter Benjamin, writing from Germany, speaks for Aby: 'A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile, human body' (from 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, published by Schocken Books, New York, 1988).

Thanks to Julian Putkowski for help with this article.

Left behind

The Socialism of Fools: anti-semitism on the left by Michael Lerner. Tikun Books, USA, 1991

This beautifully illustrated book by prominent American Jewish progressive and Tikun magazine editor Michael Lerner offers a powerful and disturbing message: anti-Jewish racism (aptly termed the Socialism of Fools by 19th century German socialist leader August Bebel) is not only alive and well on the political Left, but growing.

In support of his indictment of the Left, Lerner cites numerous examples of antisemitic incidents from inside the American antiwar movement during the Gulf War. These incidents include public statements referring, among other things, to 'Jewish control of the media' and 'Jewish attempts to run the world', plus public endorsements of the notorious antisemitic propagandist tracts, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Henry Ford's *The International Jew*.

Those of us who are both Jewish and on the Left in Australia can recall similar antisemitic incidents during the Gulf War, the most notorious being the protest march by the Network for Peace outside the Israeli embassy in Sydney immediately after the Iraqi missile attack on Israeli civilians. The noticeable presence of Libyan-funded neo-fascist groups such as the Australian People's Conference at Melbourne antiwar marches was also of concern.

But back to Lerner's compelling text. He begins with the premise (with which not all readers will agree) that Jews have a natural inclination to the political Left. Jews are bearers of a 'revolutionary' message, their ancient religion being based on a struggle for liberation from slavery and oppression. Lerner argues that Jews stood as a constant threat to the ruling elites of the ancient world because they followed egalitarian norms that threatened to subvert the estab-

lished social order. Consequently, the kings and rulers provoked hatred against Jews (antisemitism) in order to divert the attention of the masses from their radical political message.

In view of the deep Jewish religious commitment to 'caring for the oppressed', it was, therefore, hardly surprising that Jews joined the modern Left in disproportionately large numbers. Yet, according to Lerner, this involvement in the Left often had a price. Many left-wing Jews abandoned their Judaism because they believed that the prevalence of antisemitism in European society made their Jewishness an obstacle to success and acceptance on the Left. Others engaged in a form of self-loathing, internalising the prejudices of European society and blaming themselves for their oppression.

Many assimilated Russian Jewish communists, for example, were at the forefront of attacks on Jewish tradition in the early years of the Soviet Union. Often they sought to prove their allegiance to the revolution by being particularly hard on their own people. Yet virtually the entire generation of Jewish Bolsheviks were wiped out in Stalin's purges. Other European Jewish leftists found themselves tragically betrayed and abandoned by left-wing partisans during the Holocaust.

Probably Lerner's most controversial chapter is on Zionism which he describes as both a 'legitimate' and 'tragically flawed' movement. Well-known for his own criticism of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lerner draws a dichotomy between what he called 'legitimate criticism of Israel' and 'Israel-bashing and antisemitism'.

The former includes criticism of Israel's displacement of over half a million Palestinian Arabs

during the 1948 War, and condemnation of Israel's continued suppression of Palestinian national and human rights in the Occupied Territories. Lerner stresses that such criticism should always be marked by awareness of and sensitivity to the long history of anti-Jewish racism.

In contrast, Lerner argues that the Left is involved in antisemitic Israel-bashing when it gives a disproportionate amount of attention and criticism to Israel, when Left groups expect and demand that Israel adheres to a higher standard of behaviour than they expect from other regimes in the area, when they claim that Israel is the world's worst human rights abuser and when they claim that Israel has no right to exist.

Not everyone will agree with Lerner's contentions. My personal experience on the Left would suggest that there are numerous left-wingers who genuinely believe (free of racial prejudice or any emotive involvement) that the historical and moral claims of the Palestinian Arabs to Israel/Palestine are greater than those of the Israeli Jews. Whilst I disagree with this viewpoint, I don't believe that it is devoid of integrity or logic.

