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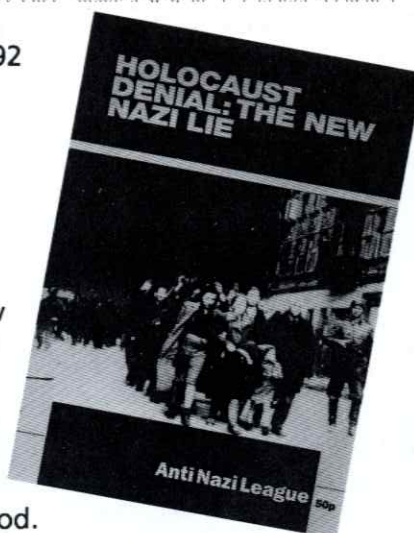
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Teresa Thornhill

with a foreword by Geoffrey Bindman

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Published by: **Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights.**
London October 1992

Distributed by Turnaround, 27 Horsell Rd, London N7.

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ISBN 0-9519610-0-4

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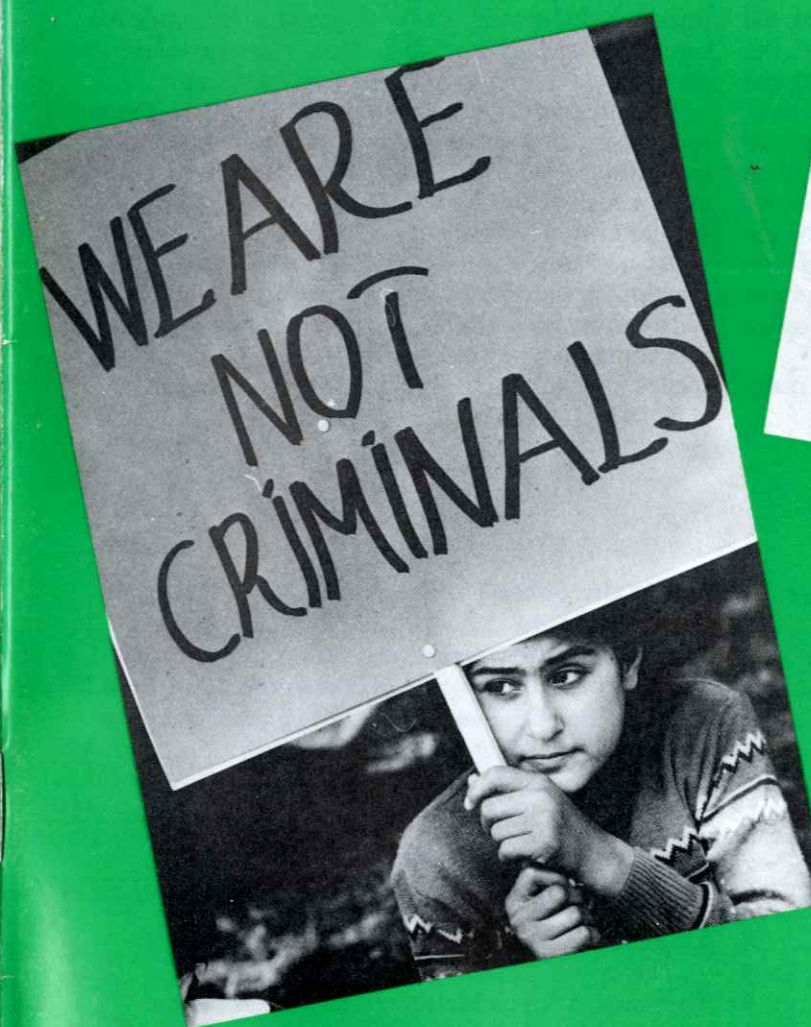
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JEWISH SOCIALIST

The magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 28 January-March 1993 £1.50

New frontier Europe unites ... against refugees



Old frontier

Walter Benjamin committed suicide in 1940, fearing deportation. But what ideas did he live for?

Also in this issue

- The fighting history of the 43 Group
- How Israel exports repression
- Legal attack on Gypsies
- Inside the Jewish family

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We can be forgiven for thinking we are living in a world that has become a macabre version of Alice's Wonderland, where moral values are grotesquely twisted but presented as straight down the middle and self-evident lies masquerade as wholesome truths. More than ever before, we have to be quite clear about when to make criticisms, when to protest and when to give support.

We should begin by making some connections. A mosque is ransacked and hundreds of people die or are injured in resulting clashes – and not only in India. In the West Midlands, temples and cultural centres are burned in reprisal. In the East End of London, doctors making night-time calls to patients are brutally attacked – simply by religious association. We do not believe this whole affair was simply a one-off. Not only have the tenets of the Hindu faith been grossly distorted to justify the original act against the mosque, but once again, India's democracy is threatened.

As we enter the new year, the world is witnessing yet another crime against the Palestinians. For a long time now, the Israeli government has characterised the Palestinians as 'terrorists' so dedicated to violence that peace-making will always be impossible. In making the recent expulsions, they have cynically undercut the position of secular Palestinians, thus undermining the very leadership that can make peace. At the same time, Palestinian fundamentalists are bidding for the loyalty of the Palestinian people. Whilst our protest against human rights abuses is unconditional, we will still maintain our support for secular peace-making forces. One of the strengths of the Palestinian national movement has been its non-sectarianism. It would be tragic if an outcome of this debacle was that the Palestinians now allowed themselves to be divided along religious lines.

Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe the spectacle of so many

innocent peoples struggling to eat, tend the sick and bury their loved ones has become a hideous daily diet for us all, with that awful phrase 'theatre of war' having a particular resonance. At the same time, their very identities are changed daily before our eyes. In this way we have seen Bosnians turned into Muslims and we have no way of knowing whether people wish to perceive themselves in this manner. Once they have defined their enemy, the next act begins. Serbian soldiers rape 'Muslim' women, apparently in order to conceive ethnically clean babies. Meanwhile, the world response sees troops floundering around, individual and disparate aid efforts, yet more 'negotiating' meetings and young Asian men from Yorkshire going off to Bosnia to fight a 'holy war'.

When we try to count the number of displaced people in the world – and stop because there are too many to contemplate – we have to know why this is happening. It is not a simple matter and it is not understandable only in economic terms. Another force driving this massive redrawing of boundaries and appropriating national identities together with their moral values is fundamentalism. This has to be seen as one movement, albeit one with many contradictory facets. Once people understand themselves to be engaged in a crusade for a significant and spiritual force that is greater than mere people, then of course anyone can be sacrificed.

Fundamentalism is more of a threat than the left recognises, and in any strategic alliance we must not leave this issue aside. One-off responses to ghastly crimes such as fire-bombs allow us to feel momentary respite only. However, it is time for democratic anti-racist, anti-fascist movements to take on board the true reactionary nature of fundamentalism. We must work with others for cultural democracy to ensure that in this remapping of the world, freedom of movement means just that.

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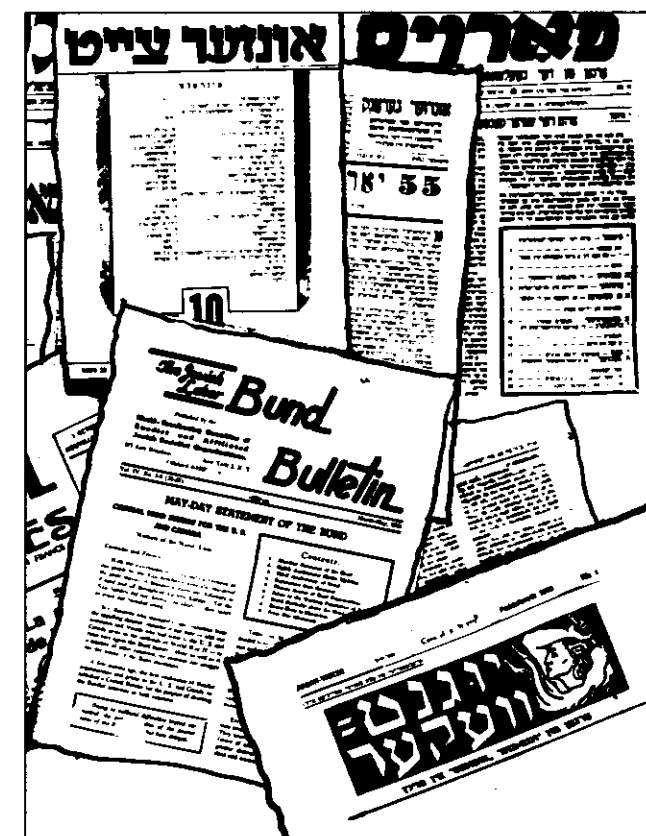
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95 years young

New York, late October 1992. The Bush administration had but a few days left to run. The trees in Central Park were russet brown. And there I was in New York to attend the 8th World Congress of the Bund, coupled with the 95th anniversary of its founding.

Bundist organisations exist in many countries, in the United States and Canada, in Australia, in Israel and in South America. A Dr Berman turned up from the Ukraine, a deputy of the People's Congress, speaking of the respect in which Jewish culture was held there and full of plans to found a Bundist organisation, with young people who were enthusiastic for Yiddish.

Resolutions were passed on socialism and on Jewish matters specifically but the major point of contention at the conference concerned Zionism. The Bund has ever since its foundation had a position which sharply delineates it from the Zionists, in its support for Jews to be Jews in the countries where they live, rather than being concentrated territorially in one particular land. One tendency at the conference, led by Bundists from New York, did not seek to turn its back on this history but con-



Bundist publications in various countries after the Second World War

sidered that Bundists had to work within Jewish communities and not to take positions which marginalised them. According to them, this meant a 'positive attitude' to Israel. On the other hand others, including the Israeli organisation of the Bund, made it clear that they had long supported a position of justice and equality for all citizens in Israel and the Occupied Territories, including Palestinian self-determination. If that placed them outside the Israeli national consensus, well that was a position they would just have to live with. In the end both resolutions were remitted to the new Coordinating Committee.

The highlight was the 95th anniversary lunch, held in a hotel in mid-town Manhattan. If one could choke thoughts back of the irony of an originally revolutionary proletarian organisation celebrating its anniversary with a \$30 a head meal in the very heart of capitalism, it was a moving occasion, for the fiery speeches, affirming their belief in the Bundist ideals of democratic socialism. And singing the Bund's hymn, the 'Shvue', with 300 others affirming its words about 'we swear an oath of blood and tears, was for me one of the highlights of the trip.

MIKE HEISER

Familiar theme

The nationalist upsurge in the former Soviet Union continues to spawn ever more ugly antisemitic, racist and fascist ideas. A recent issue of the *People's Cause* published in Moscow carried an article which claimed that 'AIDS is dangerous only for Negroes, mulattos, Jews and Gypsies ... white races ... will never fall ill themselves if their immune system is not weakened by external influences ... in our

society there is a biological group which is frightened to death of AIDS – the Jews. Because of the Negro mixture in their blood, the infected Jews die.'

The article concluded: 'For our people medicines against AIDS are not a major problem. It is much more important to work for MONONATIONAL marriages ... OUR BLOOD IS OUR HOPE AND PRIDE!' (Their emphasis.)

Another piece of the jigsaw

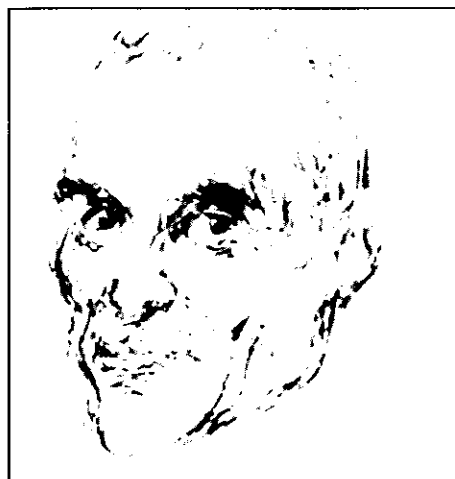
New information received from the Russian authorities is helping the Bund piece together the solution to still unanswered questions about the fate of their leaders, Erlich and Alter, who were sentenced to death by Stalin in 1941.

It had long been assumed that Erlich and Alter were shot soon after their rearrest by the NKVD in December 1941 on a trumped up charge of urging Soviet soldiers to conclude peace with Nazi Germany. A letter dated 23 February 1943 from Maxim Litvinov, former USSR ambassador in Washington, confirmed the death sentences passed on the two Bundist leaders and stated that 'this sentence has been carried out in regard to both of them'.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Bund, in alliance with several other Jewish and labour organisations, sought new informa-

tion from the Russian authorities. They have now received a response from Yuli Vorontsov, Russian ambassador to the UN,

The new version of events adds several new charges against Erlich but fails to mention the accusation of spreading defeatist propa-



Victor Alter, drawn by Feliks Topolski in 1941

which states that Erlich 'died on May 14 1942 in the NKVD prison of the Kiubyshev region. Alter was executed on February 17 1943'.

ganda as stated in Litvinov's letter of 1943. Vorontsov claims that Erlich was found guilty of 'activities against the Bolshevik party, the Soviet

Union and the Comintern, of organising infiltration into the USSR of Bund members with counter-revolutionary missions, of using his publication for attacks on the Soviet Union and of publishing articles by Trotsky'.

Though this still leaves many questions unanswered, a more positive aspect of the recent exchange is confirmation that the legal basis for the rehabilitation of Erlich and Alter was established in November 1991 and Russian officials have been instructed to contact members of Erlich's and Alter's families to advance this process.

Meanwhile, the Bund has learned from other, as yet unnamed, sources that Erlich committed suicide by hanging himself on the window grates of his cell. Efforts will continue to reach a full account of the fate of the former Bund leaders.

DAVID ROSENBERG

High risk activities

There is an epidemic of Hepatitis A amongst the Chassidic community in Stamford Hill and the disease has been around for five years. In 1991, there were 126 actual cases which is considered to be an underestimate. Teenagers and young adults are the most affected, probably due to their practical role in caring for their younger brothers and sisters.

This year's District Health Authority (DHA) annual report describes the situation and says it has been impossible to eradicate, but does not name the community involved. Instead it refers to as 'a well defined community living in a small area of Hackney'. It is the only

minority ethnic community that is acknowledged in this way. For example, high blood pressure and related illnesses are quite clearly attributed to the Caribbean community. Health professionals we have talked to say that they have taken a 'pro-active' approach to solving the problem within the community and are about to use a new vaccine to deal with it.

However, they have been, and still are, reluctant to see the facts come out from under wraps. At this stage it is unclear as to whether this rather thin veil of silence is a conscious agreement between health officials and members of the community or not. We do know that in 1988, a

community leader requested that the community not be named in the DHA's annual report, a request which has been adhered to ever since. We assume that the anonymity stems from an understandable, but misguided, anxiety to protect the community from the age-old antisemitic accusation of 'dirty Jew'.

While useful, the vaccination approach, as opposed to a thoroughgoing public health campaign, does not protect the vulnerable – those who may not have a choice about being exposed to risk. It also presumes the community has tangible boundaries and has no contact with the wider community in Hackney, which is clearly not true. Even

is it were a hermetically sealed group, the way the epidemic has been addressed and information suppressed would be open to question. Those involved in this silencing might well remember how, until not so long ago, social workers (again from the very best liberal intentions) colluded with members of the Asian community to suppress information about the levels of domestic violence against women in case it spread a racist message. If service providers are committed to people controlling their own health, they should ensure that they have the necessary facts in front of them.

KAREN MERKEL
SIMON LYNN

The Mitterrand question

Paris, 16 July 1992. A large crowd gathers. The people have come to commemorate the anniversary of a significant event that took place here, on the site of the former Vélodrome d'Hiver cycle stadium. This was the scene, 50 years ago, of the 'Vel d'Hiv round-up'. Some 13,000 Jews were summoned to a makeshift detention centre for deportation to concentration camps. There, deprived of their basic human rights and dignity, they were murdered.

This operation was planned by the Nazis and conducted by the French authorities. However, in one important respect, the French can be said to have shown greater zeal than the Germans. The Nazis wanted 20,000 Jews to be detained, but to begin with only 9,000

(adults) were assembled. At the insistence of the French authorities themselves, orders were given for some 4,000 Jewish children to be arrested, bringing the total number of Jews rounded up at the Vel d'Hiv to 13,000.

This year President Mitterrand attended the moving 50th anniversary commemoration.

The Island of Yeu, off the west coast of France, 11 November 1992. Fifty or so die-hard supporters of Marshall Pétain gather round his grave. They are here to pay their tribute to the man who, in setting up the collaborationist Vichy regime, sent those Jewish adults and children detained at the Vel d'Hiv to their deaths.

However, these Pétain-

istes are not the only ones gathered to pay homage. Each year, following a custom established by De Gaulle, a presidential wreath is laid. Last July, Serge Klarsfeld, Holocaust historian and president of a group representing the children of deported Jews (Association des Fils et Filles des Déportés Juifs de France), called on François Mitterrand to discontinue this tradition. But his appeal fell on deaf ears. Thirty or so protesters from the Union of Jewish Students of France (UEJF) witnessed the laying of a wreath at Pétain's grave on behalf of President Mitterrand. A Front National wreath lay close by.

The Elysée issued a statement to the effect that it was the victor at Verdun who was being commemorated.

Klarsfeld responded that laying this wreath was as shameful as if the President of the Federal Republic of Germany were to lay flowers at the graves of Hermann Goering or Adolf Hitler – also World War I veterans.

The incident highlights two key points. First, the role played by the French authorities in the murder of the Jewish children rounded up at the Vel d'Hiv. Second, France's inability to come to terms with its own past. Are the French prepared finally to accept that the Vichy regime was a shameful chapter in their history? Or do they still – in common with the Front National and, it would seem, President Mitterrand – see in Pétain's achievements something worth preserving?

TONY BLEND

The School Transport: pour les enfants de Drancy

He stepped, with eager pace
And open mind expectant:
The clear cold morning air
An offered promise of
A bright new day to come.
And was it bright and cold
Some distant morning for
That lost and nameless child,
An eight year old, his bundle
Beyond his strength to bear,
But with inhuman haste
By frantic yells and cries
Distracted, harried down
The rails to awful death.
And I, who might have shared
His fate, a father now
See off the parting coach
And nurse this cancer which
I know will never cure;
It burns inside: the guilt
The loss, the endless pain
For all our vanished lives.
Lionel Burman

Children coming off a French train at Auschwitz



Faith won't heal the rift

Julia Bard explains why she has little faith in religious solutions to political questions

Interfaith activity has an aura of politesse. Alliances between religious groups are forged not over instant coffee in polystyrene cups on demonstrations or pickets, but over good wine in chandeliered ballrooms where for some, if not quite all, the participants, influential contacts and a handle on the diplomatic score are as important as religious reconciliation.

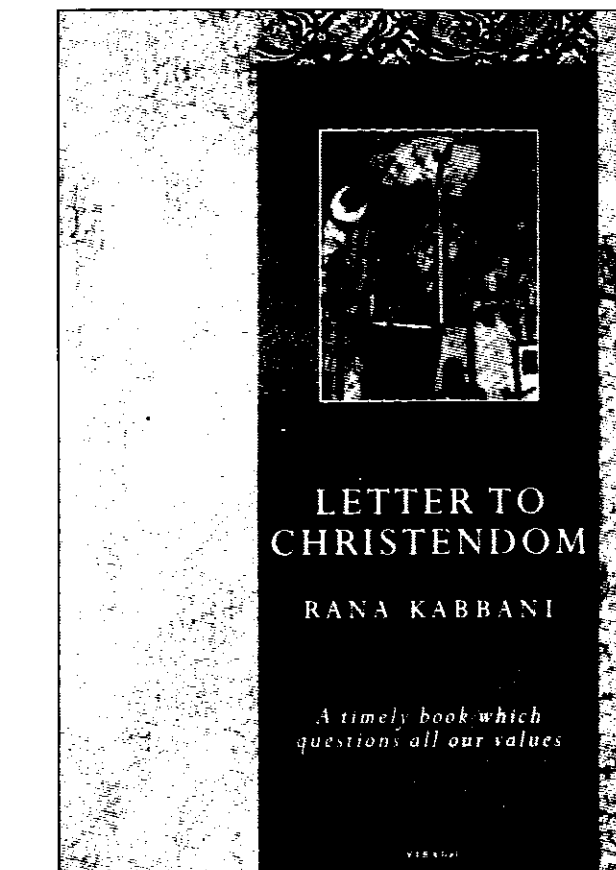
The Calamus Foundation was set up in 1989 to bring together Muslims, Jews and Christians, an initiative of Muslims concerned at a new world order which portrays Islam as the main enemy and Muslims as tyrannical extremists. They emphasise the common roots of Islam, Christianity and Judaism: 'three traditions, all of which are based on a continuum of revelation and prophecy tracing back to the Patriarch Abraham'. And therein, as they say, lies the rub.

Last November's Fourth Calamus Distinguished Annual Lecture was entitled 'The Gender Jihad' and delivered by Rana Kabbani, author of *Letter to Christendom* (Virago), a literally and intellectually thin volume in defence of Islam written in the wake of the Salman Rushdie affair. Somewhat fatter were those present at the Calamus lecture who had eaten a sumptuous meal in a Park Lane hotel before reaching the speeches. In an almost Talmudic format (apart from the gender of the contributors) the main speech was followed by *responsa* from a Muslim, Yasmin Ali, a Jew, Lisa Jardine, and a Catholic, Ann Rossiter – except that all three were at pains to assert their secularism.

Rana Kabbani in contrast asserted, with wild inaccuracy, that secularism was derived from a 19th century colonial world view used then and now to portray Muslim societies as barbaric, in particular towards women. (With even less reference to the facts, she claimed that women in the West have only worked for 50 years – but that's what happens when you can't see beyond your own class.) She concluded with the increasingly familiar argument that 'we [the Muslims] have replaced the Jews as the scapegoats of the West'. Thus in one fell swoop she colludes with the reactionary forces which are redefining complex shattered national cultural identities under a single heading: Muslim; and encapsulates the victimisation of diverse groups by a multiplicity of fascist and reactionary forces as a crusade against Islam.

Yasmin Ali was the only speaker who took issue with Kabbani's claims that Islam's global vision transcends ethnic, religious, gender and other divisions. She pointed out that this was not the lived experience shared by many Muslims, nor was it the best way of ensuring a future for marginalised and embattled communities grappling with the impact of migration on gender, ethnicity and other facets of their lives, as well as religion.

Lisa Jardine solved the problem by using her Jewish identity only to demonstrate how sorry she was about Zionism. Apparently accepting that 'Zionism' and



'Jewish' are the same thing, she told of how proud she was that her son had refused to have a *barmitzvah* in the year of the Sabra and Chatilla massacres. (There are arguments against *barmitzvahs*, but the activity of the Israeli army isn't one of them.) Lisa Jardine's display of self-hatred was surpassed only by the sycophancy with which she talked about some of her Muslim students at Queen Mary and Westfield College where she is professor of English. Apparently unaware of the debate or struggle by feminists east and west over the pressure to wear the *hijab*, she described the 'wonderful gesture as the girls (sic) take the scarf from their shoulders and put it on their heads as they leave the college'.

The Calamus Foundation has stated its commitment to debate on these increasingly difficult issues, but the debates cannot be forced into a purely religious frame of reference. Many of the people who paid their £39 for a place at the Fourth Calamus Distinguished Annual Lecture may have come away pleased with themselves at having shaken hands with the enemy. But these are no foot soldiers slogging it out in the trenches; they are the directors of the debate. And if their agenda is to hang a religious identity round our necks, they too must be challenged by those of us whose future depends on drawing on the many facets of our identity to forge a solid alliance against oppression – religious or not – from within our communities or from outside them.

First line of defence

Israel's labour organisation, the *Histadrut*, came under fire over its treatment of Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories, when two representatives of the workers' rights group *Kav La'Oved* (Workers' Hotline) toured Britain in November.

Kav La'Oved was started three years ago to help unregistered Palestinian workers employed in Israel. 'We used to go to the "slave markets" where they waited to be hired,' explained legal aid worker Ehab Hassan. But the hotline discovered that even legally registered workers, from whom *Histadrut* contributions were deducted on top of income tax and social insurance,

were given little protection.

Though the *Histadrut* accepts the deductions, it won't accept non-residents as members, nor admit them to *Kupat Holim*, the health fund, Ehab explained. Far from giving union protection, *Histadrut* officials were often involved in getting Palestinian workers fired, and during the Gulf War the *Histadrut*-owned Co-op supermarkets sacked all Palestinians from the territories.

Kav La'Oved, a non-party political organisation, helps workers fight wrongful dismissal, accident and unemployment compensation cases, as well as publicising injustices and advising

workers of their rights. It has produced advice leaflets in Hebrew and Russian, as well as Arabic, and these were enthusiastically received by new Jewish immigrants from the former USSR. The Hotline works with Palestinian trade unions in the Occupied Territories and also with those *Histadrut* members who are prepared to help.

Ehab and co-worker Kersten Sodergren spoke at a London meeting co-sponsored by the Jewish Socialists' Group during a hectic two-week trip taking them from Aberdeen to Brighton. In Hackney they were received by the mayor and the trades council; Naigou

welcomed them to its headquarters, and they were also able to discuss with trades unionists from Turkey, Iran, Ireland and South Africa at a London reception. It was *Kav La'Oved's* first visit here. Hopefully there will be more. The Jewish Socialists' Group will be keeping in touch.

CHARLIE POTTINS

Flight to disaster

Kings Cross, Zeebrugge, and ... Amsterdam? Cuts in staffing and workers' rights could have contributed to the El Al disaster, according to Eli Ben Menahem, a former El Al works committee member and now a deputy minister in the Rabin government.

Ben Menahem told Israeli radio that El Al had been operating under receivership for the past 12 years so as to make strikes illegal and break union organisation. Staff levels were cut, and temporary staff taken on without proper training, he said. Flight hours per plane were increased. Under pressure to ensure no delays, service engineers signed airworthiness certificates, sometimes against their better judgment, fearing the sack if they grounded a plane.

The pressure for quick turn round is worse with cargo flights, like the 747 that crashed on to a crowded Amsterdam high-rise estate. After the disaster it was disclosed the plane had a troubled record, including losing a fin over Amsterdam on a previous flight.

(Information from *Militant*, 16 October 1992)

Violent reactions

Avraham Burg, who chairs the Education Committee of the Knesset, commissioned a survey on the attitude of Israeli Jews towards Arabs. The survey found that almost 40% of those questioned identified with violent retaliation against Arabs and that a similar percentage of the 'non-secular' respondents agreed 'very much' with such sentiments.

Burg's reaction to the findings was that 'in Israel today there exists racism and xenophobia similar to that of contemporary Germany and France'. However, reaction amongst some in Israel to the survey has been to attack the messenger rather than the message. National Religious Party Knesset member Yehal-om went so far as to describe the poll as an expression of self-hatred and to assert that

supporters of human rights prefer the right of the enemies of Israel to exist to their own right to survive.

Deportation protests

The Israeli peace movement has not been silent in reaction to the deportation of Hamas supporters to no-person's land between Israel and Lebanon. On 17 December peace activists demonstrated against the decision outside the court in Jerusalem where the appeal against the deportation was being heard. On 20 December Peace Now members demonstrated outside Prime Minister Rabin's office demanding the cancellation of the deportation orders and talks with the PLO.

However, much comment within the peace camp has focused on the position of the four ministers from the dovish Meretz party who voted for the deportations when they were discussed in

the Israeli cabinet. For example, Roni Telmor, writing in *Hadashot* (20 December 1992) protested: 'We sent you into the government precisely for such a moment when you would be presented with four alternatives, each more disgusting than the next, each more illegal than the next and you would say No to all four of them. We sent you into government so that you would present the other alternative, in accordance with Israeli and international law and the Geneva Convention.' He concludes his piece: 'I would like to inform you that in the next elections you certainly cannot count on my vote... If it's possible to vote for Rabin, the original, then why settle for a cheap imitation?'

News from Israel extracted from *The Other Front* published by the Alternative Information Centre

DYBBUK'S DIARY

MAKING A BOMB

Writing about arms to Iraq a year ago (JS24), I recalled David Low's prophetic 1930s cartoon depicting the 'super-patriotic war of the future', with British troops crouching under a barrage of shells marked 'Made in Britain'. But I don't think Low could have predicted we'd be paying for them. When British Aerospace, Racal, GEC and the rest were displaying their wares at the Baghdad arms fair a few years back, the big banks were on hand with offers of credit. Did they send Saddam Hussein similar brochures to the ones we got – 'Why wait to enjoy the things you've always wanted?' – showing tanks and bombers instead of cars and hi fi?

When my bank turned nasty, bouncing cheques and blowing up charges, I'd a mind to say to the manager (it is supposed to be the 'listening bank): 'Just because you people made a mistake lending Saddam £400 million, there's no need to take it out on me!' It might not help my overdraft, but it would relieve my blood pressure, I thought.

Seems they've got the last laugh, though. Thanks to the good old British taxpayer and the Export Credit Guarantee Department. Chris Cowley, who was working for Gerald Bull's Space Research Corporation, says he asked a Midland Bank man in Baghdad whether lending to Saddam's regime wasn't dodgy, and was told: 'We can't lose. After 90 days if the Iraqis haven't coughed up, the company gets paid by the British government instead. Either way we recover our loan, plus interest of course. It's beautiful.' That's not quite the word I was looking for...

GUIDANCE SYSTEMS

Defence Minister Malcolm Rifkind had a perfectly sound reason for trying to keep the government's part in Iraqi arms deals quiet. He was off to Saudi Arabia that week to save the troubled Al Yamanah arms deal, and his hosts doubtless appreciated reassurances of discretion. Jonathan Aitken, who replaced outspoken right winger Alan Clark as defence procurement minister, has enough experience of doing business with the Saudis to give advice.

The people who usually claim to speak for the Jewish community on Middle East matters are being very understanding about Mr Rifkind's position. At least, they're not saying the kind of things we used to hear against Gerald Kaufman. Maybe an improved PLO peace offer presented far more of a threat to the security-of-the-state-of Israel than an improved Scud missile. Besides, Malcolm Rifkind is a Conservative! And remembering how the Tories got rid of an earlier Jewish War

Minister (Leslie Hore-Belisha), they'll understand his need to prove himself.

