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## WHERE WE STAND

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# Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 32 • Autumn 1994 • £1.50



# Still looking for freedom?

**Simon Louvish on Israel, Palestine and Edward Said**  
**Music without frontiers • The politics of Jewish comedy**

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# Jewish Socialist

Everywhere you look, members of the Jewish establishment are declaring a crisis for Jews in Britain. Having declared a crisis, of falling numbers, based on their own biased statistics, they have launched 'Jewish Continuity' as the answer.

Based on a mythologised version of Jewish survival, the 'miracle of Jewish Continuity' trumpeted by the Chief Rabbi is a fake; there is no continuous, essential, ahistorical narrative of this sort. It is a mystification of the past in the service of demanding an oppressive conformity in the present.

We too are interested in history, wrenching the past into the present, examining it, recovering its lost possibilities, and using its hard fragments to disrupt present complacency and conformity.

The establishment declare with horror and foreboding a crisis in Jewish life in the west, epitomised by the Chief Rabbi's nauseous book *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* They declare the number of Jews in Britain is falling, that one in two

'Based on a mythologised version of Jewish survival, the "miracle of Jewish Continuity" trumpeted by the Chief Rabbi is a fake'

immense diversity, uncensored, and undiminished. As for our children they will decide for themselves.

They say we are handing Hitler a posthumous victory. Well, we refuse to carry their mythical version of Jewish survival, and refuse to burden our children with this responsibility.

Our intent is to build and enjoy personal and political relationships across boundaries, rather than step back voluntarily into a ghetto.

Walter Benjamin said: 'In every era an attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.... Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.'

In that spirit of resistance we wish all our readers a happy new year.

This issue was produced by an editorial committee consisting of Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel, Charlie Pottins, David Rosenberg and Clifford Singer. Cover picture by Sally Ramsden/WUS.



Not just for laughs: Ivor Dembina takes the stage at Jewish Socialist's comedy benefit (report, page 20; interview, page 22). Picture: Ann Frankel

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## DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Anti-fascist protesters took to the streets when the new Italian Foreign Minister, Antonio Martino, visited London for talks with British Prime Minister John Major and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd on 29 June.

Martino himself is not a fascist but the Italian government in which he serves has appointed several members of the fascist Alleanza Nazionale to ministerial posts. The British government has gone out of its way to build bridges with the new Italian leadership.

The events of 29 June took an unexpected turn, however, when it was announced that Mr Martino would also be meet the new president of the Board of Deputies, Eldred Tabachnik, and Sir Sigmund Sternberg from the Council of Christians and Jews.

The Jewish Socialists' Group condemned the meeting which allowed the Italian government 'to divert anti-fascist criticism by claiming that it has the support of Jewish leaders', while Douglas Hurd could

justify his cosy relationship with Mr Martino by pointing out that the president of the Board of Deputies was happy to meet with him.

Mr Tabachnik retorted that his initiative was supported by anti-racist groups, but failed to substantiate this claim. Indeed a large number of anti-racist groups held a demonstration outside the Italian embassy while they met.

A good start for Mr Martino but not such a good one for Tabachnik.

## FASCISTS SET SIGHTS ON CABLE STREET

Soon after Labour's victory in Tower Hamlets at the last council elections, veteran Labour councillor Albert Lilley died, leaving his Shadwell ward seat vacant.

The British National Party immediately declared it would fight the seat and stood Gordon Callow, a 'bodyguard' of Oswald Mosley in the 1950s, who holds convictions for throwing fireworks at a Jewish Lord Mayor and spitting and making antisemitic remarks at another ceremony.

Derek Beackon, the failed BNP ex-councillor, has also been seen around the ward. Labour candidate Michael Keith identifies two main issues in the campaign: whether people are still as disillusioned by the Liberal policies as they were in May, and whether the current climate over 'race' issues can push the BNP into second place.

The BNP has used the murder of white youth Richard Everitt in Camden to canvass support, and is reported to have approached Richard's father to make political capital out of his death.

The Shadwell ward includes parts of Cable Street, and old, new and reconditioned estates. Housing is a major issue, with high levels of overcrowding and long waiting lists.

The BNP have not, however, been able to use discontent over housing to the extent that they did in Millwall, since the London Docklands Development Corporation and housing action trusts have invested in improvements in some of the mainly white estates.