On the other hand, it is certainly noticeable that there are many leftists in Australia (yes, far-off Australia) who do spend an inordinate amount of time condemning Israel and Zionism, yet rarely spend a similar amount of time fighting antisemitism. One would have reasonably expected such people, for example, to be vocal and audible supporters of the Nazi War Crimes Bill and Racial Vilification legislation. Yet few were. At best, their anti-racist credentials must come under question. At worst, their obsessive opposition to Zionism simply seems to be a cover for anti-Jewish racism.

Lerner concludes on a sober but optimistic note. Whilst acknowledging that the Left has

colluded with rather than challenged popular prejudices about Jews, he still believes that Jews should follow the tradition of Tikkun Olam (to 'heal, repair and transform the world') and commit themselves to social-change movements. In doing so, they should publicly confront left-wingers who employ covertly or overtly antisemitic prejudices. Such a campaign

against left-wing antisemitism will (according to Lerner) help to create a stronger and healthier movement to change society.

Many readers will disagree with aspects of this book. Some on the Left will contend that Lerner's critique of anti-Zionism renders him unsympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. Others, on the Right, will question (particularly in view of Lerner's

own documentation) his claim that the political Right remains the main threat to Jews. Yet few will question his heartfelt plea for the exclusion of the oldest form of racism (antisemitism) from progressive politics.

PHILIP MENDES

Philip Mendes is a member of the editorial board of the Australian Jewish Democrat Journal and author of The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War, 1965-1972.

Peace in our time?

This June some 200 peace activists from all over the world gathered in Israel intending to walk for peace from Haifa to Jerusalem, passing through Israel proper and the occupied West Bank, crossing the invisible 'Green Line'. However, permission was not granted to march in the West Bank, and 115 marchers who tried to cross the Green Line were arrested.

I was on the walk, though I was not one of those arrested. Within a relatively short time we had a taste of the byzantine world of regulations, of carrot and stick, which are part of the everyday life of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line. There were two days of preparation in the Lutheran Girls School in Beit Sahur, near Bethlehem, in the West Bank. The Israeli authorities found out that we were there and declared the area a closed military zone, leading to various incidents of petty harassment, culminating in the refusal to let a wedding party into the town until the peace marchers got out.

We met many Palestinians working for a space where at the very least they would not be subjected to such treatment, and with Israelis who supported their right to self-determination. We joined Women in Black saying 'Dai L'Kibush' (End the Occupation) in the heart of West Jerusalem, while counter-demonstrators from various right-wing parties paraded on the other side of the road. We took part in a protest by Yesh Gvul (the movement of reservists who refuse to serve in the West Bank or Gaza) at Atlit prison near Haifa. A march

through Haifa culminated in a meeting at the Jewish-Arab cultural centre, Bet HaGefen.

The dedication of those Israeli activists emerges in *Walking the Red Line - Israelis in search of justice for Palestine*, a book of essays covering the peace movement. Here are veteran fighters such as Michel Warschawski of the Alternative Information Centre, or Reverend Riah al-Assal, an Israeli Palestinian with a long history of activism in joint Jewish-Arab initiatives. Yesh Gvul is represented here, as are Women in Black, the Women's Organisation for Political Prisoners, the religious peace movement, activists in Oriental (Mizrachi) neighbourhoods in Israel, and more.

Deena Hurwitz sets the scene. The mainstream peace movement is represented by forces such as Peace Now, left Zionist political parties now in the Meretz bloc, and Labour Party doves. 'This camp', she writes, 'has come to the position that the occupation must end because it is a corrupting force in Israel and gives their nation a bad image abroad.' They support territorial compromise, but not necessarily a Palestinian state.

The more radical peace camp, comprises Women in Black, Yesh Gvul and parties such as the Progressive List for Peace and the ex-communist Hadash. On the whole they support an end to the occupation, an independent Palestinian state and negotiation with the PLO.

There are issues on which the two camps can unite, such as the need for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. There are

some issues on which they will not agree. During the Gulf War, for example, Yael Dayan of Peace Now said: 'Sometimes there are wars that are necessary to attain peace... Peace Now in Israel means War Now.'

Women act as a bridge between the two wings of the peace movement and also between Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab women. Certainly the most exuberant meeting in which the peace marchers took part was one at a packed Al Hakawati theatre in East Jerusalem where Palestinian and Israeli women spoke of their mutual desire for peace.