Zionist lobbyists are only complaining that more arms weren't sold to Israel (as though they don't know Israel is an arms exporter, including some of the 'supergun' technology that went via South Africa to Iraq!). No pretence now about concern for the Kurds.

But what has happened to the great moral crusade against the international arms trade, which our former Chief Rabbi proclaimed in a speech last year (*Jewish Chronicle*, 15 March 1991)? Perhaps Lord Jakobovitz, whose views on self-help and enterprise were warmly regarded by the former Member for Finchley, can provide moral guidance for young Mark, who has done so well for himself as a ... car salesman, was it?

WORDS

To most Jewish people these days, the word 'revisionist' means someone like David Irving, who denies the truth of the Nazi slaughter of Europe's Jews. Dr Marc Ellis, an American Jew, makes no such denial of historical truth. He is a 'liberation theologian' who argues that too nationalist an interpretation of the Holocaust has prevented moral lessons being drawn, and has led Israel and Zionists to feel justified in oppressing other people.

Dr Ellis was recently invited to present his ideas at Leo Baeck college. He'd given an informal talk to rabbinical students there before. But Leo Baeck's principal, Dr Jonathan Magonet, has received protests over this visit from various 'big noises'. They include Burt Keimach, PR director of the Jewish National Fund which raises money for Israel, who says Marc Ellis's thesis is 'a form of cruel revisionism'.

Either Burt Keimach doesn't know what this means, or he does and is indulging in another kind of revisionism: one where the meaning of words is revised to suit a political purpose. As when they try to ban a legitimate view being discussed in our community, this revisionism also has authoritarian consequences.

HERE COMES THE CHIEF

To Manchester's Jewish Museum, for the exhibition on Jewish women. And who's this coming, with his retinue of security men, but the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks! Does his visit betoken a new enlightened attitude? You should be so lucky!

The Royte Klezmores women's trio arrived by car from London, and promptly the Chief's minders came over. No, you can't park here, not even while you carry in your instruments, no ifs or buts, and naturally no offer of a hand with the gear. Then when the women

got in, they found the room in which they'd hoped to warm up wasn't available. The heavies had taken it over, just in case Chief Rabbi Sacks should take poorly, G-d forbid, and need somewhere to rest.

After looking briefly over the exhibits, shaking hands with a few *gantse makhers* (male) and not a word to the museum's curator (female), the Chief Rabbi was off, thankfully taking his minders with him. Then everyone relaxed and got on with enjoying the show.

As the United Synagogue lurches deeper into deficit (£500,000 expected to add to £4 million already), new president Seymour Saideman says he 'will seek cuts even from the Chief Rabbinate' (*Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1992). I wonder if he'll get past the heavies.

NO END OF THE AFFAIR

The *Guardian's* throwaway supplement (31 October 1992) had a feature on Graham Greene's love life. It repeated a story, aired in the *Observer* diary after his death, that the reason Greene never gained the Nobel Prize was his five-year affair with Swedish actress Anita Bjork, back in the '50s. Greene-eyed Goddess?

The writer may have upset some important people in Sweden much earlier. The sinister ruthless capitalist Krogh in Greene's 1935 novel, *England Made Me*, was based on Swedish 'Match King' Ivar Kreuger, whose intrigues included financing the Nazi party and whose empire fell amid scandal with his suicide in 1932.

While in Stockholm soaking up background, Greene also found material for an impressionistic article in the *Spectator*, describing characters like the bourgeois 'pacifist' who 'supported war between races'. 'He grew excited at the thought of Russia, spoke of the glory of a war of extermination: poison gas, germs, aerial bombardment...' And the publisher, with military bearing and moustache, who told him: 'If the Socialists really came to power, I should be the first to take up arms. I do not, of course, believe in God, but if our Church was threatened, I should be the first...'

It took 37 years for Greene's novel to reach the screen, and for this the locale (and Krogh's nationality) was changed to Nazi Germany (and filmed in Yugoslavia!). It's a *Battlefield*, written the year before and consciously modelled on cinema technique, is one of the few Greene novels never filmed. It's about class war on the streets of 1930s London.

As for the Nobel Prize, Greene's friend Michael Meyer says: 'He didn't give a bugger.' □

No compromise

Paul Collins, in his article 'In or Out' about the exclusion of the Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline from the Chief Rabbi's walkabout, raised some very important issues.

Can the Helpline ever become a 'respectable' group in the Jewish community? For this to happen would require a total transformation in the attitudes of the community, especially around the concept of the family. However, our position has always been to act as if we are a mainstream group, and to participate in events in the same way that other charities do.

This forces the Jewish community to confront the issues raised by lesbian and gay Jews, and to examine its own position. However, we would never compromise our own position of full equality, and we would not marginalise other groups in order to bolster ourselves.

The Jewish Socialists' Group has consistently supported the Helpline from a principled position, and we apologise about its omission from our list of supporting organisations. We certainly did not intend to marginalise the JSG and include only 'mainstream' groups, in an attempt to get some spurious respectability.

We are committed to having a pluralistic community for all Jews, and this must include any groups who suffer bigotry and ignorance from the narrow and regressive Jewish establishment, Michael Lee

Co-ordinator, Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline
BM Jewish Helpline, London WC1N 3XX.
Tel 071-706 3123

Food for thought

With the rise of Jewish Socialism in Norfolk I was interested to see the *Observer* colour mag recommending eating out at the Fox and Goose in *Fressingfields* near Diss.

But as a meal for two there can cost what the DSS expects a family of four to live on for a week, I won't recommend it for a Jewish Socialists' Group outing.

Charlie Pottins
London SW1

Sam's fan

Unlike your reviewer Paul Collins, I liked *Sam Saturday*. I liked the Jewish angle. It seemed accurate enough to me, but no doubt those who know the Jewish community better might disagree.

OK, so Paul and I don't like the same TV programmes. What annoyed me was the clever tone of his review – the snide in references that pass for wit. For example: What does 'hero-hunk jailer' mean? Is it a term of derision? Some might think Paul Collins himself is a bit of a hunk.

So, please play Sam again.

Bernard Misrahi
London N17

Don't ask the Rabbi

Dear Rabbi,
Why can't women hold their own?

THE RABBI REPLIES

We are not here to question our laws but uphold them. Leviticus is emphatic about the role of women in our services. At this point, rather than answer your question directly, I'd like to tell you a very old charming Jewish fable which I believe will illustrate my warmth and humanity and disguise my fundamental beliefs about women which are medieval. It's the story of a group of Jewish women living in north west London who feel excluded from synagogue services and arrange for 'women-only' services to be held. The community are outraged but the Rabbi, a wise and learned teacher, says 'What do you expect? They can't get husbands.'

FIFTH COLUMN

Be part of the Fifth Column. Deadline for listings in the next issue of *Jewish Socialist* is 13 MARCH. Please keep listings as brief as possible (50 words max) and send them to *Jewish Socialist*, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

London branch of the Jewish Socialists' Group meets regularly. Details from Dept LON, JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

Nottingham Jewish Socialists' Group meets regularly. Details from Dept NOT, JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX. Forthcoming public meeting with PLO representative Afif Safieh and Israeli peace activist Yael Lotan.

Leicester/East Midlands: Jewish Socialists are planning to form a local group. If you live in the area and are interested contact them at Dept LEI, JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

Norwich JSG meets regularly. Details from Dept NOR, JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

Bristol JSG meets regularly. Details from Box 21, Greenleaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.

Manchester Jewish Socialists meet regularly. Details from Dept MAN, JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

The Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline has been operating for 5 years and has taken over 1,000 calls. They are looking for more volunteers, particularly women, to staff the line. Full training given. The Helpline operates Monday to Thursday 7-10pm on 071-706 3123.

Stop Le Pen. Demonstration in Paris, Saturday 6 February, called by SOS Racisme, MRAP and other anti-racist groups. The Anti-Nazi League is organising coaches from London and Manchester. Details from ANL, PO Box 2566, London N4 2HG.

Beit Klal Yisrael alternative Jewish community. Regular services held in West London. Further details and newsletter from PO Box 1828, London W10 5RT.

Bill of wrongs

The new Asylum Bill has a long and ignoble list of antecedents, says Harry Cohen, Labour MP for Leyton

The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill is the latest in a long line of UK laws designed to appease racists and antisemites. The government claims that tighter asylum regulations are needed in order to maintain harmonious community relations

in this country. The Quakers are amongst those who answer that lie. They say: 'We are concerned that the negative attitudes contained in this Bill are more likely to damage community relations by making racism respectable and increasing the already considerable anxiety among our black and ethnic minority communities.' It is significant that despite the rising tide of racial attacks, including some terrible murders, the

government refuses to enact a law to make racial harassment and violence a specific criminal offence.

The Jewish community in Britain will also understand another point made by the Quakers: 'It is unfortunate, particularly in today's economic climate, that we now seem to consider people who seek refuge here as inevitably a drain on our economy and a threat to our community stability. We should, perhaps, remember the contribution made by refugees and, indeed, economic migrants to our cultural richness and economic well-being.'

But beyond this, many of the asylum seekers (for example from the former Yugoslavia) have been uprooted from their homes by war and face great danger to their safety if they are forced to return to their country of origin. There is a strong moral case for Britain, among other countries, to take in such refugees. It amounts to saving people's lives. The racism exposed in the Bill is that the government does not care if genuine refugees who are turned away lose their lives as a consequence. Clauses in the Bill, like those to tighten the Carriers Liability Act (aimed at airlines and shipping companies which carry asylum seekers) affect

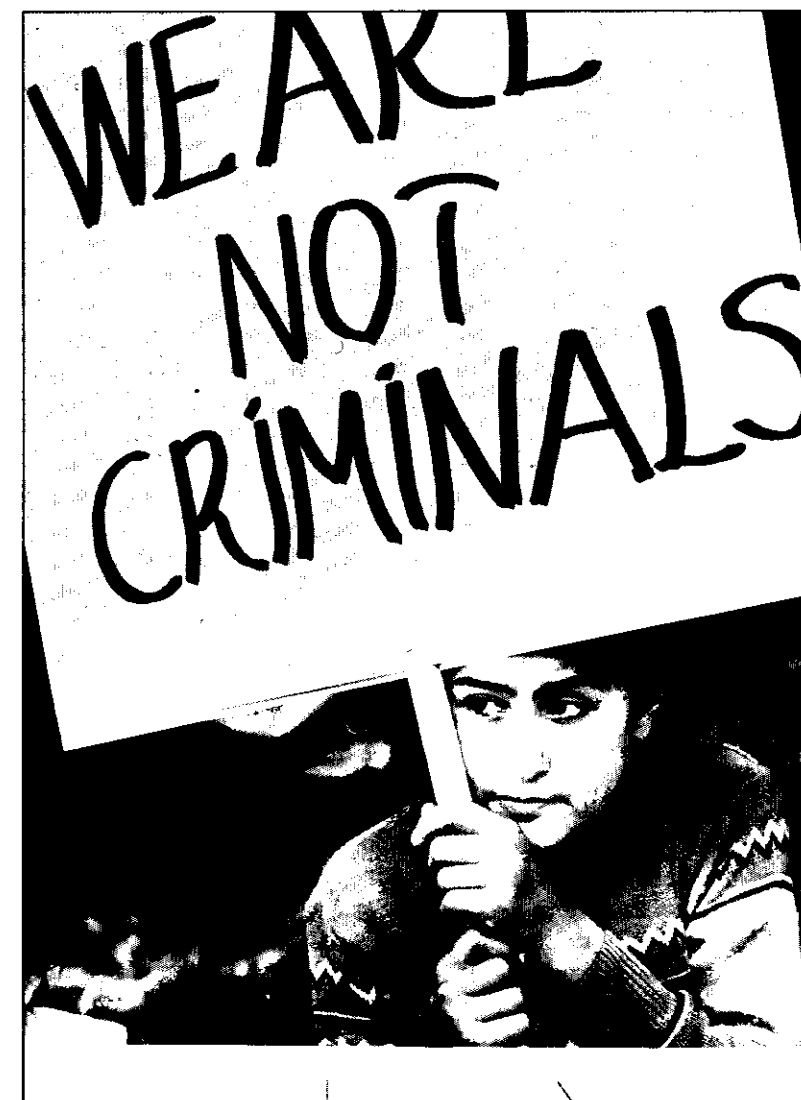


equally people with genuine claims to asylum and those without. In either case, the planes and ships will not carry them.

The government hides behind the definition of a refugee in the 1951 UN Convention, but that does not cover all the circumstances in which human rights today are likely to be violated. Citizens Advice Bureau officers recently wrote: 'Some of our clients would not necessarily qualify under the definition but would be in mortal danger if returned to their countries.' In any case, the total block upon 'economic refugees' is mealy-mouthed. The CAB again makes the point: 'Are Bosnians and Somalis going to be returned to their war-torn countries and to near certain death, if not by gun, then by starvation?'

The Bill abuses civil liberties in a number of respects. All asylum seekers and their dependants are to be finger-printed, a measure applied in this country only to those accused of crime. Refugees could be forced into temporary accommodation, and then like those in Germany would be an identifiable group in identifiable premises, and subject to physical attack. Restrictions upon legal aid apply, as well as an 'accelerated procedure' which can result in refugees being rapidly thrown out of the country without having had the opportunity properly to make their case.

Jews have been victims of similar racist immigration laws in the past. The 1905 Aliens Act was directly targeted at Jews who were forced to flee from brutal pogroms in Russia and Poland. It empowered immigration officers to turn back 'undesirable and destitute aliens'. Controls were placed on 'immigrant ships' (those which carried 20 or more alien passengers). But refugees did have the right to appeal and the legislation did preserve the right to asylum. (The current Bill has bitten deeply into these rights.) The Aliens Act turned



away tens of thousands of Jewish refugees. It was enacted as a direct appeasement of antisemites who formed themselves into the British Brothers' League. The BBL campaigned against and attacked Jews in the most vicious way.

Antisemitism continued to inform UK immigration legislation prior to and during the Second World War. Anti-alien laws were still on the statute book, and officials could reject would-be immigrants without explanation. Vast numbers of Jews were, in this way, sent back into the clutches of the Nazis and to their deaths.

Even during the war, refugees were classified as 'enemy aliens' and denied rights. Many were interned and others made subject to irksome restrictions. The

popular press (in addition to its role in the 1930s of sympathising with fascists and actually backing the blackshirts) whipped up absurd xenophobia in trying to label Jews as 'fifth columnists'.

The history of immigration law is that of appeasement to racists and antisemites. The current Asylum Bill is no exception. It does nothing to tackle the causes of the racism. Instead the racists are strengthened by the state setting up a climate whereby refugees and immigrants are scapegoated. The lesson of the 20th century is that racism, sooner or later (preferably sooner) has to be fought and defeated. That applies as well to the institutionalised racism of governments like this one in bringing in this evil Asylum Bill. □

Out of site

Simon Lynn outlines a new government attack on Gypsies and Travellers

With a depressingly familiar mix of cant, cuts and prejudice targeted at Travellers and Gypsies, comes the government Green Paper on *Reform of the Caravan Sites Act 1968*.

It will, if implemented as proposed, close the already marginal space where Travellers and Gypsies can live, travel, stop or settle safely, free from harassment and eviction, and with access to basic legal site provision (clean water, sanitation and a right to stay) and public services like health and education.

The proposals in the Green Paper will reverse the principle and gains of the 1968 Act that gave local authorities a duty to establish a countrywide network of legal sites. From 1978 onward a 100% government grant was available to local authorities for the capital cost of providing sites. Both the duty to provide sites and the grant are to be repealed.

Only 38% of local authorities have provided sites and successive governments have refused to use their power to direct them to comply. As a result, one in three of the 12,000 or so Traveller and Gypsy families are forced to resort to unauthorised sites, and face evictions, health hazards and poor access to public services.

Three-quarters of the Irish

and long distance Travellers questioned in a DoE survey in 1982 said they had been forced to move from their last encampment. This research showed that, left to themselves, they would move four or five times a year rather than the average 20 times a year they were being forced to move. The Safe Childbirth for Travellers Campaign has highlighted the stress and disruption caused by evictions of Traveller mothers and expectant mothers from unauthorised sites.

The Green Paper cynically agrees that 'People who wish to adopt a nomadic existence should be free to do so...', but adds: 'provided they live within the law'. The space for Travellers and Gypsies to live within the law, though, is all but destroyed by the Green Paper's proposals.

What is proposed?

- To repeal those sections of the 1968 Act placing a duty on local authorities to provide adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers.
- To cut all government grant aid (£56 million has been made available since 1978). New provision, having to compete in hard pressed council budgets, will effectively be halted.
- To make it a criminal offence to park a caravan without consent on private land. This will include land within the boundaries of a highway, and unoccupied or common land.

There are new powers to

impound caravans in lieu of a fine up to £20,000. The family would also have to find a legal place to stop (when there won't be any) before their caravan can be returned – in effect stealing their homes.

- To extend the period of effect of a court order, preventing those evicted from returning to the same place for two years and to within a radius of one or more miles. This will effectively allow hostile local authorities to create no go areas for Travellers.

These new proposals build on extensive existing legal powers, by-laws and plain discrimination used against Travellers and Gypsies, such as denying them use of Camping and Caravanning Association sites.

Traveller and Gypsy peoples have been resilient in the face of a long history of legal repression that sees them and their way of life as anathema to an ordered and controlled property-based society. If we let that common space close to Gypsies and Travellers, ultimately it will be closed to all of us.

The Green Paper proposes that Travellers and Gypsies who are settled on authorised sites be encouraged to move into permanent housing. Not only is this an attack on the way of life of Gypsy and Traveller peoples, it is an attempt to deny their very existence – to break up their communities and enforce an assimilation that they neither want nor believe to be possible. At a consultation meeting organised by Hackney Travellers' Rights Group, a Traveller said: 'How would we get a babysitter – we use our own.' Another said: 'We wouldn't want to move into houses, and even if we did, where are the houses coming from? What will happen to the homeless people who haven't got housing now? They're not going to give us houses straight away, when there are hundreds of people on housing lists now! What would those people think of us if they did?'

The Green Paper also tells Gypsies and Travellers to buy land and set up their own sites. As with the rest of the Bill, it actually makes harder what it proposes. A Traveller said: 'We don't have the money to buy land, and even if we did they wouldn't give us planning permission.'

The Green Paper has the gall to claim that 'Travellers enjoy a privileged position in the planning system' so it proposes to make it harder for them to get planning permission for both public and private sites. The truth is the opposite: Gypsies and Travellers face discrimination and hurdles in the planning process quite unlike anyone else.

Many Traveller families have set up and run their own sites, usually in rural areas, licensed by local authorities. They operate without public funds, and invariably coexist without problems with local communities. While paying lip service to encouraging this, the Green Paper not only makes planning

permission harder to gain, but the new legal powers will prevent Travellers stopping and establishing themselves in rural areas.

In a context of increasing racism against Gypsies across Europe, from Russia to Spain, where 90,000 have fled pogroms in Romania only to face being burnt out and expelled from Germany, we must look at the British government's own racist and mean-spirited proposals to invalidate and destabilise Traveller and Gypsy lives here. These proposals appease bigotry and attempt to force Travellers and Gypsies into homelessness, so they are perceived as competing with working class communities at a time of a desperate, government-created, housing crisis. These proposals are designed to increase hostility rather than foster respect and coexistence.

Traveller and Gypsy organisations have mobilised in the short consultation period allowed for the Green Paper

(August-December 1992). They have written detailed rebuttals of the proposals with suggestions on how the 1968 Act could be improved. They have been out discussing and informing Gypsies and Travellers about the proposals. They are planning a march and lobby of Parliament. They regard the proposed reform of the 1968 Act with dismay.

'We'd be forever on the move, rushing to get off to the next place, no time to shop or go to the launderette, the clinic for children's injections. Lots of stress, husbands wouldn't be able to get work. Wages wouldn't be coming in.' (Traveller at Hackney Travellers' Rights Group consultation meeting) □

For more information, and to support the campaign against the reform as proposed, contact Safe Childbirth for Travellers Campaign, Hackney Travellers' Rights Group, or Labour Campaign for Travellers' Rights, all c/o London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, 071-267 6723.

Arms across the water

Guatemala has pursued a vicious policy of torture, murder and suppression of its indigenous population, aided and abetted by the United States and Israel, says Joanne Bernstein.

Late last year, Rigoberta Menchu, the Guatemalan Indian political exile, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. For once the papers touched on the problems of Guatemala. Guatemala is run by a handful of millionaire landowners and dominated by a fascist military power which, in its crusade to eliminate opposition, has been carrying out nothing less than a genocide of its ethnic population. The last 30 years have

produced 150,000 deaths, 50,000 'disappeared', 150,000 orphans and 1.5 million refugees and internally displaced people. But the world has done nothing to stop Guatemala's war. As British Jews, this should be our concern, for two reasons. Firstly, because the United States has been instrumental in shaping the tragic injustices of Central American society, and throughout the 20th century Britain has been their greatest ally. Secondly, because since the late 1970s Israel has provided the weapons and methods used against the Guatemalan people.

Like all of Latin America, Guatemala's land and wealth is in the hands of a small ruling oligarchy – the result of five centuries of exploitation. Though

thousands of Mayans died in the years following the Conquest, Guatemala still has one of the highest indigenous populations of any Latin-American country – around 60% of the total population of nine million. Veneration of 'Mother Earth' is the most prominent part of the Mayan culture, though their lands have shrunk as the large farms (or *fincas*) of the rich have grown – 70% of the land is in the hands of 2% of the population. Although the Mayans have been the cornerstone of Guatemala's agroexport and tourist dominated economy, they have always been marginalised and their standard of living is far below that of the ladino population. With 86% of Guatemalans living in poverty, Guatemala has the highest rates in Latin America of infant mortality, illiteracy and malnutrition. The life expectancy of non-Indians is 64-65, but for Indians it is only 47-48.

Guatemala's first reformist government of Jose Arevalo came to power in 1944. But his more liberal successor, Jacobo Arbenz, was the first president to implement agrarian reform in 1952. His policy was to distribute unused privately owned land to landless peasants. The US United Fruit Company was the biggest landowner in the country, owning 550,000 acres, of which only 15% was in use. When the government expropriated just over 80% of the unused land and offered \$1 million in compensation (based on the company's own tax declarations) United Fruit claimed \$16 million and protested to the US government. Branded a communist by the State Department, in 1954 Arbenz was overthrown in a military coup planned and funded by the CIA. By 1956, 99% of expropriated land had been returned, and all peasant organisations and unions made illegal, and their leaders imprisoned, tortured or murdered.

Determined to make Guatemala a 'show-case for democracy', in the following years the US pumped between \$80-90 million into setting up Guatemala's economy and state structure.

Encouraged by the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, the 1960s saw the emergence of several guerrilla organisations. Using US equipment, the Guatemalan army launched a counterinsurgency campaign that was to be a model for the rest of Latin America. In 1966 the first right-wing death squads began to operate, allegedly beyond official control but in fact operating with total impunity. They would publish death lists and 'disappear' their victims in unmarked cars. The bodies would sometimes be found weeks later tortured and mutilated in a ditch or clandestine cemetery. By the 1970s, under President Colonel Arana, it was publicly acknowledged that the death squads had their bases in the army and that their activities were government-sanctioned. By this time they were not just targeting guerrillas, but students, trade unionists, journalists and politicians, as well as peasants. Within the first six months of Arana's presidency

2,000 people were murdered. Virtually a whole generation of even moderate leaders was removed from Guatemalan political life.

Though the guerrilla movement was practically wiped out, many escaped and from exile formed new organisations which came back into Guatemala in the early 1970s. The victory of the Nicaraguan Sandinista revolution in 1979 intensified the Guatemalan (and the US) governments' determination to wipe out the left wing threat, and in 1981 President General Lucas Garcia launched a counterinsurgency campaign to dwarf Arana's. Between 1981 and 1983, 440 villages were completely destroyed. As I heard from a survivor, the army would enter a village, round up men, women and children, then torture, rape, murder and even cut out the unborn children from the bellies of pregnant women. Every house was then set alight, the crops were burnt and the animals killed to ensure that those who escaped would starve. The army's objectives were to 'drain the sea' of guerrilla sympathisers, to terrorise and control the rural population and deny the guerrillas cover and food by destroying forests and fields. Displaced people were forced into model villages designed to destroy Mayan culture, by making the Indian peasants dependent upon the army for food and shelter, by subjecting them to a programme of 're-education', and by promoting an individualistic evangelism over the Catholicism which had become imbued with Mayan rituals and beliefs.

This cultural disarticulation was compounded in the mid 1980s under the notoriously cruel General Rios Montt who seized power in 1982 and whose counterinsurgency campaign lent heavily on the Civil Defence Patrols composed of men who were forced on pain of imprisonment to seek out guerrilla sympathisers among their own community and 'punish' them accordingly.

By 1984 Guatemala's reputation was so bad and the resulting international aid so thin that the military allowed the election of Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo. The repression subsided for a few years, allowing a space for many popular (mostly indigenous) organisations and unions to 'come out' and build support. They all demanded an end to the repression and to the impunity enjoyed by the army and security forces, and respect of human rights. But just as these groups were gaining momentum, the military launched another attack in 1988-89 and many of the leaders and supporters were wiped out. The consequences of the current 'lull' under President Jorge Serrano, elected in 1991, may not just be to secure international aid, but may be the means to identifying and subsequently removing a new generation of leaders.

In 1975 the British put pressure on the Ford administration to cease supplying arms which might be used in an invasion of Belize. Then in 1977, because of Guatemala's abysmal human rights

record, President Carter withdrew all aid (except essential humanitarian aid). At this point Israel stepped in as principal supplier. Latin America was becoming Israel's major arms market. Israel's military links in the region had been established in the 1960s when the Kennedy administration, alarmed at Castro's victory, asked Israel to implement its 'civic action' and paramilitary youth programmes (which trained Latin American militaries in the organisation of agricultural and youth projects to ensure their involvement in national development and their presence in civilian life). This was welcomed by Latin American governments because of their admiration for the no nonsense approach of the Israeli military, and because of their historic support for Israel, dating back to 1948 when the Latin American vote was instrumental in passing the UN resolution which created the State of Israel. Latin American oligarchies identified more with the Israelis than the Palestinians, seeing Israel as a bastion of European culture and democracy in an Arab world of Soviet-backed fundamentalism.

But within Latin America, Guatemala's case is special. The quantity of Israeli arms sold to Guatemala has been large (such as the Arava planes and Galil assault rifles which equip the entire army). But the type of counterinsurgency weapons needed – armoured cars, machine guns, grenade launchers, teargas, gas masks and fire ejectors – are comparatively inexpensive. Israel has even helped Guatemala reduce its purchasing needs by helping to construct a munitions plant, and by granting Guatemala a licence to produce its own Galil weaponry. Israel's role as adviser and instructor has been more significant. Guatemalan pilots have been trained by the Israelis both in Guatemala and in Israel. Rios Montt put the success of his coup which ousted General Lucas Garcia down to the Israeli training his soldiers had received. Israel had worked closely with Guatemalan police intelligence (G-2) and collaborated with Argentina in Guatemala on specialised electronic surveillance techniques, interrogation and torture methods. The Guatemalan Army School of Transmission and Electronics was funded, designed and staffed by Israel. At its opening, Lucas Garcia thanked Israel for the 'gigantic job' it was doing for the armed forces. The Israeli ambassador in response hailed Guatemala as 'one of our best friends' and promised – and later delivered – further technical and scientific assistance programmes.

Equally important has been the 'agricultural' assistance. Personnel from Guatemalan agricultural institutions have been trained in Israel (some receiving grants from the Israeli Foreign Ministry). The theoretically positive transfer of Israel's expertise is negated by its manipulation by the Guatemalan military. In the Guatemalan context 'rural development' has meant the terrorisation of

the rural population (with Israeli weapons), the destruction of their communities, and the clearing of land where model villages and agricultural co-operatives have been set up modelled on Israel's land settlement schemes in the Occupied Territories, and policed by the Civil Defence Patrols modelled on the Israeli armed village committees. Some Guatemalans have even referred to the 'Palestinisation' of the indigenous population. The kibbutz and the moshav have also provided models, but when imposed on traditional Mayan communities, any beneficial aspects are lost.

By the end of 1984, and with the election of civilian President Cerezo, President Reagan convinced Congress that Guatemala's human rights record had vastly improved, and the USA once again became Guatemala's major supplier, and Israel's position became secondary.

Israel has, in part, become involved with Latin America, and particularly Central America, under pressure from the United States which cannot be seen to be openly supporting regimes notorious for human rights abuse. Israel has also justified its arms diplomacy in the region as a means to safeguarding local Jewish communities facing antisemitism. There is strong anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian feeling among Central Americans, because they too are subjected to violence carried out with Israeli weapons. When the Sandinistas took power they froze relations with Israel because they had equipped the Somoza National Guards, and with the 1982 invasion of Lebanon (when Israel was supplying the Contras), relations were severed entirely. But this was not because of antisemitism, as the Israeli daily *Davar* wrote on the eve of Somoza's overthrow: 'If more and more Nicaraguans are hating Israel more and more, it is not because they have suddenly become anti-semitic. The reason is different: because more and more of their children are being killed or wounded by weapons "made in Israel".'

Israel may need allies and income, but does it have no conscience in assisting the Guatemalans and other Central American armies (notably El Salvador) to pursue policies of genocide? When asked about sales to Latin American countries with serious records of human rights abuses, General Rahav'am Ze'evi said back in 1977: 'The regimes in the various countries are the exclusive concern of the nations who live there.' An Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman said in response to El Salvador's human rights record in 1983, 'Israel doesn't distinguish between good governments and bad ones.' If Israel were more discerning in its choice of allies, would her choice be so limited? Last October Rigoberta Menchu made this plea: 'I am now asking Israeli authorities not to support the Guatemalan government and army in their human rights violations.' Will Israel's new government listen? □

On the side of the angel

Stanley Mitchell describes Walter Benjamin's visionary work on human culture, politics and history.

Walter Benjamin was a Jewish writer and critic born 100 years ago to an affluent family in Berlin. Like many of his generation he shook off (or tried to shake off) his bourgeois origins, and sought an alternative in the life of the mind, in Zionism or in revolutionary politics.

Walter's younger brother, Georg, worked with the poor as a doctor; he joined the Communist Party and perished in a concentration camp. His widow, Hilde, became Minister of Justice in the German Democratic Republic. Walter was never as committed to politics in the practical way that his brother was. He chose a life of the mind, yet came close to joining the Communists in the late '20s. He felt happier, however, with the role of a partisan outsider.

The original and idiosyncratic Marxism which he espoused was not acceptable in official Communist circles. In a similar manner he was attracted by Zionism, planned several times to emigrate to Palestine and take up a post at Jerusalem University, arranged by his friend Gershom Scholem, but he never did so. In Germany an academic career was foreclosed to him, not only because of prejudice against Jews, but because his work was too unusual and arcane. His doctorate or *Habilitation* on German baroque tragedy was rejected by the relatively enlightened University of Frankfurt on grounds of incomprehensibility.

Benjamin was an unworldly man who belonged by temperament in the tradition of Talmudic scholars, although as a freelance writer in the 20th century his life was more itinerant and wayward than theirs. Influenced by his lifelong friend Scholem, an anarchist thinker who rediscovered the unorthodox Kaballah much in the same way that Martin Buber popularised the subversive heritage of Hassidism, Benjamin developed an arresting, prismatic style of writing which made connections between the most apparently insignificant things in order to find in them revolutionary and redemptive potentialities. It is difficult to separate this libertarian use of religion from his materialism. At a recent Benjamin Congress in Germany a Latin American delegate pointed out and praised his influence on liberation theology.

Two factors impelled Benjamin to Marxism. The first was his experience of proletarianisation as a writer before and during the Depression. The second was his meeting and falling in love with Asya Lacis, a Lithuanian communist theatre director during a stay in Capri in 1924. Capri was a traditional resort for Russian revolutionaries.

Benjamin's marriage to Dora Pollak, the daughter of an academic, had by this time broken down. He immersed himself in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, which attracted him both for its expansion of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and its apocalyptic tenor. He met Ernst Bloch and was drawn to his work by its mixture of materialism and utopianism. These were still the heady days of post-war expressionism. But Benjamin's mode of perception was more impersonal. He once remarked that one should never use the first person in writing, only in correspondence. When Asya introduced him to Brecht he found a sobriety that suited him and a more practical Marxism than could be obtained either from Bloch or from his new friend Adorno, the critical theorist from the Frankfurt School (which later was to become Benjamin's sponsor). For the rest of his life Benjamin was caught in a tug-of-war between Brecht, Scholem and the Frankfurt School. Adorno and Scholem considered the pugnacious Brecht a disaster for the finely-tuned and metaphysical Benjamin. Nevertheless, the criticism which Benjamin wrote about Brecht's plays and poetry was not only the best that Brecht received, but also among the best that Benjamin penned. Their partnership is one of the most fruitful in the socialist movement.

In the winter of 1926-7 Benjamin visited Asya in Moscow and left a record of this stay there in the form of a diary, in which admiration for the new experiments mingles with apprehension about conformism and conservatism. Russian constructivism became Benjamin's model for a new socialist culture, in which all differences between writer and reader would be abolished, replacing the parasitism of bourgeois art and its cult of originality and genius, with a democratic culture based on technology and mass reproduction. Benjamin's greatest success since his post-war rediscovery has been in the sphere of cultural politics, which has been shaped to a large extent by his followers. In this country John Berger derived his television series and book, *Ways of Seeing*, from Benjamin's ideas. There is a reductive side about those ideas which, in the '70s, led to a nihilistic rejection of any traditional art or aesthetics. Benjamin's writings on cultural politics are also his most accessible.

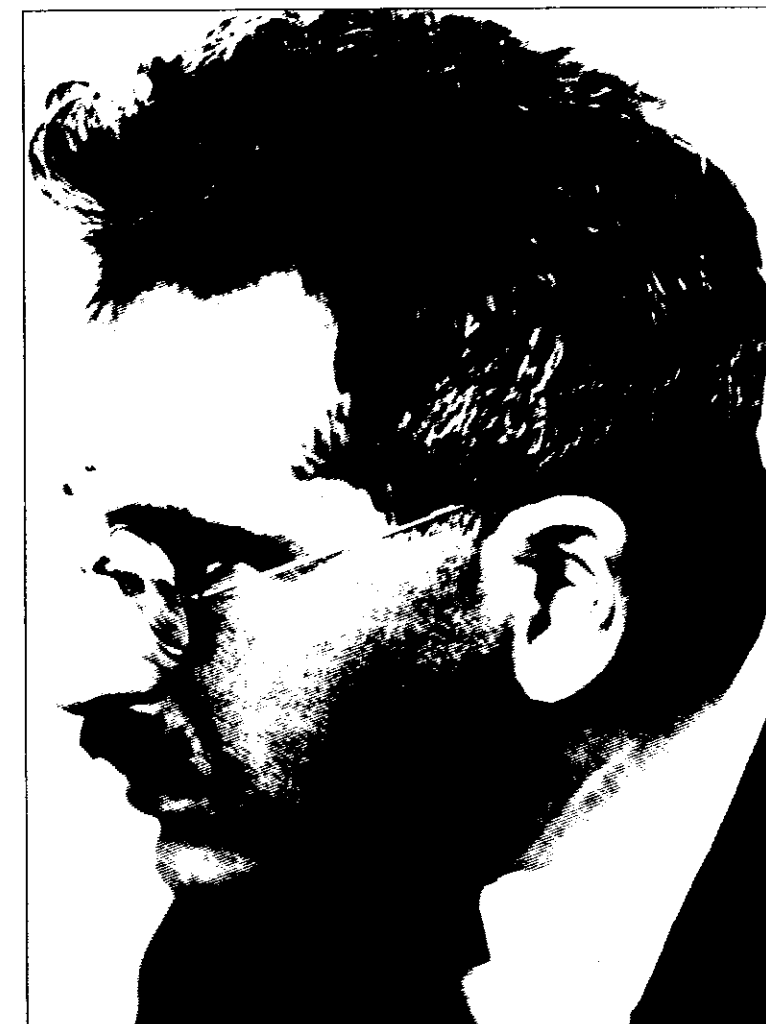
Benjamin's doubts about Soviet Communism increased in the '30s. Modernism was outlawed both by Moscow and the cultural alliances of the Popular Front. Finally, the Nazi-Soviet pact dealt an immense blow and Benjamin began to draw parallels between fascism and Stalinism. Aspects of

Marxism appeared questionable. During this period Benjamin lived as an exile in France, earning his keep mainly from the stipend paid to him by the Frankfurt Institute, which had since emigrated to America. They were financing his massive study of Paris in the 19th century, known as the *Arcades Project*, a cultural sociology of modern capitalism in what Benjamin took to be its heartland. The work was never finished. Only part of a book on Baudelaire emerged out of an ocean of notes.

Benjamin was interned by the French when the Germans invaded. Released through the help of friends, he made his way south in the hope of crossing the Spanish border and taking a boat to the USA. Hitherto he had neglected the chance of emigrating either to England, where his wife and son were, to Palestine, where Scholem awaited him, or to America, where the Frankfurt Institute had procured him a visa. In the mid-'30s friends in the Soviet Union offered him a safe haven. To Adorno he wrote: 'There are still positions to defend here.' But, as Brecht was to put it later in a poem to his dead friend: *The enemy who drove you from your books / Will not be worn down by the likes of us*. It was as if Benjamin could not conceive of a life outside Europe. Perhaps he thought he could only complete the *Arcades Project* in France. Discussing Brecht's play *A Man's a Man*, Benjamin describes its chief character, the docker Galy Gay, who can't say no, as a man whose life 'is like an empty stage on which the contradictions of our society are acted out'. So it was perhaps with Benjamin. He committed suicide on the Spanish border, unable to produce the necessary documentation for crossing and fearing capture by the Gestapo. He was 48. Brecht said that this was the first major loss that the Nazis had inflicted on German literature.

Unworldly as he was and in the tradition of Talmudic scholars, Benjamin involved himself in the real world right from his student days. His metaphysical bent showed not only in his philosophical searchings, but in his political maximalism. As we have seen, it was a trait shared by other Jewish intellectuals from a bourgeois background – Buber, Lukács, Bloch, perhaps Trotsky. Benjamin was a leading member of the youth movement and an impressive orator. He denounced the hierarchical and authoritarian structure of the German education system from school to university (the system which was to forbid him entry later on). He opposed the First World War like Bloch and Lukács (assuming sciatica and other ailments to avoid service). He upheld Sorel's vision of the

proletarian General Strike which, unlike other strikes, was to destroy the state. It would be a non-violent strike, since violence was a product of the state and repression. Should violence become necessary, however, it would resemble the annihilating fury of divine justice, sweeping away all laws and restraints.



Walter Benjamin, Paris 1937

Benjamin's essay on violence was written in 1921. From 1924, when his Marxist period begins, Benjamin's sense of the apocalypse recedes, although it is still present in the macabre and sombre metaphysics of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* of 1925, which is situated among the devastations of the Thirty Years War. His sense of apocalypse surfaces again with the rise of fascism, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the outbreak of the Second World War. The thirties are nevertheless extraordinarily fruitful for Benjamin. He writes review upon review clarifying the changed position of the writer,

who, he insists, can and should no longer stand above the crowd or entertain the bourgeois reader, even from a left wing point of view. The writer, he insists, must take cognisance of his new identity as a producer and, like his brother or sister in industrial production, seize control of the apparatus which creates economic or artistic values. The romantic myth of the artist, he argues, plays into the hands of fascist irrationalism. These explorations issue into three major essays: *The Author as Producer*, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and *Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian*. They are the fount of Benjamin's cultural politics.

Benjamin continued work on the *Arcades Project* with the assistance of the Frankfurt Institute, who clipped his wings if they thought him either too radical or insufficiently dialectical. To some extent their criticism depended on tactical sensitivity to the American market. The *Arcades Project* was a magnificently utopian undertaking written in the teeth of growing fascism. Benjamin, himself a great collector of books and toys, considered that there was nothing in human culture too insignificant for it not to harbour a lost hope, possibility or dream. He saw the technology of capitalism, expressed in the arcades and boulevards of Paris, in the world exhibitions and in photography, however misused it was in a commodity producing society, as nevertheless a storehouse of dreams revived out of the earliest longings of humanity, now that their realisation seemed at last possible. The Paris Commune was the first awakening from those dreams and their implementation in reality. The classless society of the future would resuscitate the perished aspirations of its ancestors in classless prehistory.

Asya Lacis was sent to a labour camp in 1938. Under the shadow of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the outbreak of war Benjamin set down a series of thoughts which, he said, he had nursed for many years. Now was the time to give them expression. They were to be his testament. Known in translation as the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, they form a rich and tragic document. Benjamin brings back theology to supplement Marxism. The theological figure who appears in the first Thesis is anything but grand. He is a 'little hunchback' who plays chess on behalf of a puppet called 'historical materialism', enabling him to win every game. He is also a familiar character in German fairy-tale, a mischief maker who had caused Benjamin a lot of trouble in his luckless life. If historical materialism is to do without the services of theology, then it must – so Benjamin's argument would appear to be – become truly human. After this prelude most of the *Theses* comprise a *vademecum* for the historical materialist on how and how not to write history.

Thus a historical materialist brushes history against the grain, rescues it from conformism. A revolutionary theory of today brings to life again the struggles of the past. Under the vigilant eye of the historical materialist, past and present unite in a 'now-time' which 'actualises' history, taking it out of the 'empty continuum' of mere goal-oriented time.

The major polemic of the *Theses* is directed against the idea of progress, at least in its recent manifestations. Benjamin saw the German social-democratic movement corrupted by a blind faith in technology, and warned against the exploitation of nature in the name of socialism. He attacked Marx's description of revolutions as the locomotives of history. To this deterministic perspective he counterposed his notion of 'now-time', which would bring empirical time to a halt and transform history into a permanent present that 'every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter'. The revolution, he asserted, was not a destination, it was always implicit in the here and now. If fascism were treated as a state of emergency rather than a 'historical norm', we should be better able to fight it. (One can read here the policy of the German Communist Party, which regarded fascism as the culmination of capitalism and the midwife of socialism.) Social democracy, fascism and Stalinism were all, according to Benjamin, implicated in the myth of progress.

Amidst these injunctions another theological figure appears, an angel, the angel of history, who is taken from Paul Klee's *angelus novus*, a painting which Benjamin had long possessed. The angel is transfixed by the storm of progress, rendered incapable of performing what he enjoys best – awakening the dead and making whole what has been smashed. 'Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet... The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.' The angel faces paradise to which he longs to return. The dialectic between paradise and progress forms the parameters of the *Theses*. The angel's powerlessness is Benjamin's despair. But the angel can be saved and can resume his task of resurrecting and making whole, if we can practise a new politics and redeem the past through our present struggles. He can go back to paradise and we can achieve a classless society. Benjamin repudiates the positivism of the German historian Ranke, who claimed that the historian's role was to articulate the past 'as it really was'. On the contrary, insists Benjamin, it is 'to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger'. The Benjamin of the *Theses* belongs to a nobler lineage than that of the Talmudists. He is a prophet. □

I blame the parents

The Jewish family has inspired novelists, comedians and rabbis. Paul Collins looks beyond the mythology to find a reality that's beyond a joke.

The introduction of unified association for Europeans, albeit geared to market forces, is a timely opportunity for Jews to examine families closer to home. The community is promoted as a bulwark against any repetition of European genocide, but historic Jewish structures are being threatened as a result of its shortcomings.

The slavish adherence of Britain's main political parties to economic and monetary union is condemning spiralling numbers of Jews to unemployment, bankruptcy and homelessness. With the clear link between divorce and financial problems, there is a grudging realisation among rabbis and the establishment that many 'chosen people' are not above the hardship which brings family breakdown. The acknowledgment that our families are indeed as vulnerable as the Royals, or the other way round, provides a challenge and exposes a classic irony for the community.

Delusions imposed under the spell of lay and religious leaders have persuaded congregants that reciting prayers for the monarchy would guarantee the stability symbolised by this institution. It has now proved to offer no more insurance against destructive forces than their non-confrontational approach to antisemitism.

It strikes me how my own family underlines why the deception has spanned three generations. My grandparents, refugees from Lithuanian pogroms, were urged to become true East Enders in London – to forget their poverty by sharing the cockney opium of worshipping the monarchy.

The proudest photo in our cramped home – minus a bathroom and indoor toilet – showed my younger brother, Andy, as a toddler, presenting a bouquet to the Queen Mother when she opened his nursery. Today, as a depressed social worker defending elderly and other needy people against

cuts in vital services, he, like me, brands her the oldest parasite in Britain.

And my mother, Rose, must think about her tough and harrowing life compared with the leisure and luxury of the Duchess of York, whose brainless visit to her Jewish residential home came just before she appeared topless in the tabloids with her financial adviser.

Despite these glaring contradictions, Jews, and Muslims too, committed to scholastic and theological exclusivity share the belief that, Canute-fashion, their orthodoxy can resist inexorable social trends. When experts insist that sexual equality can save and sustain relationships, Jewish and Islamic separatists fuel potential discord by teaching children to cherish a power imbalance.

Rigidity and authoritarianism condition pupils at the Jewish Free School in London, where headmistress Jo Wagerman, a zealous ally of Israel, appears to reserve limited sympathy for Jewish refugees from Zionism. Displaying the kind of intolerance Jews have long endured, she warned Israelis to stay away unless they agreed to wear the uniform and not

call teachers by their first names. Doubtless the ruler of the country's biggest Jewish school agrees with the Education Secretary that godlessness breeds unruly youth and that parents should be punished for this lassitude.

The Chief Rabbi surpassed Wagerman's caring attitude with a nauseous article in *The Times*, following *The Sunday Times*'s list of schools with the best A-level results. Jonathan Sacks used the supreme appearance of his daughter's Hasmonian school in the list to prescribe its 'family values' for the entire state network.

Rejecting liberal and secular educational principles, he asserted that conventional Jewish schools 'promote more effectively than any alternative the values that western societies have come to cherish'. The fact that these principles – universal access to knowledge, the dignity of the individual and personal growth – were confounded by offering this marvellous education only to pupils from doctrinaire backgrounds

escaped the doctor's grasp.

An emphasis on conformism and family responsibilities heralds concerted efforts to blame the victims for the disasters of such primitive ideology. Nor is this wickedness confined to Britain. Witness the backlash on abortion and against single mothers in the United States, despite widespread crime and disadvantage, as the Republicans made a desperate bid to keep the presidency. The moral hysteria which greeted the parting of Woody Allen and Mia Farrow increased the acrimony of the battle for guardianship of their children.

One event betraying the Majorite philosophy



Detail from 'A Jewish Wedding' by Issachar Ryback

came with the launch of a weekly pullout in the *Daily Telegraph*. As Labour considers endorsing government ministers' bias towards means-tested benefits, the only serious money available for a family supplement goes on a tabloid promoting conservative lifestyles.

The challenge for Jewish socialists is to exploit the renewed concern with family matters in order to put radical solutions on the political agenda. But effective strategies cannot

emerge without addressing the pluses as well as the minuses of domesticism – including the sort which our grandparents and great grandparents imported from the *shtetls* and cities they came from. The family at least provided comfort for immigrants who faced Victorian deprivation and racism from outside and criticism from inside their own Anglicised community. Yet survivors of that era will reject the condescending idea – cited in *Socialist Worker*'s focus on unrest within the working class today – that their reproduction was designed consolation for poverty. There was, and remains, hope in a future generation who might overcome, perhaps avert, the discrimination which blighted the lives of their creators and ancestors.

Neither should there be simplistic derision at the Jewish mother's role then as a little housewife. Feminists can find definitive pride in the vital impact of women defying grim conditions to rear broods of similar fighters.

By the same token, the insecurity of Jewish

fathers trapped as wage slaves in sweatshops may temper our antipathy towards their strictly patriarchal behaviour. Consternation about the outlook for families in general, and especially Jewish families, reflects an apprehensive preoccupation with national and local disorder. *Balabostas* whose mothers sacrificed individual growth for the development of their spouses and *kindelekh* now assert the right to juggle careers and childcare. My mum, a milliner for whose hats Ascot toffs would still murder, gave up her job to fashion a family instead. When my cabbie father, Sam, found another woman and left her with three children who were themselves about to depart the nest, she had, in effect, lost her prescribed role as well as her marriage. So it was small wonder that, suffering emotional breakdown, Rose kept the ambulance waiting until she had washed the same clean dishes for the umpteenth time that day.

'Our family, like many others within Anglo-Jewry, could not live up to the stereotypical myth of Jewish domestic bliss.'

The sight of my hardened older brother, Howard, weeping as she was admitted to hospital exposed the reality that our family, like many others within Anglo-Jewry, could not live up to the stereotypical myth of Jewish domestic bliss. This was made even starker by our abandonment by a religious father who has still not told the three children of his second marriage of our existence.

In addition, the dislocation of our family illuminated the Jewish paradox of theoretical family support while individuals, typified by recent Jewish cabinet ministers, are expected to be self-reliant.

Our brother, Howard, joined the country's 200 richest men, while uncle Jack, who had helped launch him on the path to prosperity, festered in a crumbling tower block flat, abused and harassed by antisemitic neighbours. Now in his seventies, Jack works at different hotels in the early hours to supplement his meagre pension.

Howard's promise of financial help for Andy's social work studies evaporated as he developed the notion that those who achieve recognition after struggle must convince others that hardship increases the value of attainment.

Our mum's 'crime' was to want to remain in Whitechapel and retain the friendships and feeling for the neighbourhood which had grown over decades. But Sam, obsessed with the need for upward mobility which he had learnt in his native



America, had to 'get out and get on' to become Essex man. It was our parents, influenced by community 'betters' to back 'superior' education, who sent both Andy and me to a grammar school. This removed us from our social class, and most of our friends who had been demoted as secondary modern scrap. During my sentence, I was one of very few local pupils, since most, including a minority of Jewish boys, travelled from leafy suburbia, where the school was due to move.

In contrast, Howard, having failed the 11-plus examination, was dumped in an institution under the then headship of Rhodes Boyson. This may explain his latent Thatcherism, along with a determination to succeed in business, unlike our dad. His insensitivity to the needs of most family members could also reflect a paucity of physical affection in our childhood which mocked the general warmth attributed to Jewish parents. This doubtless lies behind my own sustained reticence towards non-sexual, tactile contact.

The first time my mum vanished from home, I spent all night searching the local park and the riverside, until she returned at dawn. When I hugged Rose as uncle Jack drove her to hospital, my feelings were confused. At gut level, I was moved by a rare embrace from my mother which reversed the process of her fulfilling my needs. There was, though, the loneliness of a child acknowledging the lack of strong parents on

whom to depend in difficult times.

Nonetheless, there is a danger that as marriages disintegrate the nuclear family is perceived more than ever as the model for Jewish togetherness. Even the greeting 'we should only meet at *simchas* (celebrations)' rings hollow at large numbers of strained gatherings – not least during the supposedly harmonious festivals of Passover and Chanukah. At a birthday tea for my partner Lydia's sister their mother said: 'Remember my 40th birthday? After you've had children, everything falls into oblivion.'

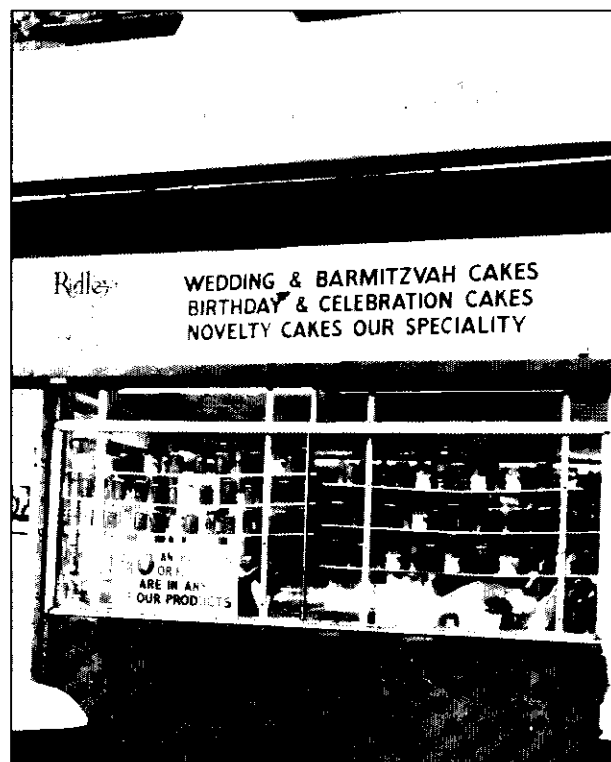
A further contrast with our antecedents is that unless partnerships deliver equality, women are ready to end marriages and in some cases, hitherto sacrilege, risk custody of children by leaving them with husbands in order to preserve their sanity. Jewish men have to discard their previously secure assumptions that their ascendancy will continue in business and at home – both of which are now in flux. Confused papas, who were taught that education ensured status and prosperity through munificent capitalism, now need to *earn* respect from their unemployed offspring. And the result of benign self-interest, as extended families implode within Jewish and other minority communities, is worry about the welfare of dependants and themselves as they grow old – even the wealthiest among them.

'We should only meet at *Simchas* rings hollow at large numbers of strained gatherings.'

The *Jewish Chronicle*, which puts Israeli news before home concerns, advertises a pensioners' home from which my disturbed mother once disappeared for two nights. She was found wandering on Hampstead Heath as our family's worst fears seemed too plausible to dismiss.

This illustrates what is clear from the most superficial research: that a failure to recognise and adapt to the changes facing the community will jeopardise the nurturing and liberating qualities which have enabled Jews to endure for so many centuries of good times and bad.

Attitudes on homosexuality illustrate the immense task ahead. The best example of this was Jonathan Sacks's ban on the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline from his 'unity' walkabout in Hyde Park. Many of the walkers showed clearly their ambivalence, torn between religious orthodoxy and real practice. Colonel Blimps praying for the issue to disappear shuddered again when the British daily press reported that orthodox rabbi



Mark Solomon had resigned because he is gay.

Families should afford succour for each constituent, whatever their proclivities, without suffocating their independence. In a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, counsellor Sylvia Adler warned that significant groups of single Jews were being 'smothered to death by doting parents unable or unwilling to let go'. Some of them had received unrealistic 'shopping lists' from their parents about the beauty, finance, education and degree of *yiddishkeit* required of their future partner. She noted the effect of intermarriage on a dwindling Jewish community and identified excessive love and standards as a 'death blow'.

Though there is a need to look at the causes and remedies of parental repression, demographic nightmares such as Sylvia Adler's are constructed on reactionary notions of identity. Views like hers, as much as those of stifling parents, are choking the legitimacy of those who prefer to stay unattached, whether they are heterosexual women opting out of the vain quest for the fictitious New Man, or whether they are gay men and lesbians in long-standing relationships, with or without children. All lie outside a narrow definition of the Jewish family unit – alongside those charged with the cardinal sin of marrying or having children with a gentile.

There are countless souls among us convinced that when Philip Larkin wrote: 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad', he had the Jewish family in mind. The formidable job for egalitarians, however, is to initiate a fiscal and communal system which builds up, not screws up, human opportunities. □

Children of the ghetto

Korczak and the children in his care are remembered for the way they died. Sue Gutteridge examines the life that led to that legendary end at the hands of the Nazis.

The King of Children is a biography of Janusz Korczak, the Polish Jew who was children's writer, teacher, educational theorist and, for 30 years, founder/director of the Warsaw Jewish Orphanage. Born Henryk Goldszmit in 1878, his life, and the lives of the 192 children of the Orphanage, ended in 1942 in the Treblinka gas chambers.

Korczak had been a figure of national stature in Poland. Out of favour during the Stalinist years, Korczak is now once again highly regarded. His life and work were celebrated by Unesco who declared 1978-1979 the Year of Korczak so as to coincide with the Year of the Child and the centenary of his birth. Since the mid-'70s, the Polish government has hosted international annual conferences to disseminate his educational ideas. In Israel he is revered as one of the Thirty Six Just Men who, according to Jewish tradition, make possible the world's salvation. However, Korczak's work has been relatively unknown in America and Britain. Much of his published work is not available in English translation and that which is, is almost impossible to obtain. Betty Lifton's biography is of enormous value in bringing to life for an English speaking readership this extraordinary and complex individual whose life and work centred on children and childhood on so many different levels.

Lifton's task was not easy. As she says, 'to go in search of Janusz Korczak ... was to seek a man who was no longer there in a place that was no longer there'. Many of the friends and relatives who might have helped in the task had, like Korczak, died in the camps. Almost all of his diaries, his letters and child observations made over a period of 30 years and which were to form the basis of a book on child development, were lost in the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. The only surviving private material other than some letters is the diary that he kept in the last months of his life. Even this has not survived in its original state.

One of Lifton's methods was therefore to search out in Poland, Israel, America, Denmark and Sweden people who had known Korczak – in particular former children and staff of the Jewish Orphanage. By incorporating her

interviewees, the people and the places that they knew, and the events that they participated in and witnessed, into the story of Korczak, she has brought her subject alive. This method, combined with her meticulous attention to historical detail and her careful reconstruction of place, has meant that the times in which Korczak lived and of which he was a part are presented not as a tragic backdrop, but as a living social world. At the same time, she has given us a comprehensive overview of his work.

The end of Korczak's life has become a legend. On 6 August 1942, the Germans evacuated the ghetto orphanages. Korczak, his staff and children marched with dignity, the orphanage banner held aloft, to the Umschlagplatz where cattle trucks waited to take them to the extermination camp at Treblinka. Korczak himself had many contacts on the Aryan side. He was on numerous occasions offered forged papers and the promise of safe hiding places out of the ghetto. Such offers were refused with the words, 'you do not leave a sick child in the night, and you do not leave children at a time like this'.

Lifton comments that when she interviewed surviving 'Korczakians' they were disturbed at his being remembered for the way he died rather than for the way he lived. What then was the nature of the life that ended with this extraordinary act of heroism?

Korczak was the only son of middle class assimilated Jewish parents. His own childhood, from which he said he 'escaped as from a lunatic asylum' stayed with him always, in that the feelings and emotions of that period of his life retained their validity and indeed formed the bedrock of his particular approach to children and childhood. His father suffered increasingly from mental illness and from the time that Korczak was 11 his father was incarcerated in an asylum where he eventually died. Korczak was brought up in a household of three generations of women – one of the many parallels with Donald Winnicott and his 'three mothers'. Both of these childless men shared an exceptional personal empathy with children. Both began their careers as paediatricians but rejected the constrictions and limitations of the medical approach to break new ground, both in their different ways, in their holistic approaches to children. Both were great popularists, writing and broadcasting for ordinary people struggling with the ordinary problems of bringing up children. To be sure, Korczak claimed to have

The King of Children by Betty Jean Lifton (hardback, Chatto and Windus, £15; paperback, Pan, £5.99)



Children with
Korczak

little time for psychoanalysis – he regarded Freud as ‘a dangerous maniac’ – although at the same time he recognised both the existence and force of the unconscious and the significance of infancy.

Korczak’s starting point was the child in himself. In his book, *How to Love a Child*, written under extraordinary conditions in field hospitals on the Eastern Front, he developed the concept of self-knowledge as the wellspring of any meaningful ‘love’ for a child, or children – ‘you yourself are the child whom you must learn to know, rear, and above all enlighten’. For Korczak, this continuing self-knowledge and self-respect was the prerequisite for regarding the child as a separate being with his/her inalienable rights. Beginning with his own childhood, he developed a concept of children that was essentially political in that he saw children as a powerless suppressed class. Korczak regarded himself as a practitioner rather than theorist. In fact he was both, and it was the dynamic relationship between his practice and theory that enabled the expression and development of this essential basic concept. It was from this concept that sprang much of his innovative experimental practice with regard to the structure and organisation of the orphanage and the way in which he trained staff.

In the orphanage, Korczak established a system of ballot box voting whereby children regularly rated both each other and the staff. On this process a system of privileges was based. But also, Korczak used the results of the process to monitor and intervene in the welfare of individual children and the interaction between

children. Korczak made longstanding attempts – not always successful, and abandoned in the last difficult months of the orphanage’s existence – to place the control of the behaviour within the orphanage in the hands of the children by establishing a children’s court. The practice of the court was based on a code of 1,000 ‘articles’ and the role of the judiciary was rotated among all the children. The children were encouraged to take responsibilities for each other by allocating a ‘guardian’ child to each newcomer. The ‘guardians’ took on a ‘grandparent’ role when their charges in turn became guardians. An orphanage newspaper was established, written by the children themselves and produced every week. Children’s journalism was a project dear to Korczak and in 1926 he established a weekly supplement to *Our Review*, a Zionist Polish language daily. This was the *Little Review*, full of contributions from Jewish children all over Poland, with a team of child investigative reporters. It dealt with a wide range of issues and included a special column of letters from children reporting on antisemitism. Reporters were encouraged to write about their own experiences rather than compose poetry or fiction. Spelling and grammar were left in their original form – incurring the wrath of various educationalists.

In his attitude to staff and in his training methods Korczak was unconventional. He was scornful of established training courses, stating he ‘would rather leave a child in the care of an old woman who had bred chickens for five years than in the care of a newly graduated nurse’. Initially, teachers were employed within the orphanage. However, Korczak rapidly dismissed them, disliking their attitudes both to the children and to other staff, and instead sent the children out to local schools. He valued, however, the contributions of staff with no medical or pedagogical backgrounds, such as construction workers, carpenters, cooks and cleaners.

Korczak ran seminars on child psychology at two of Warsaw’s pedagogical institutes. His methods avoided the use of textbooks but relied instead on putting students in touch with their own childhoods. In the mid-’20s, Korczak began an apprenticeship system for student teachers who were offered board and lodging at the orphanage and a weekly seminar in exchange for part-time work. The work included every aspect of daily life in the orphanage including cooking and cleaning, but within the context of his own rigorous philosophy.

The descriptions we have of Korczak’s attempts to introduce systems of democratic self-government in the orphanage and the extent to which he saw this as an essential

underpinning to his concept of children as a class with its own rights have about them the slight air of unreality that attends many accounts of ‘alternative’ communities – both of children and of adults. Where children are concerned, the inescapable fact remains that they are neither in such communities voluntarily nor will they remain in them as adults. Such communities cannot be self-sustaining, and nowhere is this more cruelly illustrated than in the fate of the children in Korczak’s orphanage.

Why did Korczak choose to work in this way with children? People with a strong sense of mission, more than most, choose the nature of the work they do (although this is often felt as a sense of having been chosen). Korczak abandoned his paediatric practice out of a wish to work with the ‘whole child’. However, many of the orphans in fact had parents, or at least mothers, who were too poor to look after their own children adequately. Even true orphans had a history from which they had come, to which they would return, and which continued to live within them. Korczak acknowledged this, but while attempts were made to maintain links between children and their families, one senses that such attempts were secondary to the main purpose of creating a children’s community with an alternative set of values to those prevailing in the outside world.

In the last months, pressure was put on Korczak to disband the orphanage and to arrange hiding places for individual children. This he refused to do, his reason being that it would be impossible to ensure the safety of all the children. Interestingly, Korczak is one of Bruno Bettelheim’s heroes for the way he stayed with his children, and prepared them for their death. However, Bettelheim in his essay on ‘Freedom from Ghetto Thinking’ in which he attacks the strategies adopted by Anne Frank’s father, Otto Frank, to ensure his family’s survival of the Nazi occupation of Holland, makes charges that could be levelled at Korczak. In Bettelheim’s opinion, Otto Frank’s concern both to preserve the family unit as a whole and while doing so to maintain some semblance of family life as it had been (for example teaching his daughters Latin rather than how to handle fire arms), contributed to the Frank family’s ultimate fate. Was it also more important to Korczak that his orphanage remained an entity, than that individuals might survive?

Bettelheim attributes the adoption by the Jewish diaspora of Anne Frank as its most poignant symbol of the holocaust to what he sees as a prevalent, deathly, and continuing ‘ghetto mentality’. However, this was a mentality that Korczak rejected all his life. He was informed by theory and practice current in

France, Germany and Britain. The language of the orphanage was Polish – evidence enough to the orthodox Jews of Warsaw of his own ‘antisemitism’ – and Korczak continued always to regard himself as a Pole as well as a Jew. Eight months before the residents of the orphanage were marched to their death, they had celebrated both Hanukkah and Christmas with plays and pageants.

It is probable that Korczak believed that both he and the orphanage were too high profile to be subjected to the final solution. By the time it had become obvious that this was not the case, Korczak’s concern was as it had always been, as much with the spiritual as the physical survival of his charges, and the quality of the short life that was left to them. His ability to demonstrate this concern in the way in which the children were cared for and prepared for death in the last months sprang from the nature of his struggle with his own impending fate. His diary entries, which continued until the last day, are the expression of a life force which *had* to observe, to record and attempt to understand, and which could only be stopped by death itself. In the very last entry, he speculated about the SS guard posted outside the orphanage:

Perhaps he was a village teacher in civilian life, or a notary, a street sweeper in Leipzig, a waiter in Cologne. What would he do if I nodded to him? Waved my hand in a friendly gesture? Perhaps he doesn’t even know that things are – as they are? He may have arrived only yesterday from far away...

Bruno Bettelheim and Primo Levi, unlike Korczak, survived the holocaust. While both attribute their survival in large measure to luck, they also recognise in themselves the same kind of life force that compelled them while incarcerated, respectively, in Dachau, in Buchenwald and in Auschwitz, to record and observe, and maintained in them a conception of both oppressors and victims as individuals.

Korczak did not survive. But it was this same spirit that ensured that the last months of life in the orphanage were marked by puppet workshops, choir practice, the nurturing of petunia seedlings, writing, talking about and dramatising death, as well as foraging for food. □

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Post marx

On Socialists and the 'Jewish Question' after Marx by Jack Jacobs (New York University Press, 1992)

There is a panel in the *Bet Hatfutsot* (Museum of the Diaspora) in Tel Aviv, where visitors are invited to put themselves in the shoes of an idealistic young Jew just out of the *shtetl*, and decide between joining the Russian Revolutionary movement as a Bolshevik, the Jewish socialist movement as a Bundist or the Zionist socialist movement by emigrating to Palestine. Having chosen, the visitor pushes a button to discover what fate would in all probability have had in store for them. The first would have ended up in a gulag in Siberia, the second would have found themselves in Auschwitz, but the third would have ended their days in the idyllic surroundings of a kibbutz in Galilee!

There is no shortage of literature on the attitude of socialists to the Jewish Question or on the attitude of Jews to socialism particularly in the crucial decades leading up to the First World War. However, the feeling that comes through reading the works of Nora Levin or Jonathan Frankel, whatever their respect for the Jewish socialist movements that they cover, is just such a sense of writing in the shadow of history. The general socialist movement asked the Jews to assimilate, the Jewish socialist movement died with the extermination of the Jewish working class of Eastern

Europe and only the Zionist socialists have survived, their ideals in some form intact.

This book did not leave me with this sinking feeling of inevitability. Jack Jacobs, well versed in the history both of the general socialist movement and of Jewish socialism and Bundism in particular, brings out all the nuances and complexities of the relationship by focusing in detail on the attitudes towards Jews of three personalities: Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as the more general socialist movements in the Austrian, Russian and German empires. The attitude of the general socialist movement towards Jews, for example, was not uniformly assimilationist. Different socialists in different countries had contrasting attitudes.

Jacobs uses a wealth of contemporary source material to sketch the societies from which the different personalities originated. Kautsky comes across as particularly sympathetic to the Jewish socialist movement, which Jacobs traces to his awareness, due to his own Czech background, of the complexities of the existence of national and cultural groups within multinational states. Rosa Luxemburg's notorious indifference to 'special Jewish sorrows' (even though, unlike some other contemporary socialists of Jewish

origin, she never denied her Jewishness) he attributes less to her internationalist ideology than to her assimilationist 'polonised' background.

Jacobs' own Bundist sympathies are not in doubt, but this does not prevent him from giving fair treatment to all the Jewish socialist movements of the Russian empire; the Bund, the territorialists and the socialist Zionists. They were all engaged in ideological struggle with each other and each looked to established and influential figures from the German and Austrian socialist movements such as Bernstein and Kautsky for articles and quotes with which to buttress their positions.

The contrast between the Austrian and German social democratic movements is particularly illuminating. The Austrian movement, faced with strong anti-semitic forces who accused the whole socialist movement of being a Jewish plot, sought to deny this by distancing the Austrian socialists from specifically Jewish concerns. Indeed, Victor Adler, the leader of the Austrian social democrats, though himself Jewish, had gone so far as to join a German nationalist student society.

Otto Bauer was also Jewish, but refused to apply his theory of national cultural autonomy, set out in his work *Social Democracy and the National Question* (1907), to the Jewish socialist movement of Galicia. This did not prevent the Bund from applying the theory to the Jews of the Russian empire. Indeed, Vladimir Medem's series of articles under the same title were published by the Bund three years before Bauer's book appeared.

If this book has a hero, it is German social democracy's leading theorist, Karl Kautsky. Kautsky's sympathies for the Bund extended to publishing articles by leading Bundists in *Die Neue Zeit*, the prestigious journal he edited, a privilege he did not extend to the Bund's Jewish

socialist opponents, and to sending greetings to Bundist events. True, he promulgated a benevolent assimilationism as the very long-term solution to the 'Jewish Question'. Jacobs writes: 'Kautsky's own lineage, a mixture of many nationalities, seems to have been a major factor leading him to conclude that the future would bring about a general mixing of nations and a decrease in nationalism.' However, he continues, Kautsky 'identified with the plight of the Jews and fought their enemies throughout his career'. Unlike Eduard Bernstein, who started out as an assimilationist and ended up close to the labour Zionist movement, Kautsky did not waver in his opposition to Zionism. However, throughout his career he was aware that one could not expect workers of oppressed nations to work for socialism if the socialist movement did not itself work against national oppression.

MICHAEL HEISER



Karl Kautsky

God forbid

Across the world familiar borders, identities and ways of life are being shattered. From the sidelines fundamentalists of all religions watch and wait for the moment to move in with a reassuring perspective on the past and a promising vision of the future. With the claim that their understanding of the world represents a single truth, they superimpose a narrow religious identity over distinctions of nationality, class, ethnicity, culture, gender and so on. This straitjacketing of identity affects everyone, from the top of the

hierarchy to the bottom, but places the strictest limits on women, dictating how they dress, who they marry, how often they bear children, how far they may develop as individuals – indeed, every detail of their lives.

Fundamentalists argue that what women really want is the certainty of a place in the social order. What more important job could there be, they ask, than to be queen of the home with sole charge of the children and responsibility for transmitting society's moral values to the next generation? The editors of *Refusing*

Holy Orders acknowledge how compelling and how apparently liberating this assurance of control over their own, albeit limited, domain can be. But drawing on an idea developed by Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*, they expose the world of difference between "freedom from" (uncertainty and insecurity, which has characterised fundamentalist women's politics) and "freedom to" (to be autonomous, to be self-defined, which has characterised feminist politics).

The contributors to the book look from various political and

Refusing Holy Orders: women and fundamentalism in Britain edited by Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis (Virago, £8.99)

religious angles at the impact of fundamentalism on women's lives. The result is uneven, but challenging to both the secular left and the religious right.

Those who see religion per se as a crucial pillar of conservative ideology should resist the temptation to skip Sara Maitland's discussion of radical biblicism, a tradition which she locates within the left and which she argues has been hijacked and transformed by the New Right. She exposes the Christian roots and culture underlying left wing politics. Referring to the Society of Friends and some Black Pentecostal churches which prioritise 'solidarity and need over a static, authoritative, immutable text', she says: '...it is necessary to see the current "moral majority" evangelicalism both here and in the USA as a completely new phenomenon – one which, in a complex way, uses many of the discourses of "old" Christian radicalism to new and conservative ends.'

Sara Maitland warns that 'the Left, and feminism in particular, must not ignore the high prestige that such cults can confer on their members, nor the potential and actual rhetoric force of the biblical texts'. Despite a rigorous exploration of how what she calls 'neo-fundamentalism' has drawn on and subverted a radical Christian tradition, she fails to take the next step which would expose how the assimilationist – or more accurately, proselytising – character of Christianity runs through its more progressive, historic, manifestations as well as its reactionary forms. The debate which would start to resolve some of these issues is long overdue, which may partly explain why alliances between community-based groups in the antiracist movement are so fragile. But many of those groups themselves back off from challenging reactionary ideas and institutions within their own communities.

Not so Saeeda Khanum, whose chapter is a courageous exposé of how and why girls are short-

changed in Muslim schools. The headteacher of Bradford Muslim Girls' School, who has herself already benefited enough from a decent education to enable her to make a choice, makes the now familiar claim that the *hijab* (veil) liberates her: 'No one can see me, I'm private. I have access to all the world. Although shut off from the rest of the world, I have my own window to it.' The pupils in her charge, however, are offered mere pinholes on the world. It took five years after the school opened for GCSEs to be offered – in Urdu, childcare and religious studies. 'one tiny fourteen-year-old with freckles has hopes of being a journalist,' writes Saeeda. 'I take to her immediately. She does not think her dream will come true because "Asian parents don't allow their daughters to go into such professions"'. A moment of silent confusion follows when I point out that they are talking to such a woman.'

The claims of the Council of Mosques, like the claims of self-appointed leaderships in other communities to represent a unified group with common interests, are belied by the national, cultural and class distinctions within those communities. Saeeda Khanum says: 'Judging by the background of most of the girls who attend the Muslim girls' schools in Bradford and Batley (West Yorkshire), these types of schools are more attractive to lower-middle and working-class families. Wealthy visitors to Britain from Arab countries do not send their daughters to private Muslim schools, preferring to send them instead to English public schools.'

Nira Yuval-Davis moves between Britain and Israel to look at Messianic Zionist fundamentalism such as the settlers' movement, Gush Emunim, and diaspora-based 'born again' movements like the Lubavitch. She places the British Jewish community in its historical context, though she is rather too quick to accept Stephen Brook's analysis

that the community is shrinking due to a rapid process of assimilation. Nira Yuval-Davis examines what draws Jews towards ultra-orthodoxy, and also looks at women who have jumped religious ship to carve out a secular, feminist, antifundamentalist place for themselves as Jews.

Most interestingly she starts to explore the relationship between religion, Zionism and fundamentalism, both in Israel and the diaspora. As the religious right moves into the vacuum left by a Zionism which is fast losing its hold on the community, this is an area where Jewish socialists must develop an analysis and strategies to ensure that Jews don't end up in an ideological, and perhaps a literal, ghetto, defenceless against tyranny from within and outside our community.

'Secular spaces: the experience of Asian women organising', written by Gita Sahgal long before the murderous attacks on Muslims by Hindu fundamentalists in India is prophetic and compelling. The Hindu 'diaspora' she describes, with its resources, orientation, loyalty and religious identity all being diverted eastwards, away from the needs, concerns and conflicts of people here, has many parallels with the Jewish community. Gita Sahgal describes working with women whose lives may depend on whether they can forge their own path, often in opposition to orthodox antiracism as well as to a multiculturalist state which refuses to intervene on their behalf. She concludes with the plea to continue the exploration of the impact of religion on women's lives, arguing that this cannot be done purely from within a religious frame of reference: 'The engagement with the depth and complexity of the response to religion is just beginning. It is only in a secular space that women can conduct the conversation between atheist and devotee, belief and unbelief, sacred and profane, the grim and the bawdy.'

JULIA BARD

Beating the fascists

Just a few weeks ago, on Remembrance Day, I was among a few hundred anti-fascists making a determined effort to prevent the fascist National Front completing their annual pilgrimage to the Cenotaph in central London, supposedly to remember Britain's war dead. Despite our superior numbers, we failed to stop the fascists. This was for three reasons: firstly, an enormous police presence; secondly, the sectarianism eating away at our movement which led to the event being boycotted by significant anti-fascist forces; and thirdly, the failure of any of the competing anti-racist and anti-fascist movements to mobilise popular anger against fascism among the masses of unaffiliated ordinary people rather than among the seasoned activists.

It is several years since there has been a united protest against the fascists' Remembrance Day march. Leaving aside petty sectarianism, the traditional split on this issue has been a serious political schism between those on one side who argue that while opposing the fascists' march *we* can reclaim Remembrance Day as a day to remember victims of racism and fascism and expose *why* the war was fought; and those on the other side who view Remembrance Day as irredeemably bound up with soldiers dying solely for British national glory, and the centuries of imperial and colonial subjection of peoples in Asia and Africa. Therefore, they see nothing and nobody of value to remember.

I have long felt uncomfortable with the latter view and its assumptions about the conscripts' motivation in the Second World War. I have often thought about Britain's Jewish conscripts who had been reading every day about new atrocities suffered by Jews in

Germany, Poland and Romania. When they were called up or volunteered, many knew precisely what they were fighting against. Among the hundreds of thousands of Jews and non-Jews who fought against Mosley's fascists at the Battle of Cable Street in 1936 were many who later gave their lives in the war against Hitler's fascism. A similar fate was in store for many survivors of the International Brigade. Who would remember them and how?

Morris Beckman's exhilarating memoir of the 43 Group reinforced my gut reactions on this issue. It provides almost a day by day account of the struggle by a remarkable movement which reluctantly set itself up to combat Mosley's efforts to rebuild a mass fascist movement in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Young war-weary Jews returned to their working class neighbourhoods of Hackney and the East End to struggle once more for a living wage, to piece their lives together and recover their missing years, only to find their enemy – fascism – rearing its head, unopposed, in their own backyards.

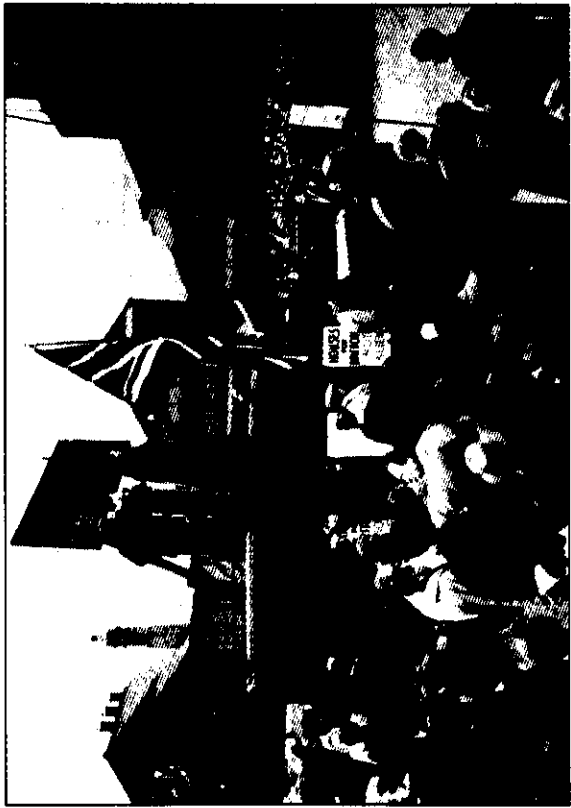
The Labour government, which was enacting several important reforms to remove key industries from the private sector, and to build a welfare state, ignored this growing threat to a vulnerable minority, then still concentrated in the heart of working class areas. The Jewish community leadership – the Board of Deputies – maintained its prewar approach combining cautiousness with complacency. Never ones to rock the boat, the increasing tension between Jewish nationalists in Palestine and the British forces nearing the end of their mandate, provided a perfect excuse for the Board to continue in its tired old ways. The existing Jewish ex-

servicemen's organisations, AJEX and, in Manchester, MUJEX, provided a material base for popular anti-fascist activity but as yet had not directed their efforts with any coherence. The Communist Party, whose militant opposition to fascism had helped win it many Jewish recruits in the 1930s and 1940s, had a very wide agenda in the postwar era. Fighting a fascist revival was part of that agenda but it could never take centre stage.

Into this vacuum stepped the 43 Group, so called as 38 men and five women responded to a word of mouth call to meet at the Maccabi Club in March 1946 to talk about the fascist menace and ways of responding. They set themselves two tasks: to attack and destroy the emergent fascist movement and to lobby parliament to make racial incitement an offence punishable by imprisonment. At the outset, the ex-servicemen who called the meeting were clear about the kind of struggle that lay ahead and the immense physical risk to those who would commit themselves to it. Twice at their inaugural meeting they gave people the opportunity to leave and pursue other strategies but the 43 remained and began planning their first 'commando' operations to disrupt the large open air meetings that the fascists were now holding every week. At the same time they set in motion an intelligence network which required the myriad of fascist organisations to be infiltrated at the highest levels. This work was carried out bravely, with great success, by non-Jewish supporters and Jews who looked far from the fascist stereotype of swarthy, hook-nosed *untermenschen* (subhumans).

Within a few months the group had recruited about 500 members to take part in its operations and in the relatively brief period of its existence – until 1949 – it had a

The 43 Group by Morris Beckman (Centerprise Publishing Project £7.50)



Mosley's Union Movement holding an open-air meeting in Hackney in 1949

turnover of maybe 1,000. Its founders were typically young, Jewish ex-servicemen, working class and without family commitments, but its overall membership spanned wider sectors. Professional doctor members were invariably at hand to deal with the wounds suffered by the 'commandos'. More respectable-looking middle class members were invaluable in infiltrating the plethora of middle and upper class fascist bookclubs and social organisations. The group was able to raise sufficient funds from more financially secure sectors of the Jewish community to rent an office and pay a full time organiser.

As each week went by it chalked up more successes. It closed down or severely disrupted more fascist meetings, and the stakes were raised higher. Beckman provides graphic descriptions of how the commandos broke up the meetings, sending successive wedges from different angles towards the well-armed stewards protecting the platform, until one would break through and topple the platform. He also describes the lightning attacks on smaller scale fascist activities, carried out by commandos hurriedly pouring out of taxicabs. Group members were frequently arrested and in some

cases suffered further beatings by the police, although Beckman offers several instances of individual policemen turning a blind eye to their assaults and advising them afterwards to scarper quick or face arrest.

In four years of street battles, Beckman recalls only one instance when group commandos retreated. It was at a Sunday afternoon meeting held in Romford, Essex. Beckman recalls: 'The foremost commandos reached within a few yards of the platform when, without hint of warning, all the stewards gave way, turning and retreating quickly, leaving the commandos nonplussed and exposed. They were then struck by a barrage of missiles the like of which they had never encountered: potatoes - but embedded in each one were two or three razor-blades with a half-inch or so of cutting edge exposed.' The potatoes were thrown by men 'dark-skinned ... dressed in two-piece lounge suits'. It transpired that Mosley's 'Aryan' heroes had paid a Maltese gang handsomely for protection.

If the 43 Group faced the physical hostility of the fascists, they continued to endure the political hostility of most of the Jewish establishment. Just as in the 1930s the Board of Deputies had

tried to neutralise the militant Jewish people's Council against Fascism and Antisemitism, so the Defence Committee of the Board sought variously to undermine, coopt and neutralise the 43 Group. To their credit the 43 Group refused to bow to these pressures. They maintained their integrity and in a determinedly non-sectarian manner passed on the fruits of their intelligence-gathering to all organisations who were seriously committed to combating the incipient fascist movement.

If Beckman provides graphic details of the day to day work of the group, he is more circumspect about its political location. While deriding the inactivity of the Labour Party's leaders he is full of praise for the anti-fascist efforts of national and local trades unions and there are hints of close co-operation with the Communist Party. At the same time, a trickle of 43 Group members made their way to Palestine in early 1948 in order to fight for the fledgling Israeli state. Today, ex-43 Group members probably owe their allegiance to different ideals across the political spectrum. Beckman retains a thoroughgoing anti-racist and anti-fascist perspective which is as passionate in defence of today's victims, primarily in the black communities, as he was in defence of Jewish victims of his time. On the other hand, another ex-43er whom he credits I know personally as someone rabidly anti-Arab, who moves seamlessly between condemning neo-Nazis and the PLO.

Nevertheless, what comes shining through the book is a story of ordinary people, self-sacrificing without being self-seeking, brave, without wishing to be heroes, hard-headed but expressing raw emotions, who stood up to and defeated a fascist threat with a seriousness and dedication which should put many of today's squabbling anti-fascist leaders to shame.

DAVID ROSENBERG

On the shelf

Democratic(ish) governments are always a bit iffy about Amnesty International. They share its criticism of totalitarian regimes, but if Amnesty says a word or two about their own human rights record the organisation is branded as one-sided, biased and basing its allegations on false information. The **Amnesty International Report 1992** (Amnesty, £11.95) which covers the year 1991 is now to hand, and it makes grim reading. Oh look, here's Britain locking up harmless Iraqi oppositionists during the Gulf war, the Birmingham 6, the Guildford 4, Winston Silcott... And there's Israel. But, as Amnesty's complaints were of a 'tendentious nature' and since 'false allegations of maltreatment are common', according to Israeli spokespeople, we need spend no time looking at their human rights problems. After all, some other countries are much worse. Wouldn't it be nice if just for once one of these governments were to say, 'Actually yes, it's a fair cop. We do bang up the innocent, maybe even knock them about a bit. Sod you.' At least it would be honest.

When something is a problem there are two ways to tell that it's a problem. Firstly by subjective experience, secondly by looking at publishers' catalogues. Let me tell you, fascism is a problem, and likely to get worse. Among the flood of books appearing or reappearing on bookshop shelves, two are useful as background reading. **Fascists and Conservatives** edited by Martin Blinkhorn (Unwin Hyman, £11.99) looks at the historic alliances and indeed confrontations between the respectable conservative/monarchist/Christian democratic right and those on the fascist right in Europe. **Neo-fascism in Europe** edited by Luciano Cheles and others (Longman, £11.99) is a selection of essays, mixed in content, covering the fascist scene in Europe as of 1987. Both of these books cover countries such as Greece and Portugal as well as the more well known areas of fascist influence. The problem for publishers is that with the situation changing so fast, books like the last are as historical as the first. Amongst the new reports is **The Dark Side of Europe: the extreme right today** by Geoffrey Harris (Edinburgh University Press, £12.95). One doesn't have to be obsessed with political correctness to think the title a little unfortunate,

strange paths sometimes, contemplating what Rabbi Akiba would make of a *mikvah* with whirlpools, saunas and exorcises; but each to their own. **Speaking for Ourselves: short stories by Jewish lesbians** edited by Irene Zahava (Crossing Press, £6.95) looks good and will add to the range of American Jewish lesbian books (*Tribe of Dina*, *Nice Jewish Girls*, etc). Maybe someday there will be British equivalents. **Speaking for Ourselves** does, however, bring out the bigot in me. In the list of contributors we have surnames Goldberg, Siegel, Stein, Klepfisz, Kantrowitz, and Dyke-woman, Freespirit and ... Mushroom. I know that Jews were forced to take surnames by oppressors in the past, and that people should have the right to call themselves what they wish, but ... well really!

Two useful reissues to look out for: **Out of the Depths** by Joseph Chaim Brenner (Westview, £8.95) is a (Hebrew) classic novel about a printers' strike in London's East End at the turn of the century; **Three Great Jewish Plays** (now there's a snappy title) (Applause, £5.99) brings together a new translation of the Yiddish classics *The Golem* by Leivick, *The Dybbuk* by Anski and *God of Vengeance* by Asch.

Finally, two magazines are worth mentioning. The Autumn 1992 issue of **Jewish Quarterly** (£2.95) is a women's issue. It includes a number of literary pieces including a feature on Adrienne Rich and the secular Yiddishist Irena Klepfisz. There is poetry by Lotte Kramer and Ruth Fainlight and a moving piece by Palestinian exile Ghada Karmi on returning to visit her former home. There is also a piece by *Jewish Socialist's* Julia Bard on Women Against Fundamentalism.

Somewhat less impressive is **The Arab Review**. The issue to hand (Autumn '92) leads on Saudi Arabia which it attacks for its lack of democracy, suppression of women and corruption, and the magazine itself claims to favour democratising the Middle East. However, running through the magazine are fantasies about Zionist control of Europe and Japan and predictions that Israel will settle from the Nile to the Euphrates.

All the Jews in the world will live there and the country will be master of all the surrounding states which Israel will have dismembered. Even the Likudniks don't go that far!

R BUCH SOICHER

but the book itself is quite good, especially on Le Pen.

I read in the press that Noam Chomsky believes that American Nazis should have been allowed to march through Jewish areas. There is an argument for allowing them to do so only so that they get a good kick up the *tokkes*, but Chomsky argues that free speech for all is paramount. Certainly many people have wanted him silenced, not least rather a lot of American Zionists. In Chomsky's new **Chronicles of Dissent** (AK Press, £10.95) he details some of this pressure. Chomsky has been one of America and Israel's harshest critics, believing that Israel's American alliance and its occupation of the territories is 'driving [Israel] to destruction. It's going to make the country unliveable and may sooner or later lead to its actual destruction, if not in this crisis then in a future one.' Whilst I can agree completely with his opposition to the Gulf War and American foreign policy, I cannot accept his ultra-liberalism. In *Chronicles* he talks about his own experience of antisemitism while growing up and during his early academic career, so why he isn't prepared to *klop* the Nazis is a mystery to me.

Two new books for women. In view of the debate in the Jewish press as to whether women should be allowed *tefillah* groups, those with a religious interest may find **On Women and Judaism** by Blu Greenberg (Jewish Publishing Society of America, £7.99) useful. Greenberg tries to reconcile her feminism with her Orthodox observance. This leads her down

Morris Beckman will be reading from the book and signing copies at 7.30pm on 8 February at Centerpiece, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8