There has been concern about the election being called on Yom Kippur.

## ITALIAN FASCISTS EXPOSED

There is a temptation to underestimate the threat posed by the involvement of the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) in the Italian government – to suggest that the AN isn't really fascist or that it is simply a minority party in a government run on Thatcherite lines by Silvio Berlusconi.

The Campaign Against Fascism in Europe have produced a pamphlet – *Italian Fascism: Same Wolf - New Clothes* – which shatters such comfortable illusions.

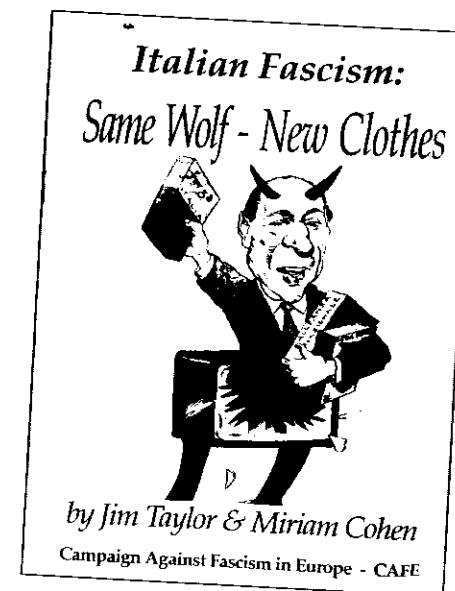
The first section, by Miriam Cohen, demonstrates the centrality of the AN to Berlusconi's project. She places the success of Italian fascism in the context of the dramatic growth of fascism throughout Europe but goes on to look at the specific influence the fascists have had on Italian politics, openly and behind the scenes, in the shadowy P2 organisation and the 'intelligence community'.

She gives details on the extreme right-wing nature of Italian government leaders, both within and outside the AN.

The second article by Jim Taylor charts the history of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), which became the AN just before the Italian elections. He documents its origins in the Salò Republic, the statelet which carried out the same genocidal policies as Nazi Germany after the Allies had taken over most of Italy during the second world war.

He documents MSI's rising influence in the 1950s and early 1960s and how this was stopped by mass working-class action.

He shows in detail the relationship between the MSI and the terrorist groups which committed an enormous number of outrages including the notorious bombing of Bologna railway station in which 86 people were murdered.



Connections are shown between these terrorists and British fascists. Jim's article leaves you in no doubt that, despite their 'post-fascist' pretensions, the AN are unreconstructed Nazis.

The biggest problem with the pamphlet is spelling, particularly Italian names. There is also a need for more analysis of what makes fascism tick and the role of the mafia. By the time you read this, these issues should have been addressed because a new edition will include more analysis and have been proof read by Italian activists.

● *Italian Fascism: Same Wolf - New Clothes*, by Jim Taylor and Miriam Cohen. Published by the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe, price £1 including p&sp. Write c/o Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.

# PRESS GANG

*Julia Bard looks at the unexpected results of the Chief Rabbi's investigation into women in the community*

'Renewal starts with Jewish women. They are the builders of our values, our homes, our families,' said Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks at the start of his 'Decade of Renewal' in 1991. So if, as our leaders maintain, the community is shrinking at a rate which threatens its very existence, that must be because women are failing to 'build'.

To find out whether this was the case, Jonathan Sacks launched an investigation into women in the Jewish community. He chose Rosalind Preston, the first female vice-president of the Board of Deputies, to head a working party which divided the research into five broad areas: family issues; religious and synagogal affairs, social issues, education and *get* and *agunah* (divorce and 'chained women').

Frustrated by their low status in religious and communal institutions, disappointed by the poor quality of their Jewish education, and worn down by the pressure to conform to a stereotype of wife and mother, at meetings across the country and in questionnaires which ran to 23 pages, many women expressed anger about being sold short by the community.

Participants in the discussions were also concerned about the Chief Rabbi's motives and wanted

to know how the research was going to be presented. Women repeatedly asked if Jonathan Sacks was going to edit the report, and if so whether he would have the right to censor information he found uncongenial. And the researchers repeatedly assured the meetings that the material was under their control and that they would decide the content of the final report.