Since then the Israeli elections have given new hope to the peace camp, as well as posing new problems. The essays in this book, dating from late 1991, may already seem dated in still reflecting the paralysis which afflicted the peace movement in the Gulf War and after. By June this year my feeling was that they were coming out of this mood. We heard that demonstrations we took part in 'were the largest since 1987 or 1988'.

In a reflective essay, Stanley Cohen wonders why the Israel of 1991 does not share the mood of change sweeping the world, even including his native South Africa. Would he make this judgment now? And what will the situation look like in a year's time? However much things change or stay the same, this book will remain a useful tool for looking behind the headlines and understanding the diverse motivations which lead Israelis to struggle for Palestinian rights.

MICHAEL HEISER

Walking the Red Line, edited by Deena Hurwitz

Mind the
Gap,
Michael
Rosen
(Scholastic
£4.99)

Well chosen, Rosen

'What's a shlump?' This question jumps out from the back cover blurb enticing readers to experience Michael Rosen's newest collection of poems.

Mind the Gap has been published as part of Scholastic's 'ad-lib' series marketed towards teenagers. This collection at least, though, will be enjoyed, laughed and cried with, or sagely nodded along with by all ages. Indeed the eclectic nature of the selections, which bounce from issue to issue across conventional boundaries of experience, is precisely what makes the book work so well.

Naturally, some poems will be more recognisable to certain readers than others. Young children and teachers will tune in instantly to the resigned and frustrated tones which pervade *Primary School Intro* - 'Yes Susan? Well we don't normally ask people how much money they get as soon as we meet them, do we... Now let's get on. This is Michael Rosen and he writes books, and he's going to - Rasheda, where are you going? I'd much prefer it if you asked' - and will identify with the disarming innocence or, alternatively, *khutspah*, epitomised in *Solomon the Cat*, a tale of unintended plagiarism fuelled by misunderstanding.

That long-suffering silent majority of society, the commuters, will find their daily experiences articulated in *Victoria Station* (Camden Town's 'information' boards could provide a wealth of material for a follow up).

Victims of injustice of all generations will identify with *Jury Service*, *Look at Me* and the

sad description of helplessness in the face of daily racist humiliation in *At the Traffic Lights*. And all who have experienced the powerful combination of love, guilt and betrayal in close personal and family relationships will find these mirrored with honesty and openness, especially in *Father*.

Never mind love and all that *narishkayt*, Michael Rosen will be known to *Jewish Socialist* readers as a political poet. And the enduring issues of our time - poverty, injustice, power and hypocrisy in local and global politics and economics are ever present and stated with a refreshing and uncompromising directness (ie you would never hear this on a Labour election broadcast but you ought to...). Take, for example, *Enough*:

'I've heard enough about Eichmann and Himmler, Heydrich and Bormann - sadistic maniacs etc etc. I've heard enough about Hitler - cunning diplomacy, magnetic oratory etc etc. Just tell me who gave them the money to start the whole thing off.'

And in *Liars* - a parody on right wing research institutes:

'The institute thinks that if you come from an overcrowded home that you should go to an overcrowded school. If children from spacious homes went to overcrowded schools they would be very unhappy.'

Now, I still haven't told you what a *shlump* is. Never mind, buy a copy and you'll find out. All I will say is that this sharp, witty and entertaining collection of poems will enthrall *shlumpen* and non-*shlumpen* alike.

DAVID ROSENBERG



Photo: Nicholas Judd

Easter

At Easter things got pretty serious at our school. Before the event there was an enormous amount

of hymn practice and when we sang:
There is a green hill far away
Without a city wall...
every year they told us
that it doesn't mean
that the green hill hasn't got a wall.

Then we went back to class and they told us the story:

those horrible Jews getting him
and poor old Pontius Pilate not knowing what to do
and then hammering nails through his hands
and feet
then afterwards with him wandering down the street
and Thomas sticking his fingers
into this bleeding hole in his side ...
the whole thing was pretty serious and pretty messy.

I felt a bit bad about those Jews.
I mean I didn't think Zeyda'd do a thing like that
and I kept my head down in class
in case anyone thought I was in on it too.
But as Jesus was a Jew as well
I didn't see why I should get it in the neck.

As for Pontius Pilate, I found out later
he was really like any other ordinary Roman
psychopath
and loved stringing people up,
especially Jews.
Strange story -
a bit too violent for kids, I should think.

(*Yiddish for Grandfather)

Hang on

People in power, experts, say: Hang on.
Don't ask for too much, times are tough,
don't take more than you earn, hang on.

They say it this year, they said it last year,
they'll say it next year, they say it every year.

But every year, people in power, experts,
don't hang on. They live for now.

Year by year these nows become lifetimes,
How many more poor lifetimes will people put
up with

before they notice it's rich lifetimes
saying, hang on, don't ask for too much
times are tough, don't take more than you earn
hang on?

Beyond Beattie

All exhibitions which focus on women as a group - whether it is women artists or, here, Jewish women - tend to meet with the response: 'Why lump all women together?'; 'Why women?' or 'Not women again.' It is, however, only when you see an exhibition like this one, full of images of strong and proactive women, that you realise how seldom they appear in museum displays. But the situation is gradually changing and Manchester Jewish Museum should be congratulated for helping to reinstate women's role in history.

Much of the exhibition is designed as a series of information panels, illustrated with photographs. There are not many artefacts. This was due to a relatively short time scale, and because the exhibition is intended to travel to other locations. It is also perhaps rather unfortunate that many of the artefacts presented, such as marriage certificates, cooking utensils, *Shabbos* candles and *sheytl* (wig) making equipment, tend to reinforce the stereotypes which the exhibition organisers have tried hard to counter. But vain attempts were made to find other material, like the banner of the Jewish League for Woman (sic) Suffrage.

Women of Worth takes a largely thematic and chronological approach, starting with the major wave of Jewish immigration in the late 19th century. It then covers women's roles in the early 20th century, including changes in religion and work patterns over two world wars, the situation of refugees during the Second World War, and ending with developments over the past 20

years - among them, active Jewish feminism and lesbianism. Women's involvement in politics - anarchism, socialism, trade unionism, or fighting for the right to vote - is examined, along with participation in Zionism and charitable work. Jewish women artists, entertainers (including Royce Klezmores), shopkeepers and rabbis also make their appearance.

Individuals make their mark. Amelia Franks, who took control of her husband's optical business in 1846; Rachel Finkel, a shop steward at 17 and the first female president of the Waterproof Garment Makers' Union, who received the TUC gold medal in 1947; the Whitcop sisters, who belonged to an anarchist group in 1912; and Bessie Cohen, who joined the Tiller Girls dance troupe in Manchester during the 1890s, when she was only 12. (Maybe the Tiller Girls are now ideologically unsound, but Bessie confounded the stereotype.) It is good to see Indian Jewish women in some of the photographs. It is also interesting to see a photograph of Vera and Chaim Weizmann, which is already displayed in the Zionism section of the museum. There the picture is used to illustrate Chaim, the first President of Israel, and Vera is simply his wife. This time, however, the photograph focuses on Vera and the caption explains how she pioneered the development of birth control clinics in Manchester.

As well as the information panels and small cased displays, three women have been interviewed on tape, and extracts can be heard on telephone headsets. Jane Black,

a member of Manchester Jewish Socialists, describes how her Jewish identity is based on socialist traditions rather than religion or Zionism. Deborah Guttentag claims that Jewish women can fulfil themselves within the orthodox tradition. All the women discuss their reactions to Beattie, the stereotyped Jewish mother character in the British Telecom adverts.

The exhibition tries to give equal weight to all aspects of Jewish women's lives. It does not steer visitors in any single direction - though some could regard the use of prominent Zionist Rebecca Sieff's photograph on the cover of the accompanying booklet and promotional literature as over-

*Women of
Worth -
Jewish
women in
Britain
Manchester
Jewish
Museum
until
January
1993*



endorsing this area of Jewish life. The useful booklet reproduces the text of the information panels, but features just a small number of photographs. Again it is regrettable that photographs illustrating feminist or socialist politics are omitted. It might, nonetheless, be over-critical to

point out what I feel sure is unintentional bias. Manchester Jewish Museum set out to challenge stereotypes – with 'Beattie' used as the stereotype – and to present 'alternative images of Jewish women which are based on fact, rather than fantasy'. I believe the exhibition

has succeeded in this. Its main organiser, Frances Guy, came to her one-year task with the right political and feminist credentials, but with little knowledge of Judaism, or Jewish life. She deserves to be congratulated.

ADRIENNE WALLMAN

Repossessed

Chmelnitski's massacres. I saw around me shadows of people, with faces full of secrets, hovering as if in other worlds, worlds unknown to us...

Both productions attempted to engage with these 'other worlds' reflected in the play. At The Pit the decision seems to have been to attempt a circumnavigation, to show a culturally distant society as such, in all its detail of costume, setting, social organisation and ritual. The production was well organised and designed, there were powerful performances in the leading roles, in particular from John Shrapnel who carries the second half as Reb Azriel, and from Joanne Pierce who, as Leye, explored the psycho-sexual boundaries of the role with agonising honesty.

However, for me, it was an experience akin to watching a group of white English people playing Afro-Caribbeans. The cultural disconnection of most of the performers and the director meant that, even in its most powerful moments, the play became a grotesque exercise in Hammer Horror, its richness and ambiguity destroyed. At other times, a failure to grasp the ritualistic patterns within the dialogue and, with these, the internal qualities of the characters, produced confused and uncentred performances. Physical theatre techniques, used to develop movement and the dance sequences, served unfortunately to heighten a sense of the odd and foreign without illuminating the inner

life of the play. There was no indication of the external oppression described by Anski, so the events took place in a social and political vacuum. This was effectively a museum production, weak on textual clarity, with little meaning for the audience or, it seemed, for the actors.

The production at New End is a new version of the play, written and directed by Julia Pascal who says in her programme note: 'I did not want to look at *The Dybbuk* as a piece of Museum Theatre, but to juxtapose Anski's play against Hitler's theatre of death.'



Julia Pascal

The production was an exploration of those inner and other worlds referred to by Anski, using his text to broaden the focus to the possession of Jews by their culture and history. Judith, a Jewish woman in 1992, speaks of her experiences as a tourist in modern Germany and of the great silence on the Holocaust. She speculates about the relatives she never knew, 'all the lost aunts and uncles', and feels herself to be possessed by them.

The piece then moves to a hiding place in a ghetto during 1942, where the group of Jews, her dybbuks, wait for their inevitable discovery by the Nazis. They are all at the extremes of fear and despair, the more so because although they are non-believers they have no choice but to share in the general

fate. Led by Esther (Ruth Lass), they at first unwillingly and then compulsively re-enact the story of *The Dybbuk* which 'as a result of the grave persecutions and suffering' springs to resonant life.

The Dybbuk now became an allegory for which the Holocaust provided the backdrop. As it was re-enacted, the text was deconstructed by the memories and experiences of the group as they tried to face their deaths, and by the sounds outside of search and the threat of discovery. Lines and themes glossed over in the Pit production became clear and vivid; Anski's 'mystical community' was set in its context.

The production moved with sureness and fluidity through a montage of choreographed physical action, dance and images, verbal text, music and sound effects helped by a set of ladders, crates and buckets and by significant props and costumes. The physical and mental commitment of the performers to the material was total.

The result was the building of an elaborate and emotionally powerful web of associations and ideas which I found quite devastating. Problematically, the image of Jew as victim trapped by history predominated, joined to final visual statements – ironically accompanied by Mozart's *Requiem* – about the inevitability of continuing annihilation and destruction from which some would randomly escape and some would not.

During the performance, I was sitting next to a Holocaust survivor whose presence and being gave me assurances not just of survival but of the possibility of action and change. The narrowness of the piece's politics contradicted its theatrical inventiveness. However, I cannot deny how moved I was or that at all sorts of levels I share in the cultural

matrix from which it derives.

What emerged for me from seeing the two productions was that Anski's play, written out of his knowledge of those lost communities, can speak with a modern voice. The success of the Pascal Theatre's production lay in its discovery of a way into the play through an internal exploration of its connections with living Jewish experience, an exploration which, despite my reservations, I accepted as authentic.

FRANCES RIFKIN

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Solomon Anski, author of *The Dybbuk*, was born in 1863, in Vitebsk. In his teens, rebelling against his traditional upbringing, he became involved in the Russian Populist movement and went to live among the Russian peasants working as a blacksmith, miner, teacher and book-binder. Between 1892 and 1905 he was forced into exile in Paris. At about this time, he began writing in Yiddish and produced in particular *Di Shvve* (The Oath) – the Bund anthem.

Anski was a folklorist, and between 1911 and 1914 he led a series of ethnographic visits to the Jewish Ukraine. These visits, together with his experiences as a relief worker in the First World War, provided him with the material for *The Dybbuk*. The play was first performed in Vilna in 1917 by a Jewish troupe. After his death it was produced with Jewish actors by Vakhtangov, Stanislavski's protégé, and subsequently became the most famous play in the Yiddish theatre repertoire.

The Dybbuk, Pascal Theatre Company, Theatre at New End

The Dybbuk, Royal Shakespeare Company, The Pit at the Barbican

A Happy New Year
to all Jewish Socialist readers
from Royte Klezmores
the three woman band
in the hope that we can be
instrumental in bringing harmony
as well as peace, justice and progress.

Royte Klezmores are available to play world Jewish music at benefits, parties, fairs; for happy events and good causes. Write to use c/o Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

Don't play it again, Sam

Sam
Saturday
London
Weekend
Television

The eulogy for this private dick series in the erstwhile organ of the Jewish community underlines the reality that on identity questions our 'leaders' do not have a clue. Granted, readers can rely on the *Jewish Chronicle* to share its knack of tripping over the body politic. But the Board of Deputies – substitute for wisdom – has always provided the analogy for police intelligence, a contradiction in terms.

Board spokesperson Rona Hart deserves some reward for her uncanny detection that the series portrayed Jews like 'normal human beings', rather than familiar stereotypes. Perhaps the aptly-named director, Alvin Rakoff, will include her in the mooted second series along with the other submissive women. With such perception, small wonder the Board projects Muslims and the Left, not fascists, as the largest source of antisemitism.

Ms Hart fails to recognise clichés generously presented as exhibits A to Z. The sexual frustrations of a 'pig' – in this case, a kosher one – distracted by, not on the job, are as prosaic as these scripts proved. Doreen Mantle's doting mother was a criminal waste of potential

drama between generations. Peter Armitage, as the heroic hunk-jailer's inevitably dense sidekick, received a cruel sentence himself, cast adrift for all six episodes.

The worst offence emerged in the Board's relief that, unusually for a show with a Jewish character, there had been no complaints. Ivan Kay (Sam) and Co may take little comfort here, since Woburn House condemns every TV programme which remotely questions the conformity of religious, Zionist or similar conservative Jewry. Yet our establishment should not fear goggle box values which, especially at weekend peaktime, are increasingly less demanding than the neanderthal simplicity of market forces.

This CID promotion offered the Met and forces elsewhere a welcome breather from growing concern over corruption and harassment. Its officers, however, while apparently innocent of false prosecution, were guilty of lacking any serious convictions. Still, barren summer competition from rival channels ensured seven to eight million viewers for nothing beyond thin plots, anorexic quips and a Jewishness which, confined to

PAUL COLLINS

the Womad (World of Music and Dance) Festival at Reading on the following Saturday. Fortunately, the publicity for their tour had been reasonable – with Simon Broughton's excellent BBC2 film *Fiddler on the Hoof* giving the New York band national exposure several weeks earlier and with a well-timed article in the *Jewish Chronicle*.

The concert at Ronnie Scott's was full. The Klezmatics have released two albums to date: *Shwaygn=Toyt* (Silence is Death) and *Ritem+Yidn* (Rhythm and Jews) and they played most of the best tracks on these albums.

The new album has a mixture of traditional Klezmer tunes (with Klezmatics arrangements) and new songs. This is above all both

dynamic and happy music played with flair and wit. If I was going to fault the performance in any way (and this is difficult) I would say that they played *Dzhankeye* so fast that it was impossible to hear the words. Maybe they figure that the audience was largely Yiddish impaired (in Henry Sapoznik's famous phrase) and it didn't matter so much. Whatever the motive, Lorin Sklamberg's vocals left everyone, except himself, breathless. He was in fine voice in, for example, a gutsy rendering of *Di Sapozhkelekh* (The boots), which is a song about obsession, and in *Ershter Vals* (First Waltz), a hauntingly beautiful love song.

If not Yiddish impaired, the audience at Ronnie Scott's was certainly 'spontaneity impaired'. I have heard the Klezmatics play twice before and, usually, people are dancing unstopably round the room or clapping wildly to the music after the first song. The sedate audience at Ronnie Scott's seemed to be something of a culture shock for the band and where normally they wouldn't even need to encourage people to clap, they had to work hard to get a response. At Ronnie Scott's that night I was reminded just how undemonstrative the British are.

Very few people understood the background to the title of the Klezmatics' first album and Alicia Svigals had to explain that the title related to 'Act Up' and the American gay community's slogan 'Silence is death'. 'If you don't speak a language, a language dies,' she added. 'If you don't play the music, the music dies. And if you're silent about injustice, people die.' It seemed particularly appropriate to have the reference to 'Act Up' explained from the stage of Ronnie Scott's to a largely Jewish (I think) audience on the day of the so-called Community Walkabout from which the Chief Rabbi had excluded the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline.

Why do I like this band so much? I guess it's because they are rooted so firmly in Klezmer music, they are excellent musicians and arrangers, and they are not afraid to blend Yiddish song and Klezmer style with other musical styles. Rather than just recreating traditional Klezmer, they have taken the form and

STEPHEN OGIN

On the shelf...

The new facts on the ground may or may not render many of the books on the Middle East obsolete. Hopefully they will encourage people to find out what the Palestinians themselves have to say. Edward Said is probably the Palestinians' best known advocate in the West and his writing seems as good a place to start as any. His new *Peace in the Middle East* (Open Magazine, £2.50) includes the following lines: '...my premise is that neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis have a military option against each other. Both peoples must learn to live in peace, and in mutual acknowledgement of each other's history and actuality. Yet ... only one people has achieved self-determination, even as the other people live in a state of subordination and oppression. That the Palestinians resist is a function of how injustice and sufferings do not defeat a people, nor compel it into submission, but rather drives that people to resist more, and to struggle further for political justice and rights...' Quite.

Interesting but I believe unlikely to stand the test of time is *Grasping the Nettle of Peace* by Khaled Al-Hassan (Saqi, £8.95). Curiously subtitled a *senior Palestinian figure speaks out*, the author, a co-founder of Fatah and chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Palestinian National Council, argues for a Swiss style confederation of Israel, Palestine and Jordan.

Meanwhile, half a world away we have *Jewish Books in Whitechapel: a bibliography of Naroditsky's Press* (Duckworth, £22). I cannot imagine this book having a large sale, or indeed any sale beyond a few libraries, yet I'm glad it exists. Naroditsky printed all manner of Zionist, Yiddish and Labour publications at his little Whitechapel press and is an important figure in the Jewish East End history. This book includes a brief history of the press as well as two warm memoirs of the

compiler of the bibliography, the late Moshe Sanders, one by his son and the other by David Katz. The bibliography itself is however put together in a most confusing manner with no translations of the Yiddish or Hebrew texts.

From quite a different part of the Jewish world again there is the new *Indian-Jewish Cooking* (Hymen Publishers, £7.95). The compiler, Mavis Hyman, was born in Calcutta, her family being of the Iraqi branch of Indian Jewry, and the book includes a brief history of the Jews in India. The recipes themselves have a distinct Middle Eastern flavour and include chapters on festival foods. As a veggie, I'm more likely to use the newly reissued *Jewish Vegetarian Cookbook* (Thorsons, £5.99) but I will have a go at some of the dishes here like *Mariel Ka Singara* (coconut and spiced veg pasties) or *Cheese Sumosacks*. I am however reminded that this is a socialist paper, not *New Moon*, so I should move on rather than list ingredients.

R BUCH SOICHER

The editors of *Jewish Socialist* wish a happy, healthy and successful year to the editors of progressive Jewish magazines and newspapers around the world, with special greetings to *Unser Tsait* (USA), *Outlook* (Canada), *Points Critiques* (Belgium), *Blaanes* (Holland) and *Israel and Palestine* (France).