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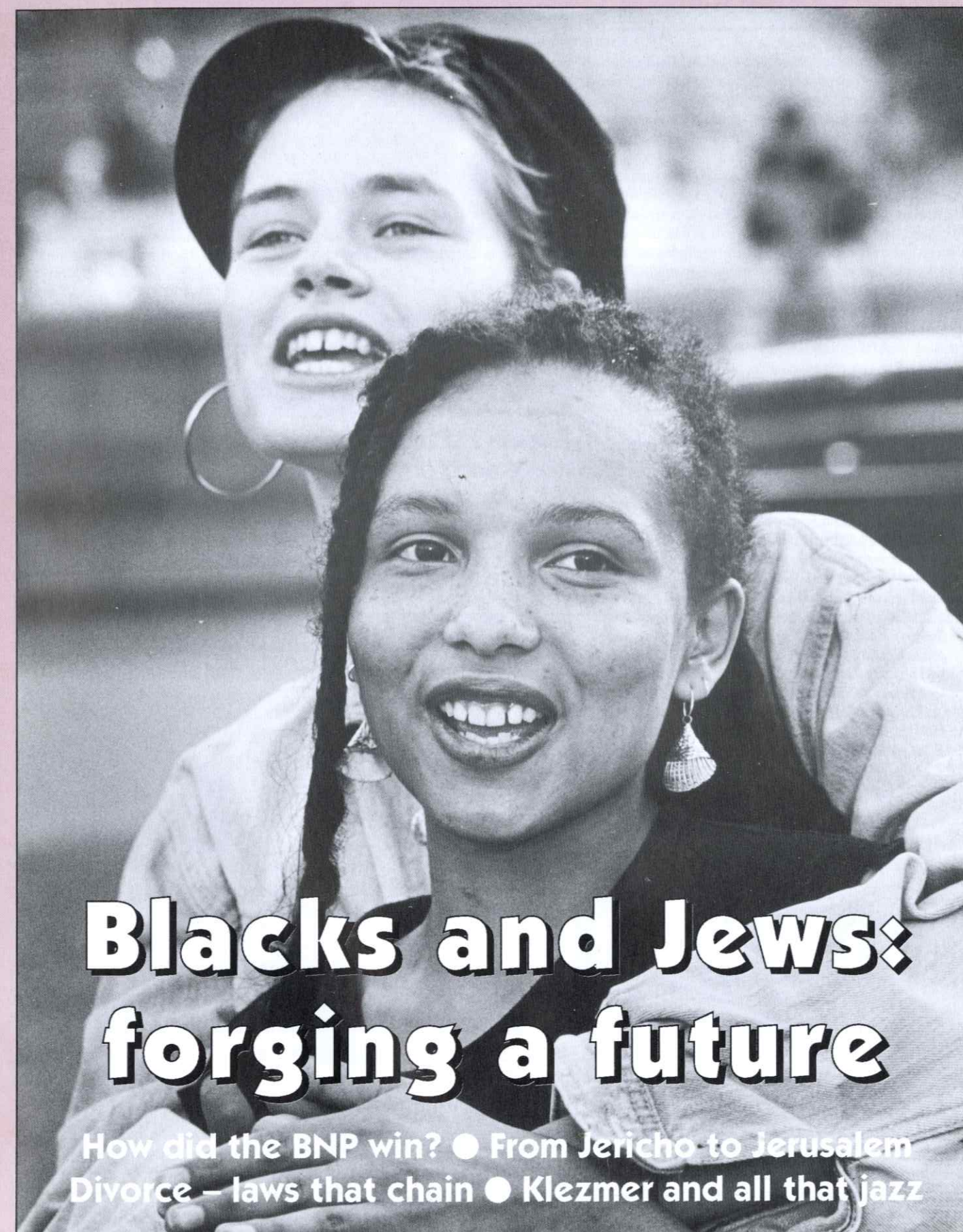
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.....
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Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialist Group

No 30 • Winter 1993 • £1.50



Blacks and Jews: forging a future

How did the BNP win? • From Jericho to Jerusalem
Divorce – laws that chain • Klezmer and all that jazz

Jewish Socialist

In the eight years since *Jewish Socialist* first appeared, the fight for a just peace in the Middle East and the fight against racism and fascism in Britain have been recurring themes in the magazine. The summer of 1993 saw important developments on both these fronts.

Jewish Socialist has consistently promoted Israeli/Palestinian dialogue and said Israel should talk to the PLO as a necessary first step towards full Palestinian self-determination. This has not always made us popular among sections of the Jewish establishment. However, two weeks after Yitzhak Rabin shook hands with Yasser Arafat, Board of Deputies president Israel Feinstein came into line by shaking hands with London PLO representative Afif Safieh.

Whatever your view on who has given how much, we must recognise that it will be much harder to marginalise the ideas for which *Jewish Socialist* has long argued.

However, the magazine will continue asking difficult and sometimes uncomfortable questions. The articles by Reuben Kaminer and Michael Safier in this issue share a common theme in seeing the accord as the start of a process, rather than its conclusion. Many difficult issues have still to be tackled – among them the status of Jerusalem, and whether the accord is a real step towards Palestinian sovereignty.

In this country, the election of a councillor from the fascist British National Party has been dismissed by many as an isolated incident, the result of local circumstances. Unfortunately, the local circumstances, as Reuben Goldberg makes clear, could easily be repeated elsewhere. The success of the BNP is due to its own organisation around a set of racist demands to which mainstream parties, notably, in Tower Hamlets, the Liberal Democrats, have given political respectability.

The BNP has shown how a classic fascist party can exploit the space of racism cleared by others, providing one more instance of the links between racism and fascism. Unfortunately, in Britain in 1993 we do not have a united movement to oppose them. While some appear to put their trust in demands on the state to legislate fascism away, others find themselves unprepared for an inevitable confrontation with the police while half a mile up the road the fascists smirk into their beer.

We're glad to be back this autumn with a new look. The strong response we received to the readers' questionnaire was very helpful – the results are on page 22. We have taken account of the many points you made and would like to know what you think of the redesigned *Jewish Socialist*.

This issue was produced by an editorial committee consisting of Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Michael Heiser, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel, David Rosenberg and Clifford Singer. Cover picture by Paul Mattsson



Where is the anti-fascist movement going? Page 16 Picture: Paul Mattsson

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JEWISH AID FOR BOSNIA

CBF World Jewish Relief, a Jewish community aid organisation, is linked in solidarity with Sarajevo's Jewish humanitarian group, La Benevolencia.

It has sent a large number of aid convoys to Sarajevo, as well as to other Bosnian communities, such as Mostar and Zenica. These have included food, clothing, medicines, toiletries and items for warmth – anoraks, blankets and sleeping bags. The provisions are distributed on a non-sectarian basis. CBF enables La Benevolencia's pharmacies in Sarajevo to meet an estimated 40 per cent of the city's medical needs and a relief kitchen at the Jewish community centre to serve 300 hot meals a day. La Benevolencia is an integral

part of Sarajevo's embattled community and works in cooperation with Mahmet, a Bosnian Muslim aid organisation, to try to sustain the city's people.

Before the civil war in Bosnia, there was a Jewish community of around 1,200 people. Many were Holocaust survivors. In 1940, the Nazis murdered the vast majority of Sarajevo's 9,000 Jews. Most now, with great sadness, have been helped to leave and are now refugees. But there remains a committed Jewish presence in the city.

CBF is allocating funds to sustain Jewish refugees in Croatia and helping about 100 Jewish Sarajevans who have sought asylum in Britain. It has attacked the British Government's

divisive and obstructive policies towards all Bosnian refugees. The organisation is meeting immediate welfare needs – housing, clothes, food and transport – besides working with agencies like Norwood. Refugees are traumatised by siege and war – many not for the first time – as they attempt to rebuild their lives in a new country.

Criticism may be levelled at the establishment Jewish concerns evident in CBF's work – 'respectability' and encouraging refugees to 'learn the English way' and 'realise their Judaism'. These are familiar themes for Jewish refugees to Britain. Nonetheless, CBF continues to give albeit limited support from Anglo-Jewry, through La Benevolencia to Bosnian

communities, on non-sectarian terms.

CBF's recognition of Bosnian Jews, mostly ignored elsewhere, should be valued. Its assistance to them is important – whether in leaving to become refugees, or struggling within a multi-ethnic Bosnian population against those who seek to impose racist division and partition.

● CBF is collecting money for work with refugees in Britain. It also plans to send 250 wheelchairs to a Sarajevo hospital and, with La Benevolencia, open a hospital for the elderly. Anyone wishing to help should contact CBF World Jewish Relief, Drayton House, 30 Gordon Street, London WC1H 0AN. Telephone 071-387 3925. Fax 071-383 4810.

WOMEN TAKE THE INITIATIVE



Sharon Lee Picture: Karen Merkel

The Chief Rabbi's commission of inquiry, 'Women in the Community', is in its final stages and the report is due to be published early in 1994. The research team, led by Board of Deputies Vice President Rosalind Preston, has travelled the country holding meetings to ask women about their experiences, and has sent out questionnaires to a wider circle of women, many of them unaffiliated to any Jewish organisations.

The researchers were

stunned to discover when they started that the Community Research Unit at the Board of Deputies had no data on women. They were equally shocked by the anger, distress and dissent expressed at the meetings, by women in the mainstream of the community as well as by those who felt marginalised or alienated. Many were suspicious of any project initiated by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who, they felt, was hostile to women who would not or could not conform to his view that the future of the community rests on the supposedly traditional Jewish family.

Throughout the project, women have questioned these and other assumptions while participating in the research in good faith. The Chief Rabbi is likely to feel uncomfortable with much of what women in the community are saying. However, the research team has made a commitment to publishing its findings,

whatever his reaction.

One positive outcome is that a number of women who tried to set up a women's tephilla (prayer) group, and ran headlong into Jonathan Sacks's opposition, have set up a Jewish

Women's Network. Launched last July, this is a concerted attempt to establish dialogue between Jewish women of every background and belief, from the ultra-orthodox to the totally secular. For more information contact Sharon Lee, 41 Dorset Drive, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 7NT. Tel 081-952 5308.



BACK TO THE FUTURE: Joy Gardner, who died at the hands of police and immigration officials earlier this year, was the latest victim of a long-standing practice. The two Czechoslovakian Jewish refugees in the picture above are being deported from Britain in 1940.

THE BEAT GOES ON

B'tselem report, June, 1993: The killing of Palestinian children and the open-fire regulations

B'tselem's report aims to highlight and curtail the current circumstances in which the Israeli security forces regularly and legally open fire on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

In the first six months of this, the sixth year of the intifada, 34 Palestinian children have been killed by security-force gunfire. Twenty of those killed were between the ages of 14 and 16, and eighteen were under 14. A total of 232 children have been killed by the security forces since the start of the intifada.

This latest half-year toll is greater than that of any equivalent period.

The security forces' 'Rules of Engagement' prohibit soldiers from shooting at children, but B'tselem repeatedly warn that the orders permitting soldiers to open fire routinely leads to the violation of this prohibition.

According to the security forces themselves, in none of the eighteen occasions when children under the age of 14

were killed were the lives of soldiers in danger.

In this report, B'tselem examine in detail the orders and procedures, particularly those outside 'Self-defence in situations of mortal danger', under which soldiers can open fire. The report illustrates what these orders mean in practice, and how supposed safeguards are meaningless. It estimates the number of Palestinians who have been killed, and presents detailed and representative case histories of a child who has died this year under each of these procedures.

1 'Firing at a central instigator'
The toddler Fares al-Kaduri was the 34th child killed this year. Aged one year and 8 months, he died in the Jabalya Refugee Camp in Gaza on 16 May 1993. He was shot while sheltering with his father in the doorway of a shop from a confrontation between youths throwing stones and soldiers. A soldier, an officer, turned quickly and shot at the two of them from a distance of about 30 metres. Fares was hit in the chest and died shortly afterwards.

2 'Opening fire as part of the procedure for stopping a suspicious vehicle'
On 13 March, a teenager from the Siyaj family took four of his younger brothers and sisters for a ride around the neighbourhood in the family car. Hebron was under

curfew at the time, but the curfew was not strictly imposed in the al-Eida neighbourhood.

The family told B'tselem that the teenager saw a roadblock, panicked as he did not have a driving licence, turned the car around, and drove away. The soldiers shot at the car and hit four-year old Safa afa (Huda) Ishaq Siyaj. She died of her wounds the following day.

3 'During dispersal of riots (firing into the air)'
Riyad Khalil Abd a-Nabi Muhammad, age 15, was shot and died on 7 February 1993, in the Shuafat Refugee Camp. Riyad was shot in the back and neck from a jeep of the Border Police after youths had erected a barrier nearby in the Camp.

4 'Procedure for apprehending a suspect'
Ala a Din Majed Rani Odeh, aged 14, was shot and died in Tamun Village, Jenin, on 8 February 1993. Uniformed soldiers and members of undercover units in civilian clothing raided the village of Tamun. Ala Din ran away, and was shot in the back.

B'tselem concludes that 'there is no deliberate security force policy to kill children, but with 232 dead in five-and-a-half years ... this does not mitigate the guilt born by the security forces'. The report holds responsible 'a deliberate policy of opening fire in

situations in which soldiers were not in mortal danger'.

The report makes clear recommendations for the amendment of these rules, and the need to inculcate the IDF with a respect for human life. However, there are dangers in accepting the occupation as a framework within which to make humane and reforming demands.

The report mentions that many hundreds of innocent Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli security forces, which implies that 'other' Palestinians killed were not 'innocent'. This is not a valid distinction to make, in the context of a people struggling for self-determination and the ejection of an occupying force, and also the report risks focusing a sense of injustice solely on the killing of Palestinian children rather than adults.

Demands for reform of the 'Rules of Engagement' could lead to an occupying force that kills less freely. But in the end, the killing will only stop when the Palestinian peoples' struggle for self-determination, justice, equality and coexistence forces Israel to end the occupation.

B'tselem (The Israeli Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), 43, Emek Refaim St (2nd Floor), Jerusalem 93141. Tel.(02) 617271/4 Fax.(02) 610756.

BIG DEAL

The Israel/PLO peace accords have provoked an important debate among activists working for a just peace in the Middle East. Below, we print a public statement on the 'Gaza-Jericho First' Plan from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in Britain. There has been much optimism expressed concerning the recent agreements reached between the Government of Israel and the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

However, as both sides acknowledge, these do not constitute a final settlement. PSC is concerned that there are serious limitations as far as the Palestinians are concerned in the current framework ...

Among the problems which concern us are:

- the omission of the right of the 3 million Palestinian refugees to return to their homes from current consideration
- the uncertainty about the future status of East Jerusalem as an integral part of the West Bank
- the continued presence of

settlements in the Occupied Territories with the potential for causing violence

- Israel's continuing refusal to abide by international conventions on human and civil rights. It continues to detain thousands of Palestinian political prisoners, to seize land and to practice house demolitions as a form of punishment.

There are disagreements among the Palestinians concerning the interim settlement. PSC hopes that all sides will act with restraint and in a democratic manner.

PSC continues to believe in

the ultimate desirability of, and necessity for, a democratic, non-sectarian state in the whole of Palestine. We support a number of measures which will help in the realisation of this goal. These are: full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank - including East Jerusalem - and the Gaza Strip; the right of return for all Palestinian exiles; the building of a democratic system in the areas from which Israel withdraws and their economic and social development and full equality for the 700,000 Palestinians who are citizens of Israel.

VEHICLES FOR CHANGE

A dozen vehicles, including a fully-equipped ambulance from Manchester and lorry-loads of food from Glasgow and Leeds have crossed the channel heading across Europe for the besieged Bosnian mining town of Tuzla. Reinforcements are expected to join along the way. This is the Workers' Aid Convoy for Bosnia and it is probably the first time since the Spanish Civil War that socialists and trade unionists in Britain have attempted anything like it.

Occupation

The Bosnian people, inheritors of a proud multicultural tradition, are having their country and families ripped apart by petty nationalism and great-power realpolitik. Indijana Harper grew up near Tuzla, in a valley of coalmines and steelworks. 'People used to say workers spent their lungs before their pensions,' she says. For generations, Muslim, Croat and Serb workers intermarried, lived and fought together under Austro-Hungarian rule, Serb monarchy and Nazi occupation.

In 1984-5 they held regular collections in Tuzla for striking British miners. Struggling to maintain traditions of solidarity amid a flood of understandably embittered Muslim refugees from the countryside and also struggling to survive the siege and UN indifference, they now need our support. 'Please, help my people or there'll be none of them left in future to help you,' said

Indijana at a meeting in London.

Not long after the Yugoslav conflict began, Radi, a Serb Trotskyist comrade, was asked if it was really as bad as the media made out. 'Worse,' he replied. His brother, called up in the Yugoslav National Army, had been the only man in his unit, besides the commander, still wearing the socialist Red Star on his cap. At Vukovar, an industrial workers' city destroyed by the army, they narrowly prevented others, wearing the Serb nationalist White Eagle, from massacring civilians.

Jewish Socialists' Group meetings heard from a member who had visited his relatives in Sarajevo. A Jewish woman who had lost members of her family at the hands of the Nazis urged the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe to do something about Bosnia. Workers' Aid for Bosnia was formed. Radi begged comrades abroad to put internationalism into practice by sending a convoy. The British Home Office stopped him coming here to help launch the campaign.

Starting from Dundee, where striking Timex workers gave enthusiastic backing, the convoy won support from NUM regions, constituency Labour Parties and the GPMU print union. Liverpool dockers provided a lorry, people in Newcastle and Manchester provided tons of clothing, young people at a U2 rock concert in Leeds put £4,500 in collectors' buckets and women at Parkside pit camp in

Lancashire laid on a meal for visiting Bosnian refugees and the convoy. Brixton teenagers painted the lorries, Tilbury dockers, victimised after the 1989 dock strike, helped load them, and the RMT seafarers' union at Dover negotiated free ferry passage.

After Hitler we said: 'Never Again.' During this year's 50th anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, surviving ghetto fighters' commander Marek Edelman said it was happening again, to Muslims in Bosnia, and again the West was standing by. Now, after 'ethnic cleansing' and 'rape camps', comes the ethnic carve-up. Will those who resist the carve-up be condemned, instead of the war criminals?

Destroyed

Sarajevo's library, a vast storehouse of Muslim, Slav and Jewish heritage, has been destroyed by high-incendiary shelling. Muslim women driven from former Yugoslavia are offered places in Pakistan, under religious laws few of them feel attached to. Having found refuge 500 years ago from the Spanish Inquisition and survived Hitler's genocide, Bosnia's Jewish community are refugees again.

What we see forced upon Bosnia is a 'new order' that has no place for minorities, or humanity. There's more than blankets, medicines and baby foods riding on the Workers' Aid convoy. Our hopes must go with it, to the people of Tuzla, and to awakening international solidarity.

BATMAN AND REUBEN

Suspicious goings-on in north London's Stamford Hill last Rosh Hashana. When a Hassidic woman thought she heard burglars in a friend's supposedly empty flat she asked her neighbour to call the police.

A local bobby arrived from Stoke Newington's cop shop but found no wrongdoers taking advantage of the Jewish new year. When the woman left, the officer stayed to chat to the neighbour. 'Are you Jewish?' he asked.

When the neighbour said no, the constable looked relieved, unaware that some of the neighbour's best friends are Jewish socialists.

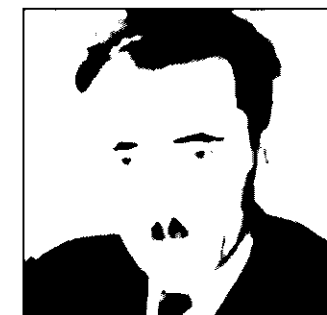
'I hear they're all moving out to that village,' he said. 'If you ask me that's the best thing that could happen around here. They're nothing but trouble.'

The neighbour was surprised. Was there an epidemic of Hassidic crack dealing, he wondered. (The officer should know, coming from the force locally known as the 'Stokey Cokey'.)

The officer continued: 'Yeah, you'd be surprised - it's all VAT fraud and kerb crawling with them.'

'You know how they're always out at night in their black clothes and silly hats, scuttling around the streets? Well, you'll never guess what we call them down at the station - the bats!'

For a moment the neighbour thought of a *treffe* (unkosher) animal and was tempted to reply: 'And do you know what we call you?'



TRIBUTE TO POLISH ANTI-FASCIST

Westminster Council has agreed to install a plaque commemorating the life and death of Jewish socialist and anti-fascist martyr Szymon Zygielbojm (right). As the Jewish Labour Bund's delegate at the Polish parliament in exile in London, Zygielbojm was

widely recognised as the representative of the Jews in Poland as a whole. He committed suicide at his Paddington flat in May 1943 in protest at world indifference to the annihilation of the Jews. The plaque will be unveiled in spring 1994 on the anniversary

of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

The Szymon Zygielbojm Memorial Committee urgently needs funds to pay for the plaque and other activities. Please send cheques/POs to the committee at BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

● See page 27

THE MOVING RIGHT SHOW

The swastika may be a hand-me-down symbol, but the ideology and practice of the far right today must be understood as a product of our time, as the Nazi were of their own era, says Ann Frankel, reporting on the conference on the Resurgence of the Extreme Right in Europe at the City Lit

The re-emergence of the extreme right in Germany has set alarm bells ringing worldwide. The detailed picture of voting for German far-right parties, produced by sociologist Christopher Husbands, shows a definite, but not wholly consistent, increase in support since 1986. Schonhuber's Republikaner Party, which gained an unexpected 7.1 per cent, over two million votes, in the June 1989 European Parliament elections, received only 2.1 per cent in the December 1990 Federal elections. The latest opinion polls suggest that support is now levelling off, rather than increasing.

Husbands concluded that, although far-right groups are better organised than in the 1980s, the 'evidence for more than a skeletal national network is not compelling... I do not believe neo-Nazi violence constitutes a potentially fatal threat to the stability of the state.'

And hundreds of thousands of Germans have marched in anti-fascist demonstrations.

Speakers cited the potential for extreme right-wing movements to expand from nationalist struggles in the Balkans and Eastern Europe and from regionalist movements like Italy's

Northern League. There is also the possibility of growth for established movements like Le Pen's Front National in France.

Linking the analyses of disparate ultra-right movements was the repeated emphasis that danger lies not in the existence of these groups as such, but in their relationship with the political centre and their impact on the mainstream of society.

The co-option of far-right ideologies by centre political parties resulting in the 'Fortress Europe' asylum laws being enacted by European governments, and the institutionalisation of racist practices like ethnic cleansing, are more far reaching and more threatening than the reappearance of swastikas.

A 'Fortress Europe', keeping out aliens at all costs, echoes the neo-fascist myth of Europe as an exclusive, all-white, superior culture. According to historian Roger Griffin, this myth is 'openly anti-liberal and appeals to deep wellsprings of elitism and ethnocentrism. The threat which it poses is not the direct challenge to state power, but to the hegemony of liberal values.' Griffin believes 'the vitality of fascism as an ideological force and a funder of racial hatred shows no signs of ebbing.'

In recent Polish parliamentary elections, antisemitism was a key element in the campaign. An opinion poll showed that one in ten Poles thought there were between four and seven million Jews in Poland and a quarter put their numbers between 750,000 and 3.5 million. In fact, there are around 10,000 Jews in Poland

today. The racism encoded in European cultures readily permits the use of racist and far right ideas by the main political parties, when expedient.

Given the relatively marginalised fascist movement in this country, most commentators exclude Britain from the resurgence in the rest of Europe. The reason usually given is that Britain is a decent tolerant society, where fascism cannot flourish. This notion does not stand up to scrutiny.

The idea that Britain is somehow immune was challenged by Dr Tony Kushner who examined the impact of the extreme right in Britain via case studies: the political arena, racial violence, Holocaust denial and mainstream culture.

Excepting a few recent 'relative and highly localised' British National Party successes – for instance, the recent by-election in Millwall – Britain's far-right parties are in the electoral doldrums. Internal squabbles and poor leadership have played a part in this situation. But more important has been the usurping of the far right agenda by the political mainstream.

'Labour and the Conservatives competed among themselves to curtail primary immigration, essentially of black people,' Kushner said. 'By 1971, this had effectively been achieved and there was a consensus of silence on the issue from both main parties.' Later, in the '70s, Margaret Thatcher hijacked the immigration bandwagon, using it to 'bolster her vision of English nationalism' and denying the National Front its main drawcard.

Today 'racist immigration controls, the absence of an asylum policy and rough treatment of aliens are now perfectly acceptable'.

Referring to the rising numbers of racist attacks, Kushner commented: 'The statistics, as well as the geographical spread of harassment and the feeble

level of fascist membership, simply do not add up. Most acts of everyday racial harassment are not carried out by political extremists.'

Government and media complacency about Holocaust denial have a complement in the widespread portrayal of fascism in the mainstream of British culture. These include Richard Allen's best selling novels *Bootboy* and *Suedehead*, the skinhead alter-ego in Tony Harrison's poem 'V', Johnny the gay Nazi in Hanif Kureishi's 'My Beautiful Laundrette'. Sympathetic portrayals of fascist and fascism are remarkably frequent.

What emerges from these examples is a picture of British society receptive to racism and to far-right ideology, at many levels.

While a small-scale revival of British fascism from its current low is probable, in the short term the real danger lies, Kushner believes, in 'our ambiguous relationship to fascism'.

Neo-fascist scenarios of keeping out the aliens are now a reality. Racist violence rarely gains a headline. These changes have occurred under the cloak of political respectability, while their authors remain marginalised.

Kushner warns: 'More worrying than anything else is the widespread acceptance that we have a problem of race or race relations, rather than a problem of racism. The cultural, media and historical fixation suggests that we somehow need the fascists. Neo-fascists in Britain represent the unacceptable face of racism in terms of their linkages to mass murder. But they also offer the reassurance that there is a race problem out there to which our solutions are rather liberal in comparison.'

The resurgence of the extreme right has its own disturbing counterpart in Britain. To effectively fight fascism and racism we must acknowledge the full extent of their existence, role and appeal in Britain today.

PASSPORT TO PRAGUE

Dear Julius, I liked Prague a lot – all that baroque. We were staying in a crumbling workers' area as well as visiting the tourist hotspots so I suppose we picked up a sense of what living there is like. Food is cheap. Phones are cheap. And the metro and trams are very cheap.

The two of us who are vegetarians found it difficult eating out. We did go several times to the Hare Krishna cafe for proper veggie stuff, but avoided going upstairs and taking our shoes off, just in case. The (very male) pubs sold cheap beer and food, but since privatisation a lot have closed. The streets are safe.

But, but, but. The biggest signs you see all over the centre are that MacDonalds now have four places and the next biggest signs are for West cigarettes – the slogan is 'Test the West'. In Wenceslas Square there were signs everywhere for Time, Budweiser and all the other big American and Japanese companies. I found myself

looking down at the little memorial to the victims of communism, where Jan Palach burnt himself to death, thinking: 'Surely you didn't die for this.'

I duly visited Josefov, the Jewish quarter, and gave your regards to the Golem. The old cemetery is very moving but the exhibition in the State Museum of drawings from Terezin brought out the tears. It wasn't so much the paintings, but the lines at the end of the biographies of each of the artists which mostly read: 'Perished in Auschwitz.'

There are hardly any live Jews in Prague, just the old synagogues. Those who the Nazis didn't get had a hard time under Stalin, and most of those who survived seem to have gone to Israel. Between the antisemites and the lure of Zion, Prague is close to being Jew-free. One of the main monuments is a medieval clock where the Apostles trot out on the hour and where they are

surrounded by the four enemies of Prague: death and vanity (I think) and a Moor, and a Jew with his moneybags, and there's another monument on the Charles Bridge to some saint who converted 8,000 Muslims and 25,000 Jews. Kafka is all over the place of course. It seems that only dead Jews are really wanted.

Even where we lived there was an old derelict shul. What happened to the people who went there? Clive, who is as religious as a plank, bought a yarmulka to go into the Altneuschul and said he felt like wearing it all the time just to say 'Look, we live.' It's a pity though that the museums didn't show how people did live, rather than just the religious side.

I'll just close by telling you



Altneuschul, Prague

about a bet I won with myself on the bus back. There was one black bloke on the bus, a Czech like most of the other passengers. At the first passport check everyone got a brief glance, apart from one person. I'd bet his passport would be carefully examined at every check. Yup, three out of three, and cursory glances for everybody else.

See you soon. Jo

DON'T ASK THE RABBI

Insights on Talmudic geology

Rock sample a)



Rock sample b)



These seemingly identical rocks were both found in Israel: sample a) outside the Israeli parliament and sample b) on the West Bank. Sample a) as thrown by a right-wing Jewish settler is surprisingly soft and porous – almost like a wet sponge. These rocks may be rendered useless by using nothing more than some sharp words and a spray of a garden hose over the assailant. Sample b) however is lethal especially if thrown by a 10-year-old boy and can only be stopped by a bullet.

Dr Avi Gotalightboy

Dear 'Worried of Didsbury', we do not know if it is genetic. To date scientists have been unable to identify the 'Chief Rabbi' gene.

BRIS BARGAINS

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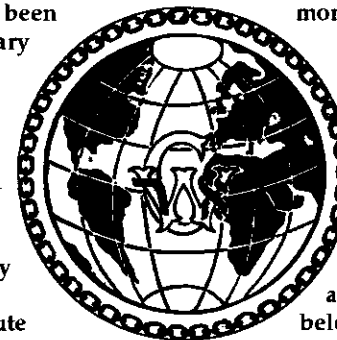
Jewish Socialist has obtained material which provides a fascinating insight on working-class Jews before and after the last world war. The magazine has been given temporary care of the archive of a Workers' Circle branch at Hackney in east London.

The archive, left by H Melzac, includes minute books written from 1935-39 and 1948-49. In the first book, the notes offer a vivid look at the political and organisational life of the circle's branch number 17.

This ranges from routine matters to members' departures for action in the Spanish civil war. It ends with the war against Germany less than seven months away.

Jewish Socialist plans to publish a feature article based on the minutes in a future issue. We would like to hear from anyone who belonged to this circle branch, or had family, friends or comrades as members.

Information can be sent to the magazine at BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.



LETTER FROM PARIS

You don't need to go to South America to find Nazi war criminals freely roaming the streets. In France too, the establishment's desire to conceal the truth about the Vichy regime is allowing former collaborators to lead largely untroubled lives of luxury. For example, until recently, that passer-by you might have seen walking his dog in the Bois de Boulogne could well have been René Bousquet.

The former Vichy police Secretary General had latterly been living in Paris's wealthy XVIIth arrondissement. A free citizen living at a prestigious address, openly listed in the phone book. The Bousquet story bears witness to the high-level manoeuvring that has gone on behind the scenes ever since the end of the war in an effort to protect former collaborators.

Fondly described by Himmler as the Nazis' 'precious collaborator', it was Bousquet who insisted that, in addition to the adult

members of their families, Jewish children be sent to death camps. Having cut short the lives of thousands of Jews, he himself was able to live to the age of 82. True, in 1949 he was 'tried' for treason. However, despite the initial imposition of a five-year sentence, the legal and political wrangling surrounding the trial resulted in an immediate reprieve.

Why he was not charged with murder is not clear. Arguably, a conviction on that count would have been easier to obtain. Perhaps the reason why the authorities tried him on the more complicated charge of treason was in order to secure his acquittal. Intended or not, that was the end result, leaving him a free man to pursue a career in banking at the Banque d'Indochine.

Not until 1992, and only following years of campaigning and pressure by Jewish groups, was he charged with crimes against humanity. By this time, he

was in his early eighties. Conveniently for all those with an interest in burying the truth about Vichy, and blocking the war crimes trials of French nationals, his trial never took place. On 8 June 1993, he was killed by an allegedly deranged killer, who had also tried to assassinate Klaus Barbie in 1978.

There appear to be mandarins in the French state who are simply waiting for all the former Nazi collaborators – along with those who could testify against them in court – to die off. When genuine Holocaust historians and the broadcasting media are no longer able to draw on the testimonies of living Jews, information on the subject will become the preserve of printed publications. Given the increasing importance of television and the corresponding decline in reading, the revisionists will have an easier task.

Faced with this conspiracy of silence, there are many Jews who are nevertheless determined to bring these matters out into the open, like Serge Klarsfeld the lawyer and historian who was instrumental in bringing Barbie to trial. Without doubt, there has been progress. As a result of campaigning, 16 July was recently made a national day of commemoration in France to mark the date on which Jews were rounded up at the Vel d'Hiv stadium in the XVth for deportation to concentration camps.

Of course, there have been setbacks, too, such as the Bousquet case and the recent Demjanjuk fiasco. But the fight goes on, young and old recognise their duty to the past and to the future to help see to it that war criminals are brought to account while there is still time. The revisionists must be discredited and the truth

told, and war crimes trials provide one way of doing so. It is still not too late for ex-collaborators to be dragged out of respectable Paris neighbourhoods or the darker recesses of the church, brought to trial and subjected to public scrutiny. Only sustained public pressure will bring this about.

There are other former collaborators such as Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon who are also being allowed to escape justice as a result of administrative delaying tactics, and there are many reasons for the cover-up. For Mitterrand, it may well be the misguided attempt to be remembered as the one who sought to heal the wounds of history by 'letting bygones be bygones'.

However, there are clearly other motives: the desire to conceal the extent of French collaboration with the Nazis in terms of the numbers involved and acts committed; the desire to conceal the lingering admiration for Pétain's espoused values and choices; and not least, the desire to conceal the lingering undercurrent of antisemitism in certain strata of French society, whereby Vichy persecution of the Jews is condoned to this day and the likes of Bousquet, far from being war criminals, are national heroes.

Bringing matters up to date, there is a further very good reason why Bousquet ought to have been brought to trial: namely, to educate young people currently being attracted by resurgent nationalism and fascism throughout Europe. They will only see the latest generation of fascists, containing the likes of Le Pen, for what it is, and reject it, if they know the reality of what has been done in the name of such movements, and in France's case in the name of Vichy. And it can only be to France's ultimate credit if that reality is brought out into the open and the Bousquet syndrome brought to an end.

Anthony Blend

WINNIE THE POOH

'Few have a greater interest in keeping good race relations than the Jewish people,' admonishes Tory MP Winston Churchill, after raving once again – this time to members of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women (AJEX) – about the supposedly 'relentless flow' of Asian and Afro-Caribbean immigrants. If the government didn't take urgent action against them, there would be 'the sort of ethnic violence we have witnessed in Germany, or worse,' warned the member of Davyhulme; a Churchill for appeasing the Nazis!

Former Home Secretary Kenneth Baker warned Jews who opposed his Asylum Bill that they risked inflaming new-Nazi violence. I get the nasty feeling that what these gentlemen mean by 'good race relations' is everyone knowing their place. Their friendly warnings sound like a threat. But Mr Churchill, a member of the Conservative Friends of Israel, drew some applause from his AJEX audience and says he felt 'most were in favour of what I was saying'.

Time was when Jewish ex-servicemen and women were renowned for fighting racism, not providing a platform for those who incite it. AJEX has condemned Churchill's speech, but his crackpot views were already notorious when Westminster AJEX invited him to repeat them. A few years ago, replying to attacks on us in AJEX's *Action Briefing*, the Jewish Socialists' Group warned that an obsession with 'enemies within' (left-wing Jews who criticise Israel) was undermining the Jewish community's alertness to real threats. The sentries were looking the wrong bloody way!

SAFE SACKS

They may dislike dinosaurs (as rivals), but we can't accuse our orthodox leaders of being entirely out of touch with modern science. Some US scientists think they have detected a genetic basis for male homosexuality. In line with Jewish tradition, it's passed via

dybbuk's diary

the mother. Ex-Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits has been quick to back genetic engineering to eradicate the trait for 'therapeutic' reasons.

Jews shouldn't need reminding where breeding certain types of people and eradicating others can lead. In my view, what's needed is more attention to childhood influences, social factors, and education, so that tendencies towards excessive religiosity can be spotted early, and nipped in the beard.

FAX TO THE WALL

It isn't only medical ethics and genetic engineering. There must be a whole department of rabbinical study keeping up with office technology and deducing what the Torah might say – sort of canon law – on photocopiers for example.

After some senior officials, including town clerk Aharon Ben-Ari, died, the Israeli municipality of Lod (once the Palestinian municipality of Lydda) called in the Chabad Hasidim to inspect the town hall mezzuzot. It's no good just having the words on your doorpost. They must be written by an approved scribe, or else. 'Some of the mezzuzot had only photocopies of prayers in them,' said a shocked municipal spokesman. 'In others the prayers were written incorrectly.' One of the *treife* (non-kosher) mezzuzot was found on Aharon Ben-Ari's door. I hope his family sued.

Recently, however, Israel's Chief Rabbis have given their *hekhsher* (seal of approval) to an enterprising use of modern technology by telephone company Bezek to 'strengthen the connection between Israel and the diaspora'. Many

religious Jews praying at the Western Wall insert written requests to the Almighty between the stones. Although unable to install a direct line to heaven, Bezek now lets you save air fares and the *shlep* to the Wall, by faxing your message to Bezek. 'We just fold them up and put them in this bag, and our driver takes them to the Wall in the evening,' explains Ovadia. But what about collecting replies?

PARTY POOPER

It's said that Britain's first woman prime minister might not have been selected as parliamentary candidate if the alternative facing Finchley Conservatives hadn't been Peter Goldman, blamed for losing Orpington. 'What a choice, a Goldman or a bloody woman!' expostulated one of the blimps in the constituency association. The local golf club used to bar Jews. Knowing what it is to have to try harder, Thatcher promoted an unprecedented number of our misguided 'brethren' to cabinet posts where they could show their gratitude by doing her dirty work. It's a wonder she didn't propose Jakobovits for Archbishop of Canterbury. Alan Clark, her former bongo-expert, minister for arms sales to Iraq and cocktail guest of David Irving, says 'antisemitism is still rife among Conservatives'. Many told him there were 'too many Jews' in their party. Funny, that's just what we felt!

It's a shame the former member for Finchley didn't brief the MP for Sutton and Cheam, Lady Olga Maitland, about the ethnic make-up of north-west London. Lady Olga, co-founder of Families, Nannies and Labradors to Keep the Bomb

and foe to terror (from Sutton child delinquents or the House of Commons mice) was telling a Tory ladies' lunch audience the other day how religious education has degegerated in state schools. Most children can't recite the Lord's prayer, she claimed. Christianity had been relegated for a 'Cook's tour of world religions like Hinduism, Sikhism and, er, Judaism'. It might have gone down in East Cheam, but the ladies in the Golders Green restaurant nearly choked on their lokshen pudding.

RED LETTERS

The Consumers' Association has tested 17,000 condoms (by mechanical means, I hasten to add), finding nine out of 34 brands unreliable, some with British Standard kitemarks. I expect the late Professor Hyman Levy would have approved such research and not just as a scientist and mathematician. I've just been rereading his *Jews and the National Question* (1958), which packed more knowledge and good socialist sense into less than 100 pages than some authors manage in volumes.

Before he broke with the Communist Party, Professor Levy, a popular Marxist educator and member of the Party's Jewish committee, took part in a visit to the Soviet Union in 1956 and sought to advertise his critical report in the *Daily Worker*. He was told he had no right to do this, because it hadn't been seen and approved by the party leadership.

'But doesn't the *Daily Worker* carry adverts for contraceptives?' asked Professor Levy. 'Er yes' In those days it was one of the few papers that did, and the suppliers were one of the paper's few sources of advertising revenue. 'Well,' said the professor, 'do you mean to tell me these are all tested first by the party central committee?'

Incidentally, I see that one of the brands that failed is flavoured. Are condoms classed as oral contraceptives or do they double as balloons? And if kosher, would the Beth Din supply them with a Yiddishkite mark?



Street life – but who's allowed to walk free in Paris?

DONOR CHOICES

JS In the past year the JSG ran a discussion through articles and meetings on the theme of what makes us Jewish: environment or genes? A focus of the discussion was the 'choices' made by Jewish lesbians seeking donors. I have subsequently discovered that the editorial group made a decision that women using the magazine to advertise for donors could not actually specify 'Jewish' as it contravened the editorial policy. I know of two lesbian couples, who have abided by that policy, advertised for a donor, and got absolutely no response.

The JSG is a predominantly heterosexual and heterosexist group. The recent readership questionnaire did not address its gay readership – we were offered a wide variety of publications which we might be expected to read, but no *Pink Paper*, *Lesbian London* or other gay/lesbian paper. We were asked if we were male or female, but not our sexuality. Lesbians and gays were made invisible. Yet this same editorial collective feels itself entitled to have an opinion

on issues which clearly do not touch it personally.

It is good that a straight group tries to raise issues which concern the lesbian and gay community and to offer support to that community. But I don't feel that last year's JSG discussions did that. To be blunt, I feel that lesbians were used more than they helped.

To be faced with 'choosing' a donor raises many issues for a lesbian. What makes a parent, let alone what makes a Jew? Do children need fathers? And however long the angling, the chances of getting exactly what you're looking for are slim.

If JSG members wish to challenge themselves re ideas of heredity and notions of Jewishness, I would suggest they start with questions which do touch them personally. Like how do JSG men feel about giving sperm? How would you feel about giving your sperm to a non-Jewish couple, where the child will not be given a Jewish identity? Do JSG women feel that their menfolk should donate sperm to help lesbians have families, or does that sperm belong to the heterosexual couple/nuclear family?

The discussion did at times seem to imply that a

Jewish lesbian using a Jewish sperm could somehow invisibilise the donor. Is this based on an assumption that all non-Jewish donors are white? That all Jews have partners whose identity is less significant than our own? Does the JSG hope to create a community which welcomes mixed race black Jewish children. Of lesbian couples? How do we create a multiracial, mutually respectful community?

If heterosexual Jews wish to support lesbian and gay Jews, please begin in your own backyard. Examine what you really feel about your sperm or your partner's sperm being used for donor insemination. How stuck in the nuclear family are you? Challenge yourselves before you legislate about our choices. Know your limitations. Until you have created a community which actively promotes the forming of lesbian/gay 'pretend' families, which is fully accessible to children of mixed heritage, (and which puts its sperm where its mouth is!) then at least have the respect to leave us to make our own decisions and deal with our own (in reality, lack of) 'choices'.

Nikki Freeling
Hackney

NO EPIDEMIC

JS In response to your article on Hepatitis A in Hackney (JS28), first there is currently no evidence of an epidemic of Hepatitis A anywhere in Hackney at present, although it is entirely possible that cases may arise in future. Second, we agreed to preserve the anonymity of the community involved in the earlier epidemic – because this was the expressed wish of the community leaders we worked with. Unlike the authors of the article, we took the view then as now, that if a community wishes to preserve its anonymity on any health issue, we should

not challenge this right – unless it poses a threat to public health. In the case of the Stamford Hill Hassidic community, this agreement on our part was a prerequisite for promoting effective public health action during the epidemic periods. Through the trust we built we are able to promote the wider health education messages needed in synagogues, schools and community newspapers, as well as achieve a high uptake rate for immunisation against hepatitis and co-operation in the vaccine trial we are developing.

This sensitivity to community wishes is a model we try to pursue in practice, as local experience has shown that however intellectually

attractive it is to 'bring things out into the open' as the article put it, our primary goal was to prevent the spread of an infectious disease as well as avert the real threat of an antisemitic backlash which this community was already experiencing.

Finally, your assertion that wider community prevention was needed is in fact wrong. During the epidemic, there was not a single case of Hepatitis A that occurred outside the Hassidic community – which was why we felt justified in focusing our preventive action where it was likely to be effective.

Dr Bobbie Jacobson
Director of Public Health
East London and the City
Health Authority

PRIME CUTS

JS What's happened to your reviewer Ruth Lukom's sense of humour? Did she think that *Leon the Pig Farmer* should have been some sort of tract? Or a deep psychological analysis of the pig industry? It was a joke, for heaven's sake.

It plays with clichés – the Yorkshire tykes turn miraculously into Jewish types – always twisting the joke just one further. When the two families finally meet, the Armitages fall over themselves to behave Jewish, and Leon's other parents behave *goyish* – all, endearingly, out of affection for Leon. The turning upside down of clichés, with good humour into the bargain.

The ludicrous is the solemn basis of the plot: just as in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, where both heroines state they could only possibly marry a man called Ernest; so here Leon's beloved hates two things: net curtains and estate agents, and couldn't think of going out with anyone who didn't feel the same. Leon is an estate agent whose father manufactures net curtains. A Born Loser, in fact.

His being Jewish, the girl unexpectedly admires – rather as Lady Bracknell approves of Jack's smoking. Leon, the Harmless Innocent, is a cliché himself – but then so is Candide. The film refuses to take a Lefty-Jew or Righty-Jew attitude: it laughs at everyone. Some other reviewers were uneasy about this: where does the director stand? they complained. Does he like some Jews or no Jews or all Jews? Why can't we tell? It is almost as bad as a Jewish periodical that doesn't support Israel, isn't it?

John Roe
Brazil

● Send your letters to:
Jewish Socialist, BM 3725,
London WC1N 3XX

After Washington

Palestinian anguish over the fact that the recent Palestinian-Israeli agreements fall painfully short of fulfilling many basic and clearly valid demands is totally justified. Almost every conceivable argument against the agreement is valid except for one, rarely, if ever, voiced: the claim that there is a viable alternative way of realising Palestinian rights and dreams. No such alternative currently exists.

The Israeli people will have to recognise that exclusive dependence on a peace built on the basis of Palestinian military and strategic weakness is counter-productive and cannot reap the harvest of peace for both peoples.

Even the 'Rabin forces' in the Israeli peace coalition will have to acknowledge that there is a whole world out there that can be built on common interests and mutual beneficial action. Moreover,

it has to be clear, a least among the more consistent and militant elements in the Israeli peace camp that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state is a *sine qua non* for peace between the peoples and that such a peace will include the Palestinian right for sovereignty in Jerusalem, the eventual dismantling of settlements and the elimination of the destructive potential of settler provocation.

The Palestinians themselves must decide how they respond to present challenges. However, I would like to focus on issues that

appear in the context of Marxist discourse on the Palestinian question which bear on the present debate. These issues are important for Israeli and Palestinian Marxists alike and for others concerned with the relationship between national liberation and social transformation.

Marxists have, even now, a common vision for the Middle East. This region which provides resources that oil the wheels of international capitalism must undergo, sooner or later, a basic transformation of its dominant social relations. This transformation will be the real foundation for progress in the region. Eventually we can and should live in a united federation of peoples in the area, where all national and ethnic groups will enjoy full equality. But many who share this vision are bitterly divided about the current Israeli-Palestinian accords.

In Israeli Marxist circles, there was a serious debate – before and after the Camp David Accords – about our attitude to what we called 'bourgeois peace.' It was clear even then that the only concrete perspective for Palestinian and Arab Israeli peace involved an agreement between the conservative or even reactionary forces in the Arab world and the pro-US regime in Israel and this agreement could only be brokered, if at all, by the United States. If there was any strategic sense, at all, to rejectionist concepts (associated with the PFLP and the DFLP), it was linked to the potential of the Arab national liberation movement in a period characterised by contradictions between two super powers, one of which declared its full commitment to the Palestinian and Arab causes.

Now the rejectionists are telling us that the recent Israeli-Palestinian agreement is unsatisfactory because it reflects the present unfavourable balance of forces. This 'discovery' cannot hide the fact that, historically speaking, the rejectionist strategy was based on a perspective that the relation of forces would improve, that progressive changes in the Arab world were imminent, that the anti-imperialist coalition would weaken imperialism and Israel. This has not occurred. We cannot blame the rejectionists for this but we can ask why they maintain their stance when there is no serious possibility for a major change in the relation of forces in the foreseeable future.

Everyone, the rejectionists included, understood that the peace process, the Madrid meeting, the Washington talks meant Palestinian willingness to negotiate the best possible agreement – in the given (unfavourable) relation of forces. Perhaps a more democratic, efficient and experienced PLO could have been more successful in the negotiations. But the agreement could not have avoided reflecting the relation of forces that dominated the negotiations up to the White House lawn ceremony.

The rejectionists made a serious mistake in principle when they rejected the advice of others in the Palestinian and Arab Left that Jewish self-determination in Palestine was both legitimate and irreversible. Had we been spared the rejectionist phraseology, the many capable and devoted cadres

Israeli-Palestinian peace must be built between the two peoples not just their leaders, says Israeli socialist Reuven Kaminer

'The establishment of a Palestinian state is a *sine qua non* for peace between the peoples...'



Can the Israeli peace movement broaden its support?

of the PFLP and the DFLP could have made the PLO two-state strategy more effective, gained more for the Palestinian cause and helped build stronger links between the PLO and the Israeli peace movement. One fears that the present surge of neo-rejectionism will push the PFLP and the DFLP down the sterile road of internecine struggle, to the deep satisfaction of the enemies of the Palestinian people.

Of course, this is not an agreement between equals and it is not full mutual recognition. The Israeli side is still far from reaching a 'historic compromise'. However, when these points are made without taking a clear stand on the agreement, these honest doubts become grist for the rejectionist mill. Isn't taking a clear stand about momentous events with immediate strategic and tactical implications the first axiom of political morality?

Clearly, the present agreement fails to meet many vital, justified Palestinian demands. Peace and justice require the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. The Palestinians have just as much right to have their capital in Jerusalem as anyone else. Palestinians must have full sovereignty over the land presently occupied by the settlements and settler provocations must be nipped in the bud. However, the agreement is a serious step forward, and I value the decision of the (majority of the) PLO to accept the agreement as the best alternative in the given circumstances. The new situation created by the agreement, despite its shortcomings, affords tremendous potential for advancing the struggle for a just and lasting peace.

In these new realities, we vitally need a strong and principled peace movement in Israel and groups which dare to dream of building a Palestinian-Israeli future on the principles of humanism and internationalism.

Ten days after the ceremony on the South lawn of the White House, the Israeli Knesset gave a vote of confidence to the Rabin government. The coalition (Labour and Meretz) minus the SHAS (Mizrahi [Sephardic] Orthodox) party, but with the aid of five members of five members of the Arab Democratic Party and the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality constituted the majority. SHAS bolted but did not run and three additional abstentions by members of the Likud made Rabin's majority more impressive.

You don't have to be a confirmed Marxist to sense the class overtones of the vote ratifying the Israeli-

Palestinian agreements. In broad terms, Israel's bourgeoisie, its enormous profession-based petty-bourgeoisie and the more affluent sections of the working class backed Rabin. You can subtract from these strata large sections of the Israeli right, namely those people with clear ideological affinities to the secular and religious versions of the 'Greater Israel' myth.

The peace coalition is still weak on roots among the urban masses and in most of the Sephardic petty-bourgeoisie. Before the vote, democrats and liberals were understandably disgusted by the nauseating, racist campaign by the Right to prove that, without the Arab MKs, then the Right, not Rabin, would have a parliamentary majority. The Right called, accordingly, for mass demonstrations of the 'Jewish majority'. Actually, the abstention of seven Jewish MKs gave the government a majority even according to apartheid logic. The democratic defence of the constitutional validity of the government majority – which was part of an intense struggle against the nationalist Right – should not blind us to structural weaknesses in the pro-peace camp in Israel.

The mass of the Right's voters are not advocates of the political messianism which inspires the settlers, who have become the shock troops and mass base of resistance to peace. Likud made a serious tactical mistake by letting the settler Right set the tactical and strategic tone of the campaign against the government. More and more indicators – including public opinion polls – indicated that many Likud voters were willing, despite their scepticism, to give the government a chance to prove itself. This same mood prevailed among the SHAS voters and influenced the SHAS decision to abstain – keeping their lines to Rabin open while simultaneously proving to their constituencies that they do not accept the Meretz line on peace questions. Many in the peace camp are bitter about the SHAS vacillations, especially since this group seems particularly adept at satisfying its own needs and clerical interests. However, these reproaches ignore the importance of SHAS's dovish tendencies, given SHAS's mass base in the urban Sephardic poor. The same lack of sensitivity allowed Meretz to drag themselves into avoidable quarrels with their clerical coalition partners. If Meretz wants to lead the peace camp, it cannot allow a situation where only Rabin and his supporters maintain correct relations with SHAS, even taking into account that SHAS is indeed a fundamentalist-clerical formation.

The consistent peace forces cannot simply rely on a majority built around Rabin's personal prestige. There is a dangerous gap between Palestinian minimum, justifiable needs and Rabin's stated positions on Palestinian statehood, Jerusalem, and the settlements. There is some hope that Rabin will be able to 'go all the way' to a comprehensive and just peace. But this will depend on the energy and the tact of a strong consistent peace camp doing anything and everything to widen its social base. This means fighting for a social-economic peace dividend in Israel and finding ways to develop the idea and practice of a people's peace between the Israeli and Palestinian masses – in much the same way that the peace camp fostered dialogue and solidarity between Israeli peace activists and Palestinians suffering under the yoke of the occupation.

From Jericho to Jerusalem

The 'agreement in principle' between Israel and the PLO over mutual recognition and limited autonomy for Gaza and Jericho has led to considerable controversy. Underlying the sound and fury is the recognition that this symbolic act propels both parties into a new and uncertain future relationship. The stakes have been raised to a new higher level. We have now entered the 'transitional period', but towards what kind of 'sustainable' settlement is a matter of fierce disagreement.

Two propositions may help to clarify matters. The first is that the 'symbolic' exchange of mutual recognition is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for substantive movement. The accords that were signed in Washington signal explicit political and public recognition that moves towards a negotiated peace settlement. They cannot be reversed, unless either the rejectionists on both sides bring their campaigns against their own peoples and each other to a level of violence that forces a breakdown or the political leaderships and their allies on both sides fail, within a short time, to 'deliver the goods' to the great majority of the Palestinian people.

The second point concerns the meaning of 'sustainable' within the eventual settlement. The transformation of a *de facto* Palestinian government-in-exile to a *de jure* government-in-residence continues the process, precipitated by the *intifada* and influenced by global shifts, by which Israeli 'colonial' occupation is being succeeded by Palestinian political authority. While great resistance remains to be overcome, the logic of the process is the eventual emergence of a Palestinian 'sovereign' state, with a government recognised after democratic elections, and with whatever interstate relations – particularly with Israel and Jordan – are acceptable after negotiations. This is the minimum sustainable basis for 'normalised' relations in the region.

To accomplish the move from symbolic recognition of, and by, the Palestinian national movement, to the emergence of a viable Palestinian state – acknowledged by its own people, by the Israeli government and people, and by the international community – will require an immense concerted effort.

It will require considerable political will, tenacious internal and external negotiation, effective political and administrative organisation, very large amounts of money and accelerated programmes of development in every sector of the economy and society. Most of all it will demand imagination in facing the issues so far left aside for future consideration. Time is short, not only for making an impact on the real lives and living conditions of the people of Gaza, Jericho and the West Bank in general, but also for finding ways to deal with so far unresolved conflicts over the future shape of Palestine alongside Israel.

Two areas of conflict must be faced by all those supporting the transition to a peacefully attained

viable statehood. One concerns the future shape of the new state as a whole; the other, the future status of Jerusalem.

Of all the matters that will influence the successful emergence of a new state of Palestine, the two most significant are the closely related demographic and economic – the 'demand' and 'supply' conditions of sustainable statehood.

On the demand side one half of the problem relates to the basic needs and rising expectations of a majority of residents of the West Bank and Gaza. The advances made by middle-class Palestinians have been beyond the reach of the vast majority of those working the land, in the towns or the refugee camps. Conditions in Gaza and to a lesser extent elsewhere are desperate, with hundreds of thousands suffering deprivation, destitution, discrimination and oppression. They want to participate in deciding on their own political future and enjoy the enhanced life chances that a political settlement should bring. Democratic and economic 'deficits' must be rectified in parallel.

The other half of the problem will require an even more radical reorientation, not least on the part of both Israel and other states in the region: the return of substantial numbers of Palestinian refugees. No representative Palestinian national government could do less for its diaspora than the Israelis have done for theirs. All Palestinians must have a formal right to live in their own country, whatever the choice they may actually make. Clearly, substantial numbers would wish to return to participate in political and economic opportunities not available to them elsewhere.

The twin demands for basic needs and expectations, and for absorbing refugees and expatriates, set an agenda for economic and social development that cannot be met on the current basis. The economic viability and environmental sustainability of a Palestinian state between Israel and Jordan will depend on a wholesale reorientation of thinking about the future of the region. To supply both the basic needs and opportunities of the Palestinian population, and the wherewithal of state-building, will need a rapid and radical transformation of the economy and of its investment and trade relations with the rest of the world. Today, the West Bank and Gaza can barely support its existing population. Within ten years it might have to provide improved employment opportunities and living conditions for double that number.

The only answer lies in a sophisticated duplication or small or city-state economic developments from Puerto Rico to Singapore, and an even more carefully judged mixture of finance, investment, trade and employment relations with Israel. For Palestinians, as with Israelis, the cultural and symbolic attachment to territory needs to be divorced from political and economic dependence on exclusive claims to it, and to notions of 'security' that go with these. This does not ignore the need for

A sustainable settlement between Israel and Palestine must move swiftly beyond limited autonomy, says Michael Safier

negotiation, remuneration or compensation over land occupation and seizure in 'the territories', nor the 'special case' of the 'settlers'. It is to argue that the future of a peaceful and prosperous Palestine – as also Israel, Jordan and Lebanon – lies in reorganisation of its resources, primarily its own people, to establish a viable niche in an increasingly competitive world market. New industries, new technologies, new patterns of trade and tourism will need to be accompanied by appropriate social policies and redistributive mechanisms, and by the successful management of rapid urbanisation. No other scenarios are remotely adequate to the magnitude and quality of the development needed to underpin a sustainable political settlement.

The question of the future of Jerusalem remains firmly off the formal agenda of the transitional period, although the agreement on a mutual commission on access to Jerusalem, agreed between Arafat and Rabin, is a timid first step. It is equally clear that there can be no negotiated settlement or emergence of a Palestinian state without agreement over the city. This is the most difficult issue dividing the two sides and will need the most sophisticated of solutions – which could be the capstone on a viable and peaceful future for both peoples.

The situation at present is still moving in the opposite direction. The 'creation of facts on the ground' leading to the further 'Judaisation' of East Jerusalem continues; the prohibition on Palestinian developments is still in force; and plans for the further extension and 'settlement' of metropolitan Jerusalem are in the pipeline. But it is widely recognised, even in Israeli government circles, that a new turn is needed. The reasons are simple and stark.

Jerusalem is the single strategic city for both Israelis and Palestinians in terms of development of national identities and political recognition. Any sustainable solution to its future status must recognise that neither of the two governments or peoples will give up the city as their respective national capitals; any political viable status must preserve the city, open and undivided; and that there will need to be a substantial increase in the Palestinian population and development to bring about a more balanced representation of both peoples within the eventual civic boundaries. This implies a search for a form of shared sovereignty and arrangements for dual administration within a unified metropolitan and municipal area, in which all Jerusalemites have a common and equal set of individual, social and communal rights and representation. Any proposed solution will have to deal with issues of land and infrastructure development, housing and services, employment opportunities, community and neighbourhood organisation, religious affiliations, security and policing, the resolution of conflicts and the development of the 'old' city and its holy places.

There are no quick and easy solutions. The outlines of possible reconciliation of interests and positions have, however, already been prefigured in informal discussions between Jerusalemites and others. What remains is to convince the official parties and the two peoples that a united city shared by both is feasible and desirable, and to make the image of a Palestinian parliament on a hill across from the Knesset seem not just thinkable but a matter of commonsense expectation.

When a guest on *Gabi Gazit*, Israel's best-loved television chat show, said he did not believe torture occurred in Israel, the studio audience burst into applause. His comment followed a plea to viewers by Dr Ruhama Marton of the Association of Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights to remember that while they were sitting in their comfortable homes someone somewhere was screaming in pain or shaking with fear.

The applause was particularly perverse because sitting next to Marton was Hasan Zbeide, a man unable to speak or move of his own free will. Zbeide, a Palestinian from Anabta in the West Bank, graduate and father of four, was held for a month in Tulkarm prison and released in this cataclysmic state.

Israel is perhaps the only state which uses torture systematically and in which it is possible to write articles, release reports, hold conferences and chat on television freely on the matter.

Information on the nature and extent of torture has been available for several years, but there has been no outcry. The government, the liberal middle classes and most of the population are united in resisting accusations of torture. Activism on this supposedly liberal issue has been left to small human rights groups often perceived as being associated with the far left. At the root of this denial is deep conformism created by Israel's siege mentality, where faith in the ability and morality of the security forces is synonymous with love for your nation.

When Zbeide was taken to a civilian hospital before his release, psychiatrists examining him wrote on his medical records that he was 'pretending'. Doctors, whose Hippocratic oath commits them to putting patients' interests above all else and who are the only independent group with access to detainees, might be expected to act as watchdogs against torture. In northern Ireland, doctors insisted small windows be installed in the doors of all interrogation rooms to let them look in at will.

Yet Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) does not know of a single medic in Israeli detention facilities who has come forward to condemn what he or she sees during the examinations which take place before and after every interrogation. The nearest thing has been a doctor who told PHR he was ostracised on his kibbutz after refusing to serve his reserve duty in a Gaza jail. An atmosphere exists in Israel in which it is more acceptable to torture than speak out against torture.

But despite the heavy taboo the debate is slowly opening up. PHR recently organised a groundbreaking conference in which medical experts and victims of torture spoke out against the lies and denials.

As Professor Stanley Cohen of the Hebrew University says, 'democracies have to find complicated rationalisations for violating their stated norms'. Cohen observes that most Israelis will respond to allegations of the use of torture with one or a combination of three seemingly contradictory arguments. The most common is denial – 'it doesn't happen here'. The second is 'what is hap-

Tortuous denials

pening is not really torture', and the third, 'what is happening is legitimate'.

The first response, which simply assumes those pointing the finger to be lying, resembles a form of cognitive dissonance – a refusal to take in that which is extremely uncomfortable. Thus, much of the debate on torture revolves around factual proof, a difficult area as torture methods are often aimed at breaking the spirit rather than the body.

A survey of 500 released detainees published by Gazan psychiatrist Dr Eyad Sarraj last May lists methods of torture including: beating, prolonged standing, being held in extreme cold or heat (in small cells known as 'refrigerator' and 'oven'), being stretched, suspended, choked, tied in uncomfortable positions and pressure to the testicles. Physical violence is supplemented by other methods – smearing with faeces, forced nakedness, sleep deprivation, denial of food and water, being subjected to continuous or intense noise and light. Such psychological abuse can be as devastating as the purely physical kind but extremely difficult to prove.

And so the testimonies of hundreds of Palestinians are not sufficiently convincing and corroboration from more 'reliable' sources is deemed necessary. An example is controversy over medical fitness forms – more appropriately known as the 'fitness for torture' forms – used by prison doctors when examining detainees before interrogation and intended to guarantee a prisoner's fitness to be interrogated.

The form has a multiple-choice layout and the doctor is simply required to circle 'yes' or 'no' to the question of whether there are any limitations on the prisoner being chained, held in isolation, having his or her head/eyes covered and being subjected to prolonged standing.

PHR, whose caseload contains many allegations of more severe torture than the options presumed in the form, tried for several years to pressure the Israeli Medical Association, an influential union with a membership of 13,000, to take a stand and advise members not to collaborate in the use of torture.

PHR's advances always met with a polite but limited response from the IMA's ethics committee until it obtained a copy of a used 'fitness form'. Faced with such hard evidence, IMA president Dr Miriam Tzangen wrote a strongly-worded letter to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin forbidding doctors from filling out such forms and declaring them to be 'co-operation in torture'.

The second argument – 'it's not really torture' – is based on a similar level of self-delusion. Israel's



You can talk about torture on Israeli television and read about it in reports, but where is the public outcry? Nogah Ofer reports

primary official source on the issue – the Landau Commission report of 1987 – purports to outlaw torture but makes legal 'moderate physical pressure'. A secret appendix to the report explains 'moderate physical pressure' but cannot be made public for 'security reasons'.

The term is nonsensical. Pressure is supposed to force suspects to release information they would rather keep secret. 'Moderate' pressure can be withstood and so any pressure that cannot be withstood cannot be 'moderate'.

In the final 'it's legitimate' argument, the story of the terrorist who knows where he has placed a ticking bomb is usually cited. It is suggested we should be prepared to inflict suffering on one person to save the lives of others.

Even if this argument were acceptable – and innumerable international declarations and treaties (most ratified by Israel) say it is not, even in 'exceptional circumstances' – torture in Israel is largely used to extract confessions for past actions rather than information about future events.

As Israel enters negotiations with the PLO, its position on torture looks increasingly untenable. It is time for Israelis to face the truth.

● The Association of Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights, POB 10235 Tel Aviv 61101. Tel 972-3-5241828

Know your enemy

The relatively small size of fascist groups in Britain provides no grounds for complacency, says Reuben Goldberg, in an article written before Derek Beackon's election victory in Millwall and updated since

On the face of it, Britain seems to be the exception that proves the rule where racist and fascist organisations are concerned. Unlike other European countries, we do not have fascist or extreme-right racist parties regularly getting 10-20% of the vote in elections. There are no fascist MPs or MEPs, though the first British National Party local councillor was elected recently in Millwall. Few people seem particularly aware or worried about what's going on 'over there' in the Europe of which we are supposedly now a part, and most seem to assume that it couldn't happen here.

The response to this of some busy groups of anti-fascists is to become frantic and hyperactive – to adopt perspectives which suggest we are on the edge of catastrophe. Such alarmism and exaggeration, while understandable, feeds, rather than corrects, the complacency of the majority.

Less than 20 years ago the situation was very different. In the 1970s, Britain, alone of all the major countries in Europe, saw the rise of fascist groups into a credible 'third force' in politics. These groups were gaining hundreds of thousands of votes in local and national parliamentary elections; in some areas they beat the Liberals into third place and even, very briefly, had two councillors elected in Blackburn, Lancashire.

Along with this rise in fascist votes came the rise in fascist and racist murders and physical attacks. Yet by the 1979 general election the fascists had declined electorally and organisationally, and were splintering into different groups. The whole thing could, therefore, be happily dismissed by many as a freak occurrence. The basic stability of British institutions and the 'sound common sense of ordinary British people' had been re-affirmed, which meant, of course, that we could ignore the day-to-day racism of immigration laws and racial discrimination, and act as if the increase in the fascist vote had never happened.

However, for a brief period Britain had shown that it *could* produce a fascist party stronger than most of those in Europe at that time. It may not seem very significant, particularly when seen from today's perspective, but it nevertheless shows that the view of Britain as being more tolerant and stable than other European states is a myth.

There were three major reasons why this rise in the fascist vote ended so quickly. Firstly there is the peculiar nature of Britain's electoral system which has no form of proportional representation, making it exceptionally hard for even a third party, let alone a fourth party, to establish itself as worth voting for. The damage that fascist groups could have done if they had been elected to town councils up and down the country is clearer today than ever in view of events in Europe.

Secondly there was a broad-based and effective anti-fascist and anti-racist movement which managed to communicate two related messages. One was that what the mass media coyly described as 'far right' parties were in fact fascist parties. They were led by people who, in the 1960s, had marched in Nazi uniforms, complete with swastika armbands; who had been photographed giving Hitler salutes and been arrested for organising paramilitary groups which attacked synagogues. The other message was that people with this sort of politics were inciting race hatred and murder and were using racism to try to destroy democracy and thus should *not* be allowed the normal democratic rights of free speech and freedom to organise. The campaign led to many organisations and local authorities banning fascist groups from using their facilities. While the vast majority of these councils were Labour-controlled, as the movement got under way some Liberal, and even a few Conservative, councils also imposed bans.

This was accompanied by mass mobilisations which tried physically to stop the fascists marching or meeting. Even where they did not halt the fascists, they almost always helped to strengthen the movement against them. They conveyed the real aims of such organisations as the National Front, at that time the main fascist group, which, despite marching through certain areas with the deliberate intention of intimidating black or Jewish people, tried to present themselves as respectable, and to deny that they were fascist or even racist.

By denying them respectability and the normal rights to organise that would have enabled them to grow, anti-fascists played a major role in putting organised racist political groups 'beyond the pale'.

Less reassuring is the third major reason for the slump in fascist support. The Conservative Party won the 1979 general election with the help of an immigration policy that was further to the right than any post-war Tory government had, up to then, thought feasible. A

key element in this new policy's electoral appeal was, quite simply, an open espousal of racism. In the run up to the election, Margaret Thatcher talked of (white 'British') 'people being really rather afraid' of being 'rather swamped by people with a different culture' and therefore being 'rather hostile' towards them. One of the first measures of the new Conservative government was to tighten up Britain's already obscenely racist immigration laws – a process to which they have periodically returned, right up until this year, with the Asylum Bill which attacks refugees' rights, and a High Court ruling following it, which threatens the rights of all black and ethnic minority people to public housing if they become homeless.

'Britain is not immune from the rise of racism and fascism sweeping Europe. It happened in the '70s and can happen again today.'

The first conclusion we can draw from this is that it *can* happen here. Britain is not immune from the rise of racism and fascism sweeping Europe. It happened in the '70s and can happen again today.

Secondly, there is a complex relationship between increasing racism and rising support for fascism. If, in the 1960s, the fascists had gained from the spread of respectable racism with the passing of immigration laws and the demagoguery of Enoch Powell, by the 1970s their rise brought further shifts to the right in Conservative attitudes on race.

Thirdly, we should be aware that there is likely to be a continuing growth in racist and fascist activity. In Britain we have a unique opportunity to learn from the greater rise in fascism elsewhere in Europe. We can organise widespread anti-fascist activity *before* it grows here. But a sense of perspective is crucial: we must avoid either complacency or exaggeration. But if we miss this chance, then the effects could be, quite literally, deadly for individuals. The first signs of a rise in organised racist violence are clear – as is the apparent inability of the anti-fascist movement to put aside its sectarian differences and respond effectively.

There has been a considerable increase in racist attacks and murders, though the evidence suggests that most of them are *not* the direct result of fascist activity. This should remind us that racism is far wider than fascism in Britain today, and that fascism has a potential for growth through its advocacy of race hatred and violence.

The dangers are clear from developments in two areas of London. Tower Hamlets is the only place in the country where the British National Party – now the major fascist party, headed by the same follower of Hitler who previously led the National Front – has gained a significant proportion of the vote. It is no coincidence that this area, where the BNP has just won a council seat and in an earlier local election gained 20% of the vote, has the highest level of reported racial attacks. The party has campaigned on a 'rights for whites' policy which has both cashed in on and encouraged the racism of the Liberal-controlled council.

This council has been taken to court by the Commission for Racial Equality because of its refusal to improve its policies as regards black people. Tower Hamlets has, in turn, gone to court on a number of occasions to try and avoid meeting its obligations. The most recent High Court ruling, mentioned above, is a direct result of this. There is no clearer example of how fascism, racist violence and 'respectable' state racism reinforce each other.

The second area which is achieving notoriety for racist violence is the Greenwich/Eltham/Bexley area of south London where, in the past two years, there have been four racially-inspired murders of black people. Then latest murder shows clear links to the BNP and, since they established their national headquarters in the area, there has been a massive rise in racial attacks there.

These two localities reflect, in an extreme form, a nationwide rise in racist incidents which are

occurring in a climate of mass unemployment, cuts in local services and falling living standards, accompanied by racist press coverage which targets 'bogus' refugees and 'illegal' immigrants, while at the same time distancing itself from the more extreme forms of racism which are used by fascist groups (and even some right wing Conservative MPs like Winston Churchill). The implication is that the state, the immigration and anti-asylum laws, and the mass media are not racist, thus conveniently obscuring the way in which 'respectable' racism both feeds into and draws support from 'unrespectable' racism.

The response of the anti-fascist movement has not, so far, been encouraging. The major grounds for optimism are that the fascists are, at the moment, still very weak and badly organised. If it were not for this

fact, the disunity and rivalries which beset the anti-fascist movement would be not only farcical but also tragic – which they are not *yet*.

In the 1970s there was only one national organisation – the Anti-Nazi League – which emerged at the culmination of a

long process of establishing local organisations and networks. And while it often dishonestly claimed credit for the work of other, locally-based, groups, the choice for most anti-fascists was simple. If one had objections to its politics, there were local groups and networks that remained viable and which could co-operate, or not, with the ANL on an equal basis.

Today, however, there are *three* rival anti-fascist national organisations, each of which claims to be 'the' anti-fascist movement, as well as several more groups which fall somewhere between claiming to be national organisations and being networks. This situation is made worse by the way that these groups seem to spend more time and energy in publicly attacking each other – including attacks through the racist mass media (this is the particular province of the Anti-Racist Alliance) – and in undignified squabbling over who heads a particular demonstration. The result has been that instead of a racist murder resulting in one large, unified march, each organisation calls its own demonstration and then attacks the other groups for being sectarian and divisive.

But the first signs are now appearing that the concern of anti-fascists about such rivalries has begun to push these groups towards a more sensible position. The massive Unity demonstration in Welling in south London on 16 October achieved the support of the vast majority of the local groups and of the national organisations. The outcome of that march, and the implications of the Anti-Racist Alliance joining the police media offensive and sticking to its decision to hold a rival march in central London, must be assessed and discussed in an atmosphere of mutual commitment to a common aim. The need for unity is even more urgent in the aftermath of that event, but it must be a unity which incorporates democratic structures – which acknowledges political differences and does not stifle debate, but also does not allow disagreements to stop us working together on at least a minimal basis.

'Today there are *three* rival anti-fascist national organisations, each of which claims to be "the" anti-fascist movement.'

Reuben Goldberg is Co-ordinator of the Jewish Socialists' Group's Anti-Racist Committee

HERITAGE OF HATE

London's East End has a history of fascism which pre-dates Mosley's blackshirts. David Rosenberg looks at the lessons of the past

As the dust settles on Derek Beackon's local election victory for the British National Party in East London's Millwall ward, a consensus states that the BNP's success can be traced to purely local factors rooted in relatively recent history – a desperate housing shortage, high unemployment and a local Liberal administration that has pandered to racist sentiments in order to maintain grassroots support.

But if these events are examined through a purely local prism, there are surely other factors with a much longer pedigree which need to be acknowledged and understood. This may be the BNP's first electoral success, but the East End has proved to be particularly fertile ground for xenophobic agitation. The BNP is merely the latest incumbents of an unbroken tradition.

I grew up hearing memories of my parents' and grandparents' experience in the area, fighting back against the terror imposed by Mosley's thugs – the British Union of Fascists. My family remembered the daily insults, the provocative marches, the physical assaults, the rallying cries to 'native Britons' to rise up against the 'sub-human creatures', the 'rats and vermin from the gutters of Whitechapel', the 'International Jews' in their midst. The fascist menace compounded the more commonplace daily struggle against poverty.

Unfortunately there were many East End residents only too ready and eager to receive Mosley's gospel. He merely opened the bottle releasing the poison created by an earlier generation of xenophobic pioneers – the British Brothers League, who can lay claim to the mantle of being the East End's first populist-racist organisation. In some ways there are closer parallels between the BNP in Millwall today and the BBL than with the Mosleyites of the intervening period.

The Bengali population in Whitechapel today will draw no comfort from knowing that they are reliving the experience of other communities. There is a long and dishonourable tradition in the East End of absorbing and then turning with a vengeance on immigrant communities. The Bengalis may draw some comfort, though, from knowing that there are other traditions rooted in the East End of fighting back against injustice and oppression.

From 1881, when Tsar Alexander II was assassinated and antisemitic pogroms swept the Russian empire, waves of Jewish immigrants moved west-

wards. Tens of thousands arrived in London's East End. Within a decade the first shoots of resentment and agitation began to emerge. A local hero of the East End labour movement, dockers' leader Ben Tillett, told the Jewish workers who laboured all hours to eke out a living in their new home: 'You are our brothers and we will do our duty by you, but we wish you had not come.'

The TUC was an early opponent of Jewish immigration and passed resolutions at congresses from 1892 urging restriction. Politicians and the press took up the agitation and laid the framework for the BBL to emerge in 1901. Based almost entirely in the East End, it claimed 12,000 members, held huge rallies and marches, leafleted and organised petitions and popularised the sentiments that have plagued every immigrant community since that has had the temerity to settle this tiny corner of the earth that 'native' Eastenders proclaimed as their own.

Reading the resolutions and speeches of BBL leaders induces a depressing sense of familiarity, offset slightly by the knowledge that the far right have added little in sophistication to their propaganda over the last 100 years. Their banners proclaimed: 'Britain for the British'; their speakers claimed that 'Jewish immigration into Stepney has driven natives from the home of their birth', and warned that they 'would not have this country made the dumping ground for the scum of Europe'; their resolutions alleged that the 'housing problem of London is insoluble until the immigration of the foreign houseless poor is prevented'. Leafing through the local Liberals' propaganda of recent years with their calls for 'the Island for the Islanders' (Isle of Dogs) and their advocacy of a 'sons and daughters' housing policy, evokes clear echoes of the BBL.

Although the BBL collapsed through internal squabbling in 1903, they saw their purpose achieved in the 1905 Aliens Act which restricted Jewish immigration, set up the machinery of control – immigration officers, powers of deportation – and, crucially, legitimised the idea that immigration itself, rather than the racist resentment of it, was the problem.

The children of those early waves of Jewish immigration, who knew no home other than the East End, grew up in this highly charged atmosphere. They refused to accept the fatalism of many of their elders and were determined to respond. Their time came in the 1930s as economic depres-

sion provided Mosley's BUF with the platform to address the dispossessed. The BUF headed straight for the East End. Perhaps they thought the Jews would be a soft target. If they did, they were wrong. The youth and sports clubs, which distant Jewish philanthropists supported to provide stability and purpose for young Jews on the breadline, unwittingly became training grounds for self-defence groups prepared to face up to fascist intimidation.

As the BUF concentrated its efforts in and around the East End, the local political establishment tried to pacify an increasingly angry local Jewish population with assurances that the police and the authorities would prevent the situation from deteriorating further. When, in October 1936, Mosley announced his intention of marching his troops through the heart of the Jewish East End, the establishment-oriented *Jewish Chronicle* and most of the local Labour councillors appealed to local Jews to stay in and pull down the shutters.

But matters had already proceeded too far. Local Jews had already formed their own defence organisation which was independent of the slow-moving official community structures. In the days before Mosley's Cable Street march, the Jewish Peoples' Council Against Fascism and Antisemitism collected 100,000 signatures on a petition demanding that the Home Secretary should prevent it from happening. When the Government refused, the JPC and others called for a massive public turnout to physically prevent the march.

The events of the day have passed into East End legend. Tens of thousands of Jews and non-Jews blockaded the streets. Jewish sweatshop workers stood shoulder to shoulder with Catholic Irish dockers to repel the BUF. After Cable Street the state authorities took a dimmer view of Mosley's organisation, but it was the disciplined self-organisation of the threatened community and its capacity to make alliances with those who acknowledged

the threat that dealt the decisive blow against the BUF. It is a lesson worth considering in light of the concern expressed currently about the proliferation of self-defence groups in the Bengali community in the East End today. The spontaneous walk-out by Unison members on the Isle of Dogs, following Derek Beackon's victory, was a hopeful sign that alliances can be forged on the ground.

Mosley's organisation never fully recovered from the blow it received at Cable Street, but it succeeded in leaving behind a poisonous legacy in the form of a strengthened antipathy to 'outsiders' in the East End areas where his party had agitated most strongly. It is precisely this deep-rooted, almost tribal antipathy that the BNP has been able to exploit once again. Undoubtedly it has been helped by opportunist politics among local Liberals. Yet the Conservative government, fulsome in its condemnation of Beackon's victory, and the policies which his party stood for, must not escape its share of the blame.

The facile arguments of the BNP would make little headway if they were not bolstered by a climate of racism which has found expression in Thatcher's infamous accusation that immigrants were swamping 'our' culture, and increasingly harsh government policies on immigration, nationality and refugees which perpetuate the idea that (non-white) immigrants and settled minorities are social problems. They have been abetted by sections of the popular press who specialise in racist scaremongering.

But we are also witnessing a profound growth in the political culture of scapegoating with the moral, political and economic decline of Britain being attributed by government ministers to phenomena as diverse as single mothers, young offenders and new age travellers. In this sense the BNP is merely playing by rules that the government itself has laid down.

Community resistance in the 1970s



BREAKING CHAINS,

Paul Gilroy looks at the experiences of black and Jewish people in Britain and the US and considers the potential for creating links to challenge racism and fascism

We have yet to explore the history of political relationships between blacks and Jews in Britain with the seriousness and urgency of US discussions. This country doesn't have a history of civil rights activism which forces attention towards the connections between these communities. In the US, even if the links are denied, effaced or undermined, they cannot be ignored. In Britain that is the easiest thing to do.

Though it is different from the American picture, a distinctive pattern of connections between these two complex and internally differentiated constituencies can be seen in Britain. Our local patterns of racism and antisemitism have not fostered the development of political coalitions and both groups are comparatively smaller here. Neither of them contributes consistently to a sustainable liberal bloc in British politics. The relationship between "race", ethnicity and class takes different forms and while the old languages of labourism and conservatism still dominate political organisations, they incline many people away from consciousness of racial or ethnic particularity, which is viewed as a distraction from the fundamental dynamics of class conflict.

Unlike the US where the symbols of ethnic difference are integral to the polity, in this country ethnicity and cultural difference are privatised, banished from the dead white space of our sanitised, but essentially feudal public culture. In the US, the melting pot ideology focuses the project of social assimilation, even if it promotes the negation of difference through the suggestion that the hyphen in any hyphenated American identities should be read as a minus sign. In Britain, homogeneity and cultural stasis are simply assumed.

My interest in raising the issue of black-Jewish relations derives from several immediate concerns. First, I am anxious about the possibility that upfront antisemitism and low-intensity Zionism have become intertwined and equally plausible outcomes in contemporary black political culture in general and in Africentrism in particular. Second, I am disappointed that opportunities to make cultural and political connections between blacks and Jews are being missed, with regrettable consequences for the opposition to racisms. Third, I have a strong sense that the history of the shifting relationship between blacks and Jews has itself emerged as an important and contested issue that has significant implications for the future of both "communities". Fourth, the revitalisation of fascism in Europe offers an opportunity to rethink exactly what fascism is and where it fits into the embattled heritage of European civilisation and culture.

The entangled histories of racisms and antisemitisms are central to this reassessment. The important ways in which these questions were resolved after 1945 – prompted by the catastrophe

of the Shoah – seem to have been exhausted. As the time-worn desires for ethnic purity, phenotypical symmetry and cultural sameness reappear and work their fatal magic in eastern Europe and elsewhere, we are crying out for better theories of fascisms, past and present, and in need of a greatly refined sense of where racisms and nationalisms articulate with them. The Africentrism which is beginning to dominate black political consciousness unwittingly trades in models of thinking about black identity that have significant, but usually unacknowledged connections with Jewish history and thought. The idea of diaspora, which has achieved considerable currency in black politics, is the most obvious of these, but there are many other ways in which black thinkers have been indebted to Jewish history and thought.

Edward Wilmot Blyden, a prominent Pan-Africanist and an architect of the Liberian state, who is regularly viewed as a progenitor of the Africentric doctrine, was greatly enthusiastic about Theodor Herzl's work. Blyden applauded Zionism as a "marvellous movement" and sought to emulate it in his own pursuit of an independent nation state for new world blacks in their African homeland. Needless to say, this type of information has been passed over in embarrassed silence by many of Blyden's contemporary devotees.

Britain has no holocaust memorials that might serve to clarify the relationship between past and present terrors. It has no Vichy history that can be imaginatively revisited as a means to explore the critical moral questions raised by the return of the fascists amid a culture of indifference. Our nostalgically nationalist anti-racisms, premised on the memory of heroic and usually masculine anti-Nazi heroism have also passed their sell-by dates, now the memory of the 1939-45 war has faded.

People from a variety of different groups experience forms of racial jeopardy, but they don't know what to do about it. Many of them solve that problem by retreating into the shell of their ethnic particularity and creating cultures of compensation that can keep at bay the prejudice and discrimination that corrode their lives. In these conditions, ethnic absolutism can begin to take hold. Its diverse effects can be felt in the way that each history of terror and persecution gets assigned to the particular group that has lived through it. It becomes their special property, rather than some potential part of any common legacy. Racial slavery thus belongs to blacks, Nazism to Jews.

The dismal competition between groups for the moral legitimacy that suffering confers becomes a therapeutic substitute for politics. In the past, there may have been clear advantages in letting those who had suffered remain the principal custodians of the memories of their suffering. But now, if we are not to let an indifferent society off the hook, new tactics are called for that can actively cultivate painful social memories. In order to protect what

MAKING LINKS

is good and right in the imperfect democracy we inhabit, it is necessary to create a new rapport with the presence of terror and suffering. Blacks and Jews can contribute much to this.

French writer Alain Finkielkraut has explored some of these issues in *Remembering In Vain*, his powerful study of the trial of the Nazi Klaus Barbie. The laudable desire to protect the uniqueness of the Shoah, which his interesting but contentious book celebrates, becomes more problematic when he betrays a reluctance, shared by many other black and Jewish thinkers, to link antisemitic racial science in Europe with its antecedents in the new world, or to situate the genocide of European Jews in relation to modern racial slavery, or the exterministic barbarity of colonialism and conquest.

Attempting to set the experience of European Jews in a context provided by other different instances of ethnocidal terror is not to undermine its uniqueness. If we are vigilant, this vein of historical and moral enquiry need not degenerate into unjust and impossible evaluations of which group has suffered the most ineffable horrors. Can't we say, instead, that we might learn something new and useful about modernity, humanism, democracy, rationality and European civilisation, if we can find a means to open a conversation between and about these different histories of suffering?

We are left with black antisemitisms and Jewish racisms. The antipathy towards Jews among blacks is an extremely complex issue that should not be trivialised by oversimplification, or by the premature importation of American insights that don't translate well into our European circumstances. It is, in any case, difficult to say whether antisemitism is growing among blacks in this country and it would be wrong to elevate blackness so this becomes part of an explanation in the absence of really detailed evidence about changing patterns in Britain as a whole. This means that my views here are provisional and impressionistic.

The antisemitisms that exist in black communities have become entangled with a hostility towards Israel that derives from black support for Palestinian struggles for democracy and justice, from the identification with Egypt that many blacks feel and from long-standing criticism of the close connections between Israel and the apartheid regime in South Africa. None of these is offered here as an alibi for antisemitism, but they are substantive political issues that have a real bearing on the climate in which black antisemitisms can thrive.

It is important to remember that whatever benefits it may confer, melanin does not render those whose skin contains it immune to the appeal of reductionist and deterministic explanations. This point can be put another way. We might make better politics against racisms if we thought more about the fact that merely experiencing racial



Black diaspora solidarity, Anti-Apartheid rally, London

Picture: Philip Wolmuth

oppression or persecution does not in itself prevent us from being racist. This is an elementary lesson offered up by the study of modern Jewish history and it is underscored again when blacks and other minorities, who have been victims of terror and harassment, absorb and promote the prejudice, hostility and violence that flows from the hateful mainstream, making them their own and even using these attitudes to insulate themselves from the effects of immiseration and insecurity.

Reluctance to accept the possibility that yesterday's victims may be today's torturers and tomorrow's persecutors is bound up with the popular idea that a special moral authority goes with victim status. Being a victim projects a desired aura of sanctity around the profane political choices people make. Another lesson that emerges from the histories of suffering experienced by Jews and blacks in the modern world is that the couplet perpetrator/victim is an inadequate basis for coherent political action against racism. In our histories of suffering, prosecution and exploitation, there were bystanders and witnesses too. Let us strive to bring those roles back into the picture as well. To bear witness is, after all, to take a measure of responsibility.

We are not prisoners of the mistrust and suspicion that we sometimes inherit from the past. Looking frankly at the relationship between blacks and Jews matters now most of all, because defeating the new fascisms may depend upon it. The history of the connections between us in Britain and elsewhere in Europe is waiting to be written. We can use our enquiries into it as a further means to sustain the political coalition we so urgently need.

● Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (Verso, £11.95) and *Small Acts* (Serpent's Tail, £12.99) were published this year.

What do you want from us?

Thank you for your strong response to the readership survey in the last issue of Jewish Socialist. Here is our analysis of the first 100 replies

'Good in-depth reporting, feature articles and insightful analysis'

Our readers are very loyal: 57% have taken the magazine for over two years and 25% have taken it since the first issue seven years ago. Only 4% were first-time readers. We need to be seen in different places to attract new readers. Eight out of 10 respondents read every issue and 60% pass copies on, mainly to friends and relatives. Nine out of 10 read more than three quarters of the magazine.

Over three quarters of the readers wanted the magazine to include news about the Jewish community, international news, anti racism/anti fascism, in-depth features, historical articles, book reviews and interviews. Features were most popular, followed by news and book reviews. There was ambivalence about the inclusion of poetry, fiction, cartoons, theatre and film reviews and listings. We need to examine the quality, relevance and accessibility of these, though there is a demand for a 'cultural and community notice board' particularly for secular Jews outside London. There is also a demand for a letters page.

'It's a good magazine, very useful to people outside Jewish institutions'

Only a quarter of respondents belong to a synagogue and 41% belong to no Jewish organisations. The 59% who are involved in Jewish activities reflect a diversity of interest which could be drawn on to greater effect: Jewish Lesbian and Gay Group; Jewish Film Foundation; Jewish Socialists' Group; Manchester Jewish Socialists; New Jewish Agenda; Holocaust Survivors' Group; Yiddish Classes; Oral History Group; Bet Klal Yisrael; Klezmer bands; Jewish Women's Aid; Gertrude and Alice; Mapam; Yakar; Sternberg Centre; Ruach Chavurah; Liberal Synagogue; Jewish Comedy; Der Arbeiter Ring; Jewish Women's Network; Conference of Lesbian and Gay Jews – and even Herut.

The survey showed equal numbers of men and women readers – welcome for a left political magazine, which usually have many more male readers. There were no replies from the under 20s, but otherwise readers came from every age group from 20 to over 80.

Nearly half of the respondents work in the public sector, a quarter in the private sector and a tenth in the voluntary sector. A third are professionals, 12% are in clerical and administrative jobs, 14% are academics, 8% are unemployed, 10% are self-employed, 6% are managers, 3% are manual workers, 9% are students and 3% are retired.

Four out of 10 readers are parents. One third of the total readership have children of school age, nearly all of whom are in state/secular education.

The ethnic identity question produced extremely complex answers, including a varied, definite but open description of Jewish identity – enough to give nightmares to designers of ethnic monitoring forms and the Jewish establishment. This theme should be explored more in the magazine.

There was sharp conflict over secularism and religion. With regard to our attitude to religion, we were told we were 'upsetting and offensive', 'that being religious and being a socialist is not a contradiction'. These comments are contrasted with those who value our unique role as a secular Jewish socialist forum: 'Greatly enjoy your in-depth analysis and expression of Jewish cultural issues from a secular point of view'. There were similar but linked disagreements about our humour, but we were offered sound advice; 'more and better jokes; irreverence is what I crave'.

A serious criticism is that we tend to take Ashkenazi as the norm. There were demands for articles from a Sephardi perspective, both present and historical, and indeed from all Jewish communities.

There was a huge variety of suggestions about what we should cover more of, in more depth, or with more emphasis. But a rare example of hostile comments was: 'Articles which have no literary merit, which essentially portray the personal hang-

ups of apparently damaged personalities should have no place in your journal. An example is "I blame the parents" from issue 28.' In fact we had a great deal of positive feedback about this article along with others from a personal/political perspective, like those on circumcision in JS16 and JS27.

One reader points out that we should cover Israeli society in more depth, arguing that our present focus on racism, oppression and conflict with the Palestinian people was one-dimensional and lacking in the perspective that we bring to bear on diaspora Jewish life.

Some respondents requested 'more facts and less opinions', some requested 'deeper analysis' and others wanted a wider range of contributors and subject matter.

A sample of issues you want covered in greater detail includes more international issues – Africa, USA, ex-Soviet Union, Eastern Europe. Indeed we are now inviting correspondents both regionally in Britain and internationally. You wanted more on disability issues and asked us to retain a strong perspective on women, lesbian and gay issues, sexuality, youth, green and environmental issues, perspectives for socialism, Jewish working class issues, trade union struggles, left secular Jewish culture, personal and political relationships across cultures, community defence, biographies, music, art, sport – a flavour of your demands.

A third of our respondents belong to the Labour party, a third are not affiliated to any political organisation. Other affiliations include membership of CND, ANL, ARA, AFA, Greenpeace, Dongastrie, Reflex, Militant Labour, Democratic Left, Socialist Organiser, SWP, trade unions, Social Ecology Network, WAF, Red Rope, Socialist Health Association, miners' support groups and Chartist.

Redesign for the magazine was felt to be welcome and you have made useful suggestions which we have taken on board in the new-look *Jewish Socialist* you are now reading. You did like the magazine as it was and there has been a strong



The magazine you can take to bed with you

demand for continuity. 'I think it is very good, don't make it too media orientated, one *New Moon* is more than enough'.

Half of our responses were from people living in London, the other half from Manchester, Nottingham, Cambridge, Glasgow, Bristol, Leicester, Leeds, Liverpool, Brighton, Birmingham, Lancaster, Cardiff, Sheffield, Southampton, Norwich, Oxford, Lincoln, York, Mid Wales and Sussex. There were also a number of readers from other parts of the world – including Australia and Latin America.

We had a strong sense and many clear statements of the value of *Jewish Socialist* to our readers, notwithstanding a great many constructive criticisms and suggestions. A sense that the magazine thrives when it has a relationship to its readers has given us a renewed commitment to our work as an editorial committee.

'My mother was a refugee from Germany, being Jewish was our secret identity. I have learnt a lot from the magazine, it has been a real help to me. Thank you all very much – it's great!'

Please continue to write and respond to *Jewish Socialist* and tell us about issues, send cuttings and suggestions.



Who are you kidding?

'Family' oriented policies espoused by the Tories and embraced by the Chief Rabbi undermine the position of parents and children and increase pressures on the childless, says Paul Collins

Britain's first unified budget threatens to translate rhetorical attacks on certain parents into a substantial drive for 'traditional family values'. Pundits forecast that Chancellor Kenneth Clarke's tax-and-spend plans could increase income and consumer levies and remove welfare aid. A fuel tax has already been announced and housing benefit could be slashed and VAT charged on children's clothes. Charges may also be introduced for children's medical prescriptions.

But even if there were less fiscal harshness in the short term, this would not ease fears about a growing backlash against alternatives which challenge orthodox parenthood. Ministers need scapegoats to cut 'dependency' and reverse a £50 billion deficit. This would herald treasury sweeteners before the next general election. Single parents have been high among the targets, providing a convenient scapegoat for social unrest. Government ministers, trying to escape blame for the havoc wrought by their own policies, are not the only people to bemoan the meltdown of the nuclear family. The Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, has blamed lone mothers for 'rising' juvenile crime – even when figures show the opposite.

In *The Times*, his Canute-like call to 'turn the tide' against domestic breakdown invoked the 'two nations' associated with Benjamin Disraeli. Dr Sacks cited the biblical noun for faith, *emunah* – derived from the same Hebrew word for rearing children – to issue an apocalyptic warning. When fathers

abandoned women and offspring, the worst sufferers were those 'they chose to bring into being' – apparent censure for mammas as much as men. Here was not an act, but the act which abdicated responsibility. Our population would be split between those who have known a stable childhood and others denied such equilibrium.

Jewish establishment leaders continue to promote Conservative policies, despite their growing disfavour in the community. Both Dr Sacks and Jewish Care president, Lord Young, have rejected criticism from the Archbishop of York that linked crime with unemployment.

The *Spectator* announced that the Tories have started to act on the 1974 'truth' of former Cabinet minister, Lord Joseph. The then Sir Keith argued that the lowest classes must receive 'every possible assistance to stop reproducing'. His 'pills for proles' speech argued that taxpayers could no longer afford to pick up the bill for other people's 'sexual incontinence'.

Like the *Spectator*, Home Secretary Michael Howard urges less 'generous' state aid in a bid to persuade single mothers to have their children adopted. The Chief Rabbi proclaims that *Genesis* lists parenthood as the paramount command, and he cites marriage as the ideal family unit.

Decrees on creation heighten the pressure on individuals who are childless and labels them 'unproductive' in Roget's seminal thesaurus. Some desperate Jews buy infants from poverty-stricken parents in Bogota or Bucharest. The cultural imperialism this entails is unlikely to worry Jeffrey Greenwood, chair of Jewish Care, who now presides at the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. On arrival, he promised to eradicate 'politically correct nonsense'. Observers understood this to mean same-ethnicity adoptive practices reflecting the council's belief that 'racism is endemic in British society'. Sceptics might wonder how Greenwood would justify a Jewish toddler being fostered by parents who did not acknowledge the existence of antisemitism.

Mr Greenwood's outburst boosted reactionaries' focus on exemplary action to deter those judged unsuitable for parenthood. Neighbours expect two lesbian mothers to move – even though police lacked evidence to prosecute them for leaving their children at home alone during their holiday. Witness the jail sentence meted out to Heidi Colwell, the working single mum who kept her daughter indoors because she could not meet childcare bills. Remember the media-fed public hysteria over the lone mother actress whose child stayed behind while she hunted employment abroad. All mirror a calculated plot to claw back female liberties first won in a '60s era which the new blimps condemn for destroying natural order.

Opponents of this analysis pinpoint labour trends for women to outnumber men in the workforce before the year 2000. However, more and more a woman's place, when not at the hearth, lies in low-reward employment for temporaries or part timers, with safety nets like minimum wage laws repealed.

Options magazine, defending its name, identifies women's sustained capacity to select their life preferences. In contrast, Britain's formal childcare provision ranks alongside the worst among rich

nations 14 years after its first woman Prime Minister vowed that every under five would have access to a nursery.

Abortion entitlements reel under siege from violent sermonisers here and in the US, the Pope's latest edict, and sexists and jingoists in post-communist Europe. Meanwhile, as the once-idle John Major hints at workfare, Britain is to launch a contraceptive implant which over a dozen American states deploy to bribe deprived mothers, many of whom are black. The Family Planning Association has warned that British doctors may have already used the contraceptive injection Depo-Provera on teenagers and women from ethnic minorities. Across the Atlantic, welfare mothers are offered cash incentives to insert Norplant – in some areas a condition for benefits. *Newsweek* betrayed the hidden agenda with a cover story headlined 'Children in Crisis' with this introductory statement:

Thirty years ago, one quarter of black families in the United States were headed by women. Now it's a majority: 62 per cent. What's happening to the black family and what will be done to save it?

Within Britain's Asian community, intimidation to undertake arranged marriages and produce large families has escalated suicide rates among women aged 16 to 24 to three times the national average. Losing one in three Jews in the Holocaust has raised pressures on survivors and later generations to replace the dead with the living. Nonetheless, the same Jewish leaders who bemoan falling numbers reject the children of Jews who have gentile partners and encourage a climate in which Jewish organisations exclude those who are neither religious nor Zionist. They display similar hypocrisy through supporting relief for war-injured Muslim children in Bosnia while backing Israeli soldiers who murder Palestinian teenagers.

Socialists can encourage tomorrow's radicals by prioritising a commitment to policies which help brothers and sisters who are parents. One campaign would fight maintenance legislation which forces women to risk their autonomy and perhaps court violence by naming their children's father. Another might cajole voluntary groups which seem to have swallowed the monetarist notion that childcare must be founded not on state provision but on the profit motive.

Non-parent progressives should anticipate solidarity from leftists with children against sectarians like Professor Richard Lilford. This head of gynaecology at Leeds University declared that fertility treatment should come before chemotherapy for cancer patients. Those with and without children can unite to protect them from sexual and physical abuse. Almost one in two babies endures frequent spanking, according to a poll for a London Weekend television programme. Parenting education represents a further vital initiative to prevent emotional damage to adults and children.

Women themselves must stand together. When Heidi Colwell was in prison, she had to be separated from other prisoners for her safety.

The Talmud says that, in conception, women reaching orgasm first will have sons. If men are the first, the babies will be girls. Maybe those who do not care, so long as both climax – straight or homosexual – love their kids as much as each other.

Wedlock deadlock

I left my first husband fifteen years ago when, after three years of marriage, I was on the point of emotional disintegration. I broke the news to him while we were on holiday in Britain and, despite his claim to be shocked and devastated, he raced back to Israel where we were living to lay claim to our home. I'd cracked his code by that time, and beat him to it, but I hadn't realised that by entering Israel I was putting myself within the jurisdiction of religious authorities with unassailable and, apparently, immutable powers.

Soon after I arrived back in Tel Aviv, my sister-in-law turned up to curse and yell at me: I was a useless wife; I hadn't created a proper home and she would see to it that I was dragged through the rabbinical courts until I pleaded for mercy. This was not an empty threat. A neighbour who had been through a similar sequence of events advised me to get the first plane out the next morning because, she warned, if my husband told the rabbis that I had made a 'hasty decision', the religious courts could stop me from leaving the country until they had tried to 'effect a reconciliation' – a process which could take months.

I later discovered that this was actually quite a common scenario, and one of a number of ways in which the religious courts could hold wives to ransom. The usual solution was for the wife to hand over money and property in exchange for a divorce. In Jewish law marriage is not a sacrament but a contract, and since biblical times a mechanism has existed for ending that contract. But the final decision has always rested with the man and he cannot be compelled to agree to a divorce even where there are clear grounds for one. I was lucky. I had moral support and good advice, and as soon as my husband realised there was nothing to be gained financially, he discovered he could live with my 'hasty decision' and granted me my *get* (religious divorce). Without a *get* I would not have been permitted to remarry in an orthodox synagogue. I did not consider this much of a loss, though it matters a great deal to many women. But perhaps more importantly, if, in the absence of a *get*, I established a relationship with another man, I would be defined as an adulteress, and any subsequent children I bore would be *mamzerim* (bastards), who can only marry other *mamzerim* (or, interestingly, converts) for ten generations.

Gloria Proops is one of thousands of women across the world who did not escape as lightly as I did. Though granted a civil divorce in 1975, her ex-husband has consistently refused to grant her a *get*.

As the issues facing women in the Jewish community move towards centre stage, a challenge to archaic and coercive divorce laws is long overdue, says Julia Bard

'Children are the flowers of communism' Russian revolutionary poster





Adrienne Baker, researcher on divorce

'I've tried everything to persuade him,' she says, 'starting with going to the *Beth Din* [the rabbinical court], and I've had a lot of help from the Jewish Marriage Guidance Council. This year I had to give up, though, because my mother has had a heart attack and I want to concentrate on her.'

Gloria was in her mid-30s with two teenage children when she finally decided to end the marriage she says was 'torture'. Because her ex-husband will not give her a *get*, she is defined as an *aguna* – a chained woman – who, according to orthodox Jewish law, cannot remarry. Though she has had the opportunity, Gloria has given up any idea of settling down with another partner because she, together with any children she might have had, would have been driven out of the community.

Researchers on the Chief Rabbi's Commission on Women in the Community have amassed files full of tragic case histories like Gloria's. And there are many more women who have escaped this state of limbo by buying their way out – a device which is apparently morally acceptable to the rabbinical courts. Worse still, it may be beyond *anyone's* powers to release a woman from a marriage that has ended. There is no presumption of death in Jewish religious law, so a husband who disappears is considered to be still alive – and married – unless there are valid witnesses who can testify to seeing his body. This rule has trapped women whose husbands were murdered by the Nazis or who died in battle or who have simply vanished.

A woman whose husband is incompetent to grant a divorce – if he is senile or insane, for instance – cannot be liberated from the marriage. This is the threat that hangs over Gloria Proops: the *dayanim* (rabbis who administer the law) advised her early on to take care because they believed that her ex-husband was trying to be categorised as *meshugga* (mad), which would remove any possibility of his ever being able to grant her a *get*. And even if he were deemed competent, he may not, according to strict Jewish law, be coerced into it for fear of invalidating the divorce.

The last category of *aguna* is the childless widow. She is bound, according to orthodox law, to marry her late husband's brother unless he formally releases her. If he is incompetent, too young or unwilling to release her, she may not marry or have children with anyone else.

According to the orthodox *dayanim* – that is from the United Synagogue rightwards – there is no mechanism by which these laws can be changed, though they do admit to the possibility of reinter-

pretation. A number of women within the United Synagogue, like Adrienne Baker who heads the Chief Rabbi's research team dealing with *get* and *aguna*, are negotiating with the *dayanim* over just how much room for manoeuvre there is. They have recently won what they consider to be a very significant gain: the United Synagogue has agreed to insert a prenuptial clause into the *ketuba* (religious marriage contract) which would disallow the husband from unreasonably refusing a *get* when a marriage has clearly ended – though this will have to be tested in the Civil Courts.

This is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but the profound discrimination embodied in the laws on *get* and *aguna* cannot be eradicated by clauses in contracts. This would merely be an administrative solution to a political problem, which leaves the Jewish legal system in the hands of rabbis who have a strong vested interest in claiming that their authority is absolute and immutable. A cursory look reveals that over the centuries, and even over the last few years, politics and convenience have been major factors in how these so-called unchangeable laws have been used and understood. For instance, according to the letter of the law, an unmarried couple who have lived together and then decide to split up require a *get*, otherwise all the same punishments are rained down upon the woman and her children. Clearly this is impossible to administer and, more importantly, would alienate many people who otherwise accept the status quo in the community. So the *dayanim* turn a blind eye because they want the law to be a means of keeping the community under their authority; they don't want it seen as an instrument of wrath which would drive away the supporters they need.

Of course, many people have opted out, either by going to the Reform or Liberal synagogue where the whole business is more humane, or by ignoring religious authorities altogether – both perfectly reasonable individual decisions. But we have a Chief Rabbi in office who argues at every turn that 'the family' is the only basis of Jewish continuity, whose director of marriage authorisation, Rabbi Dr Julian Shindler, argued in the *Jewish Chronicle* (4 June 1993) that 'the bulk of Anglo-Jewry as we know it today is in real danger of disappearing within a generation or two, through indifference, assimilation, inter-marriage, low fertility and divorce'. What he means by 'the bulk of Anglo-Jewry as we know it' is that slice of Anglo-Jewry that comes under the Chief Rabbi's authority. The fact is that both the more liberal and the more right wing synagogues are growing, and increasing numbers of secular Jews are standing up and asserting their place in the community.

Women have particularly strong motivations to escape from the discriminatory grip of the United Synagogue. What is more, many have discovered that they don't need the Chief Rabbi's *hekhsher* (seal of approval) to be Jewish and have said so clearly to the researchers on his Commission of Inquiry. Now we need to work together – religious and secular, orthodox and progressive – to challenge the breathtaking hypocrisy of rabbis who collude with extortion and ignore the blighted lives of women and children while claiming that religious law is too moral to coerce vindictive men into behaving like human beings.

A call to each of us

Five decades have passed since the man whose remains are buried here gave up his energy, his passion, his hope and, in the end, his life in the struggle to save the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. We have now come here to honour the memory of this man and his deeds.

Artur Zygielbojm's history is, in itself, very ordinary. He was a leader of the organised workers, a Jewish socialist. This was his life's purpose until the Second World War. He was not a religious man and not a Zionist. But from the very beginning of the Nazi oppression he threw himself into the struggle to unite the whole Jewish people in Poland. This is what he strove for and it was for this aim that he surrendered his life.

Artur Zygielbojm died with the hope that his last demand and protest would be heard by those world leaders who still had the power to change the course of events. But the reaction from these leaders was indifference. Does this mean that his last words disappeared with the winds of history, that his sacrifice was worthless?

Artur Zygielbojm's life spanned an era of great changes in the situation of humanity. He was born in the days of the horse and cart at the end of the last century, at a time of expanding commerce and prosperity of modern industrialisation, at a time when workers demanded dignity and a better life; at a time of vibrant Jewish life in Europe, and especially in Poland, in the Yiddish culture which had flourished despite having always faced waves of antisemitism; at a time of hope and progress.

His life ended in the ruins of Europe. He saw how modern industry came to be utilised for the most terrible purpose that could be imagined – the destruction of peoples and cultures – especially his own. This was a time of the lowest human degradation and depravity.

Three generations have come since Artur Zygielbojm and they are witness to the continuing changes in the world. His son Yosef, my father, was born shortly after the First World War and he became a mature man at the time of the Nazi invasion. He felt in his own flesh and bones the brutality to which humanity could sink and the agony of losing his wife, child and others close to him at the hand of the murderers. He suffered combat and captivity, torture and hunger, but he survived all of this.

My grandfather's life began in an epoch of optimism and ended with the extermination of nearly a third of his people. In contrast, the lives of my parents developed in their youth through war and conflict although today they see a world of hope.

The winds of history blow with a mighty force and we can still hear in the air the words of Artur Zygielbojm.

However, the changes that humanity has made in the last four generations show that it has not yet shed the kind of brutality and depravity which my grandfather struggled against until the last day of his life. Such crimes still continue today. The

world now sees the systematic annihilation of a people and its culture in Bosnia. It is a disgrace that there has not yet been an effective response to this brutality and so much suffering.

Yes, Zygielbojm's words are still carried on the winds of history. Read his last testament again and you will see that his words are relevant not only to the Jewish martyrs in Poland but to all oppressed peoples and all who suffer inhumanity. Wherever people stand up against brutality you can hear the thunder of Artur Zygielbojm's words.

Artur Zygielbojm's last words are not lost. The frustration and disappointment that he expressed came with the hope and belief that there would come a world of freedom and justice.

Artur Zygielbojm's last act did not save his brothers in Poland, but his grandchild who plays in the park named after him in Montreal symbolises for me a new generation that has the possibility of living in freedom, justice, peace and dignity.

Therefore, we should not mourn, but accept Artur Zygielbojm's hope as a call to each of us to build for our children the world for which he struggled but did not live to see.

● Pinye Zygielbojm was speaking at the Zygielbojm memorial in Mount Carmel cemetery in the US. Translated from Yiddish by David Rosenberg from an article first published in Unser Tsait.



Artur Zygielbojm (bottom right) at the Bund's fourth convention, Poland, 1929

On 13 May 1993 Pinye Zygielbojm made this speech to honour his grandfather, Szmul 'Artur', who committed suicide in 1943 to draw the world's attention to the fate of Europe's Jews

Any other business

Richard Bolchover has touched raw nerves with his careful illumination that, at the time, the Holocaust was not high on the agenda of mainstream British Jewry. Here he writes about his book and its controversial conclusions

It has been reviewed as 'the worst book ever on Anglo-Jewish history' which, given the competition, is certainly saying something. Indeed any attempt at studying Jewish onlooker response to the Holocaust runs the risk of being accused of insensitivity and *British Jewry and the Holocaust* has proved no exception to this rule.

The book, then, is controversial, particularly so if one imagines, as most of its detractors do, that it is an attempt to answer the question: 'did British Jewry do enough to save Jews during the Holocaust?' but in reality the book's emphasis is not on the influence, or lack of it, that Anglo-Jewry had on events during the Holocaust was not very high on Anglo-Jewry's war-time agenda. The community had other concerns to which it devoted more of its time. The book is an attempt to examine what this ordering of priorities reveals about the way the community saw itself and its position in Britain, about the way in which it conceived of its Jewishness, organised its institutions and conducted its affairs.

What then are its major conclusions? During the years of the Second World War, the British Jewish community was beset by conflict. A bitter contention over the so-called 'Zionist Caucus' control of British Jewish institutions dominated the organised community. The battle had little ideological content but stemmed more from a struggle for power and prestige fought between two social strata, the descendants of the turn of the century East European immigration and the older established Anglo-Jewish grandee families.

Much time and energy were devoted to this bat-

tle. Approaches to government on all issues were now made by a number of bodies claiming to represent Anglo-Jewry and deriving status from various sources. What effectiveness there had previously been in *shtadlanut* was diminished by this overlapping of communal representations and its resultant inefficiency. No dominant Anglo-Jewish leadership emerged; Jewish communal politics did not attract many talented British Jews; and there was little serious analysis of the political alternatives available to the community. British Jews were self interested and distracted and were as preoccupied with their most immediate concerns as were others.

On a more philosophical level there were further constraints on Anglo-Jewish responses to events on the continent. The nineteenth century emancipation of the Jews in England had given birth to two contradictory, yet simultaneously held, convictions. The first was a fundamental belief in the liberal view of the development of human society. In this light, liberal democracy was the ultimate form of political achievement. The government existed to preserve life and prevent suffering, and its leaders, like Churchill or Roosevelt, embodied this mission. Right would always prevail. This optimistic philosophy suggested a hopeful view of the Jew's position in British society. Antisemitism was seen as a uniform phenomenon wherever it was encountered and it was, in any event, in its death throes. It was economic stress that had thrown Germany into temporary insanity, and appeals to human goodness would ultimately bring about an end to Nazi persecution of the Jews. When this strategy failed there was little else to replace it.

The other emancipatory philosophy stressed the contact between the Jew and the Gentile British state, where religion was the only feature distinguishing Jew from non-Jew. Non theological assertions by Jews on Jewish matters might imply dual loyalty. British Jewish political strategy stressed as a result the need to maintain a low profile and shunned any suggestion of Jewish nationality. Responses to atrocities committed on Jews were subsumed in general condemnation of Nazi brutality. Non-Jews were viewed as more effective advocates on Jewish matters than Jews. Gratitude and loyalty to Britain were unendingly proclaimed. Philanthropy was a preferred strategy to overt political lobbying, as it was self-contained, mostly unseen by the Gentile world, and therefore avoided accusations of Jewish clannish cosmopolitanism.

Fear of antisemitism dogged the community and antisemitic stereotypes were internalised.

Much effort was expended on apologetics and disciplining Jewish behaviour, particularly in trade. Jewish refugees were seen as a potential cause of antisemitic sentiment within Gentile society. Any policy which endangered the precarious status quo was anathema to the community. Appeals on behalf of the Jews of Europe had to be contained within this mould.

In line with both these philosophies, the British government's claim that the only way to save Europe's Jews was to pursue general war aims was persuasive.

Traditional religious views regarding the fate of the Jews in Europe were also ambivalent, with both immanent and transcendent views widespread. These views were very influential in a community which, acculturated as it was to British norms, depicted itself primarily in religious terms. Nazi persecution was widely seen both as divine punishment for the sins of assimilation and as the harbinger of a future redemption. Both views led to resignation to the fate of European Jews. In the face of such powerlessness, and the psychological difficulties posed by the revelations from Europe and the reality of anti-semitism in Britain, the community sought refuge in a Jewish fighting model which would symbolise Jewish fortitude in body and spirit. This would stress Jewish honour and German dishonour at a time of Jewish collective shame at the hands of the Nazis.

The community utilised this model both in its campaigns for a Jewish battalion in Allied ranks and, especially in its campaign for Zionism as a counterpoint to the horrors of the Holocaust. The community never saw the two policies of Zionism and rescue from Europe as potentially conflicting; indeed it saw them as one and the same. Effectively, British Jewry linked the cause of European Jewry with Zionism, despite the community's unwillingness to see itself in national terms.

There were exceptions, however who urged a more activist, direct approach to the plight of European Jewry. Against the fairly homogeneous communal background there were also socialist, strictly orthodox Jews, academics and Revisionist Zionists, groups that did not conform to the general patterns outlined above. But these groups were all small, some tiny, and operated on the margins of the community, largely isolated and ignored by most of Britain's Jewish leadership. They had little in common, and there was considerable variation within the groups themselves. Many of their leaders were charismatic and idiosyncratic, and all of them were mistrusted by the mainstream of Anglo-Jewry, probably because they fitted so uneasily into a community dominated by leaders seeking peer group approbation.

The groups had no common ground for agreement, let alone co-ordination. All these nonconformists rejected in whole or in part the prevailing communal philosophies of liberalism and the emancipation contract. This rejection is the key to an understanding not only of their response to the Holocaust but also of that of the mainstream community. Fortunately, not all the book's reviewers have missed this point.

● *British Jewry and the Holocaust* by Richard Bolchover is published by Cambridge University Press.

POEMS BY MIKE ROSEN

THE WOOLWICH

Hallo Mr Rosen
said Mr Knight, the man at the Woolwich
how can I help you?

I said that I was wondering
if there was any way that I could raise some money
to pay for doing up the basement
and he said that building societies
were in the business of providing a competitive product
and I said that I was looking for a loan
not a product
and he said that's what he meant
but they were all in the marketplace now
so I said that was great
but could he or couldn't he give me some lolly
and he said that he could
and would I sign form 23/B
and for all he cared I could buy a speedboat with it,
and I said I didn't want a speedboat
I just wanted a new basement
and he said
that the satisfaction he got in life
was helping improve the quality of people's life
Thanks a lot I said.
Pleasure to do business with you, he said.
Goodbye, I said
Goodbye, Mr Cohen, he said.

THE PROMISED LAND

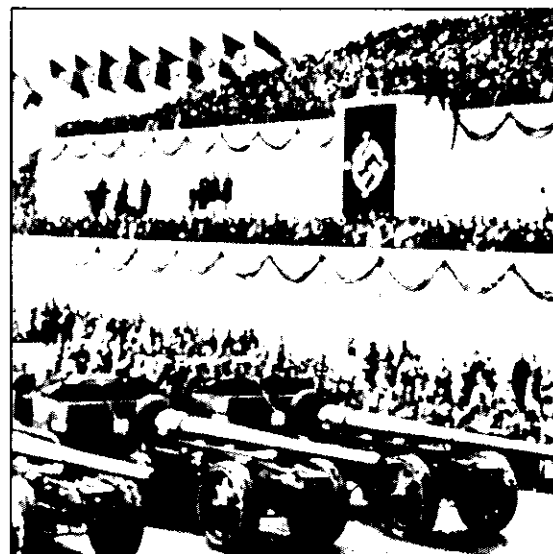
So you live in Hackney? – why live in Hackney?
everyone moved out of Hackney
have you been to Israel? – my daughter lives in Israel
she married an Iraqi feller – Jewish of course
wife and I went out
we sold up here – sold the house, the car – everything we sold
I was in computers here – writing programmes – doing very well
but over there they wanted it all in Hebrew
I tried – I went to classes – the prayers I could read
but I was too slow – I couldn't work it on the computers
I couldn't get a job – they didn't want me
it got very hard – we couldn't talk to our grandchild even
he only spoke Hebrew – we spoke to him and he didn't understand
and we spent everything – we spent everything we had
all our savings, everything – we had nothing
so we had to come back
and here we had nothing – no house, no car nothing

so now we're living in a little poky flat
you can see I'm too old to get a mortgage
and driving the taxi doesn't bring in enough
she's taken it very bad – she's ill
she's always got something wrong
she doesn't go to the toilet for a day – and its bowel cancer
I'm not at home – I try to get her to go out
sometimes she does the catering at the synagogue
I showed my slides there last week – raised a few pounds for *aliyah*
but only 16 people came – they're good slides – Eilat everywhere
and you know when we ring? – the little boy can't talk to us

that's £6.40 – nice talking to you – *zay mir gezint*

aliyah – immigration to Israel; *zay mir gezint* – be heathy

● From Mike Rosen's new book, *You Are, Aren't You?* See back page.



Cool for Katz

Don Byron Plays the Music of Mickey Katz
(Elektra Nonesuch
7559-79313-2)

Mickey Katz was probably the most inventive, irreverent writer-performer klezmer music, ever. The typical Katz number was a heady cocktail of jazzy-Jewish syncopation and screwball humour, all served up with dashes of daring musicianship by Katz and his band.

I first strained to hear his music on my Dad's decrepit 78s. Katz, it said, on the labels, but cats, it seemed, had skated open-clawed over the shellac grooves – the recording rendered practically inaudible through all the mush. Now one can enjoy an inspired interpretation of Katz's klezmer contortions against the crypt-quiet background of a new CD.

Don Byron Plays the Music of Mickey Katz is the tribute of a 34-year-old black New Yorker to the Jewish bandleader from Cleveland who died in 1985. Like Katz, Byron is a master clarinetist. He and his talented combo capture all the fun and anarchy in Katz's compositions without sticking too religiously to the originals.

Byron has studied not only the music, but also its impact on society. His sleeve-notes are erudite and perceptive. Katz prised klezmer, the Jewish dance music of eastern Europe, out of the shtetl and re-rooted it in challenging juxtaposition to the brave New World. Byron writes:

'Mickey was a departure from earlier Yiddish entertainers and klezmer traditionalists. His lyrics contained few sentimental references to a romanticised "old country" but instead reflected Jewish-American life...Throughout most of his career Mickey's lyrics mixed Yiddish and English. This loyalty to Yiddish was remarkable considering his mass appeal and the fact that his audience was not entirely Jewish.'

Katz's subversive klezmer simultaneously took a cheeky swipe at the smug complacency of white America. A tradition had emerged in the States of pseudo-ethnic hits like 'Day-O' and 'Volare' which sanitised non-white culture while playing on stereotyped prejudices. Katz ridiculed this development.

His first parody, 'Haim Afen Range', was recorded in 1947 following his departure from Spike Jones' City Slickers. 'With it he dived headlong into the chasm between America's immigrant population and a social order that held – and still holds – WASPishness as its highest value,' says Byron.

Haim Afen Range, Katz's rendition of the cowboy ditty 'Home on the Range', is one of the tracks on the CD – guest Avi Hoffman handling the lead vocals with the requisite *chien*. The lyrics are quintessential Katz, like Mel Brooks on uppers, the punning reference to 'Oy Vagas' encapsulating the collision and fusion between old world and new. The music too is bursting with mischief and it was this quality that first struck Byron:

'I was looking for stuff that didn't sound obvious. I was listening to a tape of Yiddish music and suddenly I hit a Mickey Katz tune. I immediately responded to it – it had great musicians



on it, Manny Klein and Ziggy Ellman. And there's all this beautiful voice-leading, four-part harmonies, melodies that go down to 16th notes, four-part fugues, really fancy writing. I really felt like this was where klezmer left off in terms of progressing.'

I caught up with Byron when he was in London recently, playing three nights of gigs in the company of some of the world's most libertine jazz and improvisational musicians. His CV includes stints playing big-band jazz with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, rock with Living Colour, and ragtime with Gunther Schuller's band. He currently leads two other ventures besides the Katz project – Semaphore (the Ensemble for New Music) whose repertoire

stretches from Schumann to Messiaen, and an experimental quartet.

He says: 'I'm only interested in music that's moving, whether it's klezmer, jazz, big-band or improvisation. I gravitate to whoever is playing the trickiest, outest stuff.'

Here is a musician clearly driven to explore all the possibilities of his instrument. Perhaps it was inevitable that at some time or other he would turn to klezmer. Although the violin still figures prominently in most klezmer outfits, the clarinet has largely displaced it in the lead instrumental role. What really impressed Byron when he listened to the old 78s was the way that clarinetists like Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras were always taking risks.

This adventurousness sprung deep from klezmer tradition, which has much in common with pre-modern jazz. It would be stretching a point to claim that Brandwein and Tarras were greatly influenced by jazz – they were immigrants whose improvisations departed little from the old ways.

However, US-born klezmer musicians of that era were well conversant with what was undoubtedly the most exciting new music around. Several Jewish performers switched freely between jazz and klezmer bands. Katz employed jazz musicians such as Manny Klein and Sy Zentner (who adopted ostentatiously Yiddish forenames in his band). Katz's most notable acquisition was Ziggy Ellman, hitherto a star trumpeter in the Benny Goodman swing band. Ziggy's solos often took on Jewish inflections, even when he was playing for Goodman. Another Jewish musician noted for the skill with which he juggled klezmer and jazz was the brilliant clarinet and sax player, Sam Musiker. The idioms proved to be extremely compatible.

Even before the advent of jazz, it is possible to identify qualities in klezmer that would also come to define the music pioneered by Louis Armstrong, King Oliver and Sidney Bechet in New Orleans. There's the collective improvisation, the driving beat, the way klezmer musicians manipulated their instruments to mimic the human voice, to make them 'laugh' or 'cry'. Like early jazz, Jewish dance music revolved around the five notes of the pentatonic scale. By the time jazz arrived, there had already been a major shift in klezmer



Don Byron: 'A white man plays world music and no one questions the ethnic connection' Picture: Cori Wells Braun

bands towards brass instrumentation, a tuba frequently providing the bass pulse.

There were affinities of folklore too. Gary Giddens commented in Village Voice: 'The klezmerim...draw on a tradition of itinerant musicians going back to the Middle Ages; their legends, like those of early jazz, are full of stories that boast of an inability to read music and are probably just as unrepresentative of their true skills. Katz's arrangements, certainly, demand rigorous instrumental skills, while aiming for the mirage of improvisational ease.'

No one could have picked up the

Katz mantle with greater assiduity than Byron. After a period of collaboration with the Klezmer Conservatory Band, Byron formed his own klezmer outfit dedicated to Katz's music. Initially the project focused on instrumental compositions from Katz's album *Music for Weddings, Bar Mitzvahs and Brisses*. Since then Byron has transcribed and arranged work spanning Katz's entire recording career, including one of his last albums featuring music from Fiddler on the Roof. The Katz band has played sell-out shows throughout Canada and the US.

Inevitably the novelty of a black musician playing Jewish music attracts a

disproportionate amount of publicity. Don Byron responds with typical contempt for barriers: 'I've played klezmer since 1980. But it hasn't been easy to feel entitled to play it. A white man plays world music and no one questions the ethnic connection. But too many brothers are playing music from Bulgaria.'

'I've spent hundreds of hours transcribing Katz's records; I feel entitled to the knowledge, entitled to participate. I'm not doing Jewish or classical music instead of black music. But I don't feel the need to live one genre of music like the young be-bop cats.'

Mike Gerber

I ain't gonna study war no more

The New Left, The Jews and The Vietnam War 1965-1972
by Philip Mendes
Lazare Press

It was not so long ago that for a Jew to be a socialist was as natural and, it seemed, as necessary as breathing the air. From the 1880s to the 1950s, Jewish participation in radical and revolutionary movements, as thinkers and doers, was particularly marked, most notably in countries where large numbers of East European Jews migrated and settled.

Jewish Socialist readers will probably be most familiar with aspects of this Jewish left-wing tradition in Britain and America. In the introductory chapters of his very readable book, Philip Mendes recounts the Australian part of this story. But the real focus of his study is closer to our own times. It is about the revival rather than decline of the Jewish socialist tradition.

Drawing on a wealth of published sources and probing interviews with scores of activists, he examines the outstanding level of Jewish involvement in the New Left wave of student radicalism in Australia in the mid-1960s to early '70s which mobilised, above all, against the West's war on the Vietnamese people. He attempts to explain the basis of this involvement in the wake of the historical decline of the old Jewish left: a decade earlier, the developing politics of the Jewish establishment in relation to Australian state and society and the increasing influence of Zionism. Mendes also asks what this episode of widespread Jewish involvement in the New Left tells us about the continuing and changing relationship between Jews and socialism. Australia may be 12,000 miles away, but the events and polemics he describes, and his analysis and conclusions, seem pretty close to home.

The old Jewish left tradition in Australia established itself in the 1920s and peaked in the '30s and '40s when trade union and anti-fascist struggles were at their sharpest. This socialist tra-

dition was based on the sustained efforts of a rarely harmonious triangle – Communists, Bundists and Labour Zionists. The wide gulfs in philosophy and deeply felt histories of betrayal that separated these traditions occasionally gave way to moments of pragmatic unity. Mendes cites Bundist-Communist unity in the anti-Nazi boycott campaigns of the '30s – a unity shattered by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Despite their differences, all these movements succeeded in creating a vibrant, working class, largely Yiddish based socialist culture for coming generations to inherit. Many of their children imbibed the tradition and stayed within it, though they often displayed more fluidity than the preceding generation and did not necessarily share the party affiliation of their parents. Several of Mendes' interviewees were born into Labour Zionist households and matured into Communist Party members, or vice versa.

Mendes identifies various factors that hastened the decline of the old Jewish left – social and economic mobility, deflection of energies into Zionism and destructive infighting – but he gives most prominence to the revelations of antisemitism in the Soviet Union and the rise of the Cold War. The Communists

had been relatively strong and influential, but through the witch-hunting 1950s they were progressively depleted and marginalised, though some of their institutions remained intact.

The class basis of socialist activism operated in an unusual way with the New Left. Rooted in the universities, it was a solidly middle-class movement, but many of Mendes' interviewees reflected socio-economic changes within the Jewish community which, in a curious way, made them enthusiastic recruits to socialism. In most cases they were the first generation in their families to have had the opportunity of higher education. Their intellectual fervour found a ready outlet in the flowering of political debate that the 1960s threw up in response to global and more local events. Coming from homes where political debate was commonplace, even if party affiliations had lapsed, they took to the anti-war movement like ducks to water and came to be represented very disproportionately in the New Left movements and campaigns, especially in revolutionary organisations.

But the new honeymoon between Jews and socialism was rudely interrupted by the Six Day war. It forced young Jewish students to clarify their position on Zionism at a time when their other ideas were developing organically in unpredictable ways. For the minority of already convinced Jewish anti-Zionists this did not present a problem. For many others it did. In the main they solved it by attaching an ill-fitting radical Zionist nationalism to their evolving revolutionary internationalist beliefs.

The tensions over Zionism stayed on the boil and ultimately led to deep fissures in the New Left. Some of the book's interviewees described the crude anti-Zionist arguments and overt antisemitism they encountered which made the New Left feel increasingly uninhabitable. One organisation, the Radical Zionist Alliance, temporarily bridged the gap. Mendes refers to one incident where a Maoist group ransacked the offices of the local Nazi party and obtained a membership list. The Victoria Board of Deputies, which undertook

lower profile activities against fascism, wanted a copy of the list but was not on speaking terms with the Maoists. The Radical Zionists happily performed the role of go-between on this occasion.

The Jewish establishment had a mixed response in general to the popularity of the New Left among young Jews. A very small minority sympathised with the mood of the students, while the majority were worried about the long-term implications of this radicalism. A more sophisticated sector sought to mobilise and co-opt the students' energy into approved channels, particularly in defence of Zionism at a time when the popular perception of Israel was beginning to shift away from victim and towards oppressor. The Board of Deputies briefly gave financial support for a radical Zionist magazine, but as soon as the journal turned its emphasis towards a critique of the Board's conservatism, the support was withdrawn.

The Board's reluctance to embroil itself too deeply in the broader political issues raised by the students' radicalism reflected its acute embarrassment at the openness with which young Jews were linking their politics and their ethnicity. Mendes observes the extent to which the Board gratefully welcomed Australia's politically monocultural norms and how it sought to maintain its low profile as Australia was edging towards a more pluralist and multicultural politics.

The profiles of the book's main interviewees confirm the author's general contention that the relationship between Jews and socialism, albeit in diminished form as a Jewish socialist subculture, continues to bear fruit even under adverse conditions. Many of those radicalised in the '60s remain committed to left-wing politics, though many are now more involved with single issue campaigns than with general radical parties. Ecological and feminist politics developed enormous strength from the political renewal that began in the 1960s, but the small minority of women whose stories are told or who are referred to in the book suggest that feminism was not central to the immediate agenda of the New Left.

Ironically, as we look across the world today, Jewish establishment organisations are facing an uphill battle to retain their credibility and, in the wake of the Lebanon war and the intifada, many more Jews are asking fundamental questions about Zionism. What a pity we are not experiencing the kind of radical political renewal among young thinking Jews today that the previous generation did with such vigour.

David Rosenberg



Resistance: Jewish partisans from the Vilna ghetto

Uneasy lessons

From Prejudice to Genocide
by Carrie Supple
Trentham, £16.95

Did you hear the one about the rabbi going to the gas chamber? I did – along with various other yarns about death camps and lampshades. Although the Holocaust was not mentioned once in my school classroom, it had an unavoidable presence in the playground. And when the jokes ran out, there were always the silent *sieg heils* behind the backs of unsuspecting teachers.

Ten years on, the Holocaust is part of the secondary school national curriculum – although, as Carrie Supple points out in her preface, it was excluded from the original plans. The subject still makes ministers and civil servants uneasy – particularly those who prefer history lessons to stick to kings, queens and generals.

But explaining the Holocaust in the classroom can make teachers uneasy too. How can the full horror and scale of that period be conveyed to young adolescents without turning it into comic-strip caricature or making it seem too ridiculous to be true?

Frustrated with 'text books which cover the Holocaust in half a page accompanied by a photograph of corpses', Supple wrote *From Prejudice to Genocide* to offer students an account which describes the causes and consequences as well as the camps. She is

insightful about the political and economic climate which helped Hitler gain power, and covers areas often neglected in history books, such as the role of women in Nazi ideology.

She describes resistance to the Nazis before and during the war, and in particular the activities of Jewish partisans in the Warsaw Ghetto, although this information is slightly lost in a wide-ranging chapter entitled 'Resistance, Collaboration, Indifference and Rescue'.

Usually, Supple has looked at other attempts at genocide both before and after the Second World War, rather than writing of the Holocaust in isolation. She brings her account up to date by discussing the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975 and the current suffering of Muslims in Bosnia. Throughout, she conveys the uniqueness of the Holocaust, without being afraid to make appropriate comparisons – or attempting to build a hierarchy of suffering.

Scattered throughout the book are big, bold questions relating to the text, which can be tedious for non-student readers. But even here Supple can be incisive, alluding to lessons for the future as well as those of the past.

Towards the end of the book she writes: 'One of the East Timorese people asked why the UN had decided to help liberate Kuwait when Saddam Hussein's army invaded it, but was not willing to do the same for East Timor when it was invaded by Indonesia. Can you answer this question?'

Clifford Singer

Sounds of silence



Songs of Ashes Song Cycle
by Julian Dawes, to texts by
Jerzy Ficowski
(The Classical Recording
Company)

This song cycle was completed in 1991 and received its premiere at the Spiro Institute on 29 April 1992, the eve of what has latterly become known as Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. The fifteen songs for soprano, with piano accompaniment, reflect on various aspects of the destruction of Eastern

European Jewry; on those who died in extermination camps, or from starvation in the ghettos. Although the tone is uniformly mournful, some of the most telling effects come from the use of jazz rhythms, for example, in the song 'Jewish Effects' where, over a lilting syncopation, the singer sings of the clothes, armchairs and dishes of a woman who presumably died in the camps. The culmination of the cycle reflects on a 'thronging of stones' in a graveyard, to an accompaniment reminiscent of the Mourners' Kaddish.

The prevailing tone of the cycle, then, is one of lamentation. But is this the appropriate, or indeed the only, artistic response? Missing from these songs is all

notion of resistance, or even a feeling for the lives of those in the ghetto. The only song which concerns a survivor concludes that he 'died alive'.

The artistic creation of the ghetto itself was one of irony, sarcasm and different forms of resistance. This can be seen in Yiddish songs such as *Minutn fun Bitokhn* (Moments of Confidence) where the singer concludes *Mir hobn zey in dr'erd* (we will bury them in the earth). A similar spirit pervades Viktor Ullmann's remarkable one-act opera, *The Emperor of Atlantis*, given an all too rare performance by the Mecklenburgh Opera on 7 October in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Emperor Überall has killed so many people that death itself goes on strike. Death will only relent if Überall himself is the first to die. It is little wonder that the opera, composed in Terezin, was banned by the Nazis.

A further representation of the Holocaust can be seen in Steve Reich's *Different Trains*. Against a rhythm suggesting the running of an express, people tell of their different experiences on the railway; the porter on the American express and the deportee on their way to a camp. That work achieves its effect by constant use of the railway motif. It suggests an image close to that of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*.

All these works, whether composed at the time or subsequently, do not allow themselves to indulge in mourning. *Songs of Ashes* would have been a stronger work if it had included these other aspects.

Michael Heiser

When the things we make are born out
of beauty and need
In a world made whole, he said, we can
all be creators
Not winners and losers in a game of
grab and greed.



These lines are taken from the title song of Leon Rosselson's recently published selection of 125 songs – words and music – which he has written since 1961. He chronicles the struggles of the last three decades both on a political and a personal level. This well-produced and carefully illustrated book is an affirmation that music and lyrics can not only describe experience but also be a powerful weapon of resistance that sustains us in our struggles. As it cuts through the lies, deceit and hypocrisy which maintain the status quo, Rosselson offers us the vision of a liberated world worth fighting for. *Bringing the News from Nowhere*, by Leon Rosselson, is published by Fuse Records, £14.95

ON the shelf

Making *challah* is not easy. My *challah* smells and tastes like *challah*, it just doesn't look as *challah* should. It's the braiding that's wrong. Some people can just *do it*. Maybe it's genetic. I must have a word with the ex-Chief Rabbi in case this matter can be sorted out for the benefit of my descendants. However, as our paths don't cross very often I'll have to make do with *Secrets of a Jewish Baker* by George Greenstein (Crossing Press, £11.99) where the illustration for braiding *challah* is not dissimilar to an octopus doing the twist. That might work. The rest of the book looks good too, even if *naan* isn't very Jewish.

The book(let) of the quarter has to be *At War with Society* by Tim Hepple (Searchlight, £4). Hepple was a prominent footsoldier of the British National Party who latterly worked in their 'bookshop' HQ in London. He 'turned' and worked as a mole for *Searchlight*, the anti-fascist mag. Hepple himself comes across as a bit of a spoilt brat who quite admires some of the BNP heavies, which gives more weight to his descriptions of the personalities and activities of the BNP members. He quotes the wife of Richard Edmonds, the BNP's HQ manager, describing Edmonds as a 'Jew-obsessed loser' which about sums up most of the BNP. If half of the stories Hepple tells are true, the BNP must be squirming at this pamphlet, which is essential reading for lukewarm anti-fascists especially so they can see just how nasty the BNP really is.

Fascism and Anti-Fascism in the Medway Towns 1927-40 by David Turner (Kent Anti-Fascist Action Committee, £3) is an account of an

earlier generation of fascists in one of the areas where they were strong. This booklet might encourage other groups to delve into their own local history, but it would have been nice if the pamphlet had given even a small resumé of what happened to these middle-class Mosleyites after the war. The year 1940 may have been a turning point, but it was surely not the end of the story.

From over the water, Thunder's Mouth have brought out the first anti-fascist coffee table book, *Blood in the Face* by James Ridgeway at £15.99 which looks at the history of the racist far right in the United States. The illustrations do, however, leave you feeling in need of a good wash. At least James Ridgeway recognises the antisemitic nature of the far right. In *Race and Class* by Alex Callinicos (Bookmarks, £2.50) Jews only get a walk-on part in this Socialist Workers' Party statement on how best to fight racism and fascism. Two paragraphs on the history of antisemitism and that's the lot. Oh well.

Adrienne Rich does not, as it were, always wear her *Mogen David* on her sleeve. And nor should she, would argue the United Synagogue, as only her father

(and ex-husband) were Jewish – and Rich is a lesbian, but she does now feel free to claim her Jewishness. Her essay, *Split at the Root: an essay on Jewish Identity*, first written in 1982 and now available in the excellent *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose* (Norton Critical Editions, £7.95) may be familiar to some JS readers from earlier anthologies (*Nice Jewish Girls* and *Fathers*). In the essay she describes how in the '40s she buys a Chagall print of a rabbi in a prayer shawl, yet in the same year, having a skirt altered, a seamstress asks her, 'You Jewish?' which she denies, upset that someone had guessed from her looks. Only in 1982 could she accept her Jewishness as a new beginning. And yet in 1951 Rich is obviously an outsider to American Christian culture...

What else then? Wear the old identity, The mark of other birth, and when you die, Die as an exile? It has done for some. Others surrender, book their passage home, Only to seek their exile soon again, No greater strangers than their countrymen.

Norton have brought out a large and very attractive volume of Rich's work, *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, for £18.95 and I can recommend it.

The best title this last quarter is *The Dyke and the Dybbuk* by Ellen Galford (Virago, £5.99). This is a homely tale of a Jewish lesbian taxi driver in Hackney (where else?) and a dybbuk, which goes some way to answering the question, 'Why is this book different from all others?' **R Buch-Solcher**

FIFTH COLUMN

Be part of the Fifth Column. Deadline for listings in the next issue of *Jewish Socialist* is 21 JANUARY. 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.

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.

Royte Klezmores – the women's klezmer band – are playing at the launch of 'The Peopling of London', a major exhibition on immigrant communities in London, including their music, at the Museum of London, Barbican, London EC1, on Sunday 21 November, 2-6pm.

'I blame the parent' JSG London branch meeting about the government and Jewish establishment targeting of single

parent families as a cause of social ills. All welcome. Sunday 12 December, 7.45pm, Friends International Centre, Byng Place, London WC1 (nearest tube: Goodge Street).

Jewish comedy on Sunday evenings until 5 December at the Old Bull Arts Centre, 678 High Street, Barnet, Herts. Box office: 081-449 0048.

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.

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