This is not exactly how it has turned out. The survey report and the review and recommendations, published in two separate volumes, were due to be launched in May. However, instead of the expected press launch, an abridged version of the research results was presented at a seminar to an unusual selection of academics, many of whom have no particular connection with the Jewish community.

This presentation was followed by a smaller, more public meeting where an even more abridged version was offered. *Jewish Socialist* discovered by chance that these events were happening and despite discouragement ('It will be very academic; I'm sure you won't be interested') was granted an invitation. The *Jewish Chronicle* reporter was furious not to have been informed about the 'academic' meeting.

Perhaps there were still unresolved arguments about the content of the report and review. At any rate, the Chief Rabbi was clearly directing operations when the books were finally published at the end of June.

Most of the press reports were bland, deferential and remarkably uniform. The radio reports were the same, which might be explained by the fancy footwork going on behind the scenes, with the Chief Rabbi agreeing to be interviewed but not to debate the research findings, while other interviewees were happy to debate the findings but were unable to lay hands on copies of the report.

## Independent

There were two exceptions. *Jewish Chronicle's* women's page editor Valerie Monchi has maintained a rigorously independent view and has provided a forum for women in the community who the rabbinic establishment has tried to intimidate or silence.

Under the headline 'Sacks rewrote women's report' she quoted Evelyn Stern, a senior member of the Women in the Community working party, who said that the Chief Rabbi had reworded recommendations on kaddish (the prayer for the dead) and on whether women could use the Sefer Torah (scroll of the law).

Subsequently the other members of the team were warned not to speak to the press, but not all of them obeyed and the debate has continued in the letters page

of the *Jewish Chronicle*.

Angela Levin of the *Sunday Telegraph* interviewed a range of women, orthodox, progressive and secular, few of them impressed by or particularly polite about Jonathan Sacks. Her article was due to come out at the end of June, just before publication of the report and review, but the Chief Rabbi, having an inkling that it wouldn't be entirely complimentary, asked the editor to delay it until the following week. He agreed, which also gave the journalist a chance to interview Sacks and put his side of the story. It didn't help.

The double-page spread was a hard-hitting critique of a patriarchal establishment. Women spoke openly about their lives and their views. Few had faith that the report's recommendations would be implemented, and while some expressed their anger and frustration in the community, others were afraid to be identified as having attended a women's service for fear of reprisals. '...when it came to taking their photograph...' wrote Angela Levin, 'many refused. One because she had a daughter who is due to be married in a United Synagogue in a few weeks and feared trouble if her face was shown; another who teaches in a Jewish school, was concerned about her job.'

If the Chief Rabbi is honest in his claim to want to reach out to women, he's going to have to work hard to persuade women like these that he's running a benign establishment.

● *The Jewish Socialists' Group is holding a dayschool on Women in the Jewish Community on 6 November 1994. Details on page 11.*

'We particularly want to encourage younger people to get involved,' she said.

● *Further information from Manchester Jewish Museum, 190 Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester M8 8LW. Tel 061-834 9879.*

## MANCHESTER MUSEUM

Congratulations to Adrienne Wallman, the new director of the Manchester Jewish Museum. Adrienne, a Jewish Socialists' Group member, is

delighted to have moved to the museum which, as has permanent exhibits and organises walks, talks, recitals and meetings.

## NO SACKS PLEASE, WE'RE JEWISH

Happy New Year to all our friends, family and comrades from Julia Bard, David Rosenberg, Jacob and Reuben

## ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS OPPOSED

The fundamentalist Islamic group, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which has gained notoriety for its anti-Jewish, homophobic and anti-democratic statements, raised its profile at a major rally at Wembley, North London in August.

With mainstream Jewish organisations calling for the provocative rally to be banned, the issue threatened to polarise on a religious basis. The Jewish Socialists' Group campaigned for a broad anti-racist response but in a climate of anti-Islamic racism in Britain, the major anti-racist and anti-Nazi organisations backed off from confronting an openly anti-Jewish Islamic group.

However a number of local anti-racist and anti-fascist groups united with the JSG and other organisations such as Southall Monitoring Group and Women Against Fundamentalism around a public statement which read: 'The principle force behind this rally is the Hizb-ut-Tahrir group... A recent leaflet put out by the group said "the hope of resurrection will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them".'

'We unreservedly condemn all racism and antisemitism. Jewish and Muslim communities face racist abuse and attacks on a daily basis. It is essential that both communities unite with each other and other communities to fight against racist persecution. We fear that the rally on 7 August will serve to incite violence towards Jews and make such unity more difficult to attain in the future.'

The apparent difficulty of combining a principled opposition to racism and fundamentalism was typified by *Searchlight* magazine which initially supported the statement but later withdrew.



A Jewish Socialist team scrambled their way heroically to the quarter final of a six-a-side soccer tournament organised by the Supporters' Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (SCARF), before losing 1-0 to a younger and lighter team of Turkish Communist Youth. The cup winners, fittingly, were Tower Hamlets Unison, who have been at the forefront of local campaigns against the BNP. SCARF are organising nationally to remove racism and fascism from the terraces. See page 18.

## WRITER WRONGED

Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin was forced into hiding in June after a warrant was issued for her arrest for allegedly making 'antagonistic, insulting and acrimonious statements against the Holy Koran'.

She was also in fear of her life after the religious right wing demanded that she be hanged and 100,000 taka (£1,500) was put on her life at a public meeting.

Following local and international pressure for the charges to be dropped, she appeared in court and was granted bail and allowed to leave the country. But the charges and death threat remain.

Press reports about the writer-in-hiding have sensationalised her private life and obscured the issue of the rise of the right wing in Bangladesh and its attacks on women who are less able to speak out than Taslima.

In recent years, several women have been sentenced to death by public stoning or burning, or to public lashings,

by village councils or *salish* which have no legal authority to pass such sentences.

Victims include a 21-year-old woman sentenced to death by stoning in January 1993 and another woman publicly burned to death in June 1994 after *salish* verdicts.

A 14-year-old girl was sentenced by *salish* in August 1992 to 100 lashes after she had been raped by an influential villager; the *salish* acquitted the rapist but took the pregnancy which resulted from the rape as evidence of illicit sexual intercourse.

The law under which the *salish* have illegally tried, convicted and sentenced individuals is a form of Islamic law which contravenes civil law.

Fatwas have been issued by right-wing imams against non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with poor women. Friday prayer gatherings have been used to attack NGOs and Taslima with equal viciousness.

The government, reluctant to alienate the religious right

(which has political and economic power), has failed to act against the illegal *salish* sentences or the death threats. It had, however, no difficulty in issuing an arrest warrant against Taslima.

Bangladesh was born out of a war in which three million people died, between those who believed in secularism and those who wanted an Islamic state. The country that emerged in 1971 had a secular constitution giving equal rights to minority Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, and majority Muslims – men and women.

Bangladesh has been portrayed as a state ruled by unopposed 'fundamentalists', and Taslima described as a 'freak', 'westernised', 'outspoken' woman (Radio 4), as if only western women speak out against oppression.

Women and men from all backgrounds in Bangladesh are struggling against the increasing power of right-wing Islamic groups. Taslima is the best-known symbol of those struggles.

# CRACKS IN THE WALL

*Is the European Commission easing its stance on immigration? Bernard Misrahi reports*

We have all heard of 'Fortress Europe' – a European Union that strives to keep out all Third World immigrants. So it was surprising to hear Cornelis de Jong from the European Commission declare, at a conference on 'immigration after Maastricht' called by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, that immigration might be good.

Together with law centres and anti-deportation campaigns, the JCWI has been fighting an ever increasing tightening of immigration controls and a rise in deportations. It is a war of attrition that we have been losing. The only consolation is that without this opposition the situation might be even worse, and less people would realise how appalling the controls are. These defeats contrast with progress in increasing equal opportunities at work over the last 15 years.

There is no chance of any liberalisation of immigration controls without a change of government. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the Labour Party has a radically different attitude. Previous Labour governments introduced and tightened controls. Since the Aliens Act of 1905, the first immigration act, no government has liberalised controls.

So when Cornelis de Jong declared that migration is not necessarily bad, I listened. He recognised that more restrictive measures will just lead to more illegal immigration and reward trafficking in people. Even when migrants infringe controls their human right should be respected.

De Jong supported a policy of economic support to the countries that the

immigrants came from to reduce pressures on them to leave. However, he recognised that in the short term there might still be more immigration and that should be accepted.

There are eight million people in the European Union who don't enjoy the freedom of citizens of the 12 states to work in any other EU country. Many are citizens of Turkey, Algeria or other African or Caribbean countries. Most Black people settled in the UK do at least have the right.

Most ethnic minority communities in Germany and France aren't allowed to work in another European Union country. De Jong wants all 'third country nationals' to have the right to work anywhere in the EU.

## Racist

By the standards of any European government this is radical stuff. But it makes sense for capitalist reasons. The European Community was created to facilitate movement of capital and labour. Drastic restrictions on the mobility of labour don't make economic sense. Most governments have been so racist they haven't recognised this, or were prepared to pay the price. The Commission, however, might be a little less hidebound by old traditions. Maybe?

Jan Niessen from the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe wasn't impressed. 'Nothing is to be expected of European Union immigration policy.' Niessen believed the law enforcement tendency in the EU apparatus had the upper hand. He wanted the human rights approach (of Cornelis de Jong) to be the starting point. If human rights instruments

were enshrined in law they might thwart some of the proposals of the law enforcers.

He outlined a few such human rights principles including the right to migrate and the right to seek asylum. Member states should co-ordinate their immigration policies, but in a liberal direction. He suggested quotas to admit immigrants – and not just refugees. The right to family reunion should be recognised. Settlers should be entitled to full citizenship within five years.

Claude Moraes, director of the JCWI, didn't believe a Fortress Europe was inevitable. There might be grounds for optimism, not least in the European Commission communication moved by de Jong, elements of which he welcomed.

Josephine Ocloo from the Standing Conference on Racial Equality in Europe (SCORE) reported on the 'alternative summits' convened by SCORE which attracted Moroccans, Zaireois, Turks and Algerians who had lived in Western Europe for three generations without enjoying citizenship rights. Mitterand's relaxation of French immigration controls over ten years ago seems to have been forgotten – the French government is now committed to 'zero immigration'.

She reported on the SCORE experiment of sending a group of people on a day trip to the Continent to test whether they really could simply wave their passports to the immigration officials or if, as most of the party were Black, they would have to show them – which is what happened. So much for the removal of controls within EU states.

Who were we to believe – Cornelis de Jong or Jan Niessen? Don Flynn from the JCWI and a prime organiser of

this conference left us in no doubt. The European Commission's communication represented a window of opportunity. One that should be taken before the window was slammed shut. How long? There are two years until the Inter-Governmental Conference in 1996.

The Commission has a right to initiate proposals. It is not rooted in any particular national culture so is relatively objective. The communication has many unique features. 'In my 15 years in this field I have never come across a policy maker who said immigration is a good thing,' he added.

## Freedom

How effectively can the Commission stand up against Douglas Hurd and his cronies? We can't answer that question as spectators. Together with Black and anti-racist organisations, and hopefully with the support of the 62 Labour MEPs who reputedly support freedom of movement for third country nationals, we have to press the Commission to clarify what they mean and to press the member states to relax their immigration policies.

Whatever the balance of forces, if the Commission really is proposing a significantly less racist immigration policy (let's not claim it is non-racist) we must lend them such support as we can. How many other opportunities do fighters against racist controls have that we can afford not to test this one?

Where had I heard Don's term 'window of opportunity' before? From Afif Safieh, PLO representative, at a Jewish Socialists' Group meeting. As Jewish socialists campaigning for justice in the Middle East we are accustomed to cautious optimism and supporting any initiative that has even a glimmer of hope.

# HOW SCOTT SCUPPERED DISABLED RIGHTS BILL

Nicholas Scott, former minister for disabled people misled the House of Commons and 6.5 million disabled people about his department's involvement in wrecking the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on 6 May, writes Simone Aspis.

This Bill, which will give disabled people the same civil rights, access to services and public facilities as non-disabled people, had support from all sides of the House. At the second reading, 231 MPs voted for it and during the committee stage the Government had not tabled a single amendment.

As time was getting short, John Hannon, chair of the all-party disablement group, had overwhelming support for a motion calling on the Government to allocate enough time to ensure the bill went through the remaining stages.

During the second reading and until the third reading I wrote, phoned and met many MPs; some were committed to the Bill, some were confused and some opposed the Bill. I spoke to all the Jewish MPs and Mildred Gordon and Barbara Roche offered support.

I also probed Nicholas Scott's conscience to ask him to support this beautiful legislation and to go against the Government's decision.

In principle, Mr Scott said he supported the Bill but stressed he had responsibilities to the Government. A stark contradiction to this claim came when 80 new amendments were tabled, two days before the third reading on 6 May. Five tame Tory MPs, Richard Spring, Michael Stern, Edward Leigh, Bernard Jenkin and Lady Olga Maitland were chosen



Simone Aspis with Labour MP Roger Berry, who sponsored the disabled rights bill

to destroy the bill on behalf of the Government.

The amendments were designed to either waste time or weaken the Bill. On 6 May, Nicholas Scott was forced to admit that the parliamentary council and senior civil servants had been used to draft the wrecking amendments, and should have been tabled at committee stage and not at the third reading.

An embarrassed Government gave the Bill additional time on 20 May. It was third on the day's business with the first two private members' bills having 45 amendments. Labour MPs called for Nicholas Scott's resignation. He finally killed the Bill by requesting a vote when only 70 MPs were in the House – 100 MPs are needed for a valid vote.

● See the letters, page 10.

## JEWISH SOCIALIST PUBLICATIONS

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● **Also available: Songs Anthology (Yiddish) with music, by Majer Bogdanski, £7**

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## DON'T ASK THE RABBI



### ● Kol Nidre Appeal

Since the Oxfam report that Britain's rising poverty has put it on a par with developing countries I believe it is time to stop sending money to the JNF (Jewish National Fund) and set up an organisation called the BNF (British National Fund).

The BNF will fund very similar projects as those we funded in Israel. These include planting trees; many forest and highland areas are increasingly difficult to maintain for grouse shooting; funds for religious buildings and stately homes – we must preserve our cultural heritage; monies for demolishing dreary council estates and building settlements or *piet a terres* for worthy tax-paying citizens. And lastly we will be sending money for security forces to maintain them.

Please give generously.

### ● To Worried of Tottenham, N17

You are not alone. Many Spurs fans have now finally forgiven the Germans.

# GENE GENIE

So many people feel mystified by science and technology that those who take political decisions on issues from nuclear and chemical weapons to genetically engineered crops have been able to dismiss or ignore anyone who wants to question, oppose or even discuss those decisions.

The 20th century has brought increasingly rapid and sometimes revolutionary scientific changes, but right across the spectrum there are examples of supposedly neutral research being used directly to destroy life or at least to enhance short term profits at the expense of long term human interests.

The misuse of genetics has had a long and sometimes tragic history, and new developments are throwing up more and greater social, political and economic dilemmas. *GenEthics News* is a welcome new publication which provides clear and accessible information, reports of the activities of governments, industry and campaigners, and debate on the ethics and effects of the revolution in genetic engineering.

Edited by Jewish Socialists' Group member David King, *GenEthics News* is aimed at non-specialists, and the first issue includes a clear guide to genetic engineering, analysis of the politics of screening for genetic diseases, debate on the labelling of genetically engineered food, and a report on the first patent application for a method for genetically engineering humans.

● *GenEthics News* is bimonthly and is offered a free launch issue to subscribers. First year's subscription is £14.95 (usual rate £18.95). Contact *GenEthics News*, Freepost (LON 6013), PO Box 6313, London N16 0BR.

# THE MEAN TEST

Much energy and attention has been focused on the Disabled Person's Civil Rights Bill with good reason but the effects of another bill undermining disabled people's rights have hardly been recognised.

The Incapacity for Work – Social Security Bill conceived in the November 1993 Tory budget passed rapidly through the Commons and Lords and received a third and final reading on Tuesday 21 June 1994. Until now the only opposition has come from the Disability Benefits Consortium made up of representatives from various charities and voluntary organisations who were involved in a DSS consultation document about the bill. Their monitoring of the bill's progress and their 'respectable' lobbying of MPs has not excited media coverage or stimulated public awareness.

The 'Incapacity for Work Bill' if passed will be operative from April 1995. It sets out to abolish Invalidity Benefit, many people's sole income, and replace it with Incapacity Benefit, the qualifying conditions for which are much tougher. The Disabled Income Group reports that according to government estimates 250,000 people currently receiving Invalidity Benefit could be denied Incapacity Benefit as the result of a review, while another 70,000 people will not qualify who would have successfully claimed Invalidity Benefit.

Nicholas Scott, ex-minister for disabled people said the bill seeks to target 'those people genuinely medically incapable of work', thus implying that vast numbers of claims are fraudulent. The truth is that the government aims to make savings at the expense of disabled people.

The key factor in deciding who is genuine is the new medical test, which will



Incapacity Action protest outside Peter Lilley's home.

measure incapacity for any work as opposed to Invalidity Benefit which took age, job skills, experience and other factors into account.

Instead of obtaining a sick note from their GP, claimants will be expected to complete a lengthy questionnaire with a related score chart. Those who score below a certain threshold will be deemed capable of work. This decision will be made by a DSS adjudicating officer with the option of referring claimants to a DSS medical board for a physical examination.

This process as well as being extremely stressful, discriminates against those who have difficulty with reading and writing because of their disability, and who may be discouraged from claiming altogether.

The medical test doesn't look at 'incapacity' in relation to work – it focuses on severity of disability.

Questions and allotted scores range from the insulting to the ridiculous: 'No voluntary control over bowels' scores 25 points, but if you 'cannot lift and push an unladen wheelbarrow' you score only 4.5 points. No account is taken of the fluctuating nature, for example, of HIV and AIDS, multiple sclerosis, Arthritis or ME, where to perform a task once might be within your limits, but

repeated activity would bring about relapse and a massive exacerbation of the illness.

The real message of the Incapacity for Work Bill is that sick people are unproductive and therefore disposable. This has to be challenged. The right to benefit at its most basic level is about the right to survival.

So far activists have concentrated their resources on the Disabled Peoples' Civil Rights Bill believing that if this becomes law there will be some leverage against economic discrimination. Unfortunately this does not offer any comfort to the disabled people who fear total loss of income if the Incapacity for Work Bill is passed. We have to act now. Links must be made between the campaigns.

Incapacity Action, a group of people with various disabilities organised a lively demonstration against the bill on 20 June outside Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley's home in Islington.

We welcome the support of non-disabled allies. Contact us, lobby your MPs to campaign against the bill and raise the issues in your own meetings and organisations.

● Contact: Incapacity Action, PO Box 9 136-138 Kingsland High Street, E8.

## PAST EXPRESS

'ANGER at 150,000 UK Bosnians,' exclaimed the *Sunday Express* on 1 May. 'Thousands claiming state handouts. MP calls for identity controls.'

After we'd seen helpless civilians being bombed in Gorazde 'safe haven', something was needed to lower the public's compassion level and put readers back in true-blue xenophobic mode. *Sunday Express* political editor Charles Lewington obliged: 'Tory MPs say the hand of kindness extended to Bosnians is spawning a new generation of "Euro-migrants" who live off benefits and take the jobs of British workers.'

No good wondering why they're taking jobs if they can live off benefits; nor questioning the *Express* figure of 150,000. Less than 5,000 refugees from former Yugoslavia have actually been admitted. But when the saloon-bar bigot is spouting, it's no good arguing. Besides, council and Euro-elections were coming up.

Home Secretary Michael Howard raised the bogey of immigration. Mr Howard goes to *shul* and believes in 'family values'. But he also belongs to the Conservative Party. A Bosnian father who pleaded with the Home Office for months wasn't allowed in to take care of his children till after their mother had committed suicide in despair.

Tory Wandsworth council wouldn't let a disused old people's home be used temporarily to house Bosnian torture victims in case their presence lowered local property values – the kind of values Tories really care about. In Essex, after racist attacks on Bosnian refugees, a Tory councillor said: 'Send them back where they come from'.

'We British have always responded to the dictates of humanity, and always will,' lied the *Sunday Express* editorial, 'but we also have a duty to ourselves.' *Express* newspapers always speak for 'we British'; anyone who disagrees with them shouldn't be here.

It reminds me how the *Sunday Express* warned of the menace from Nazi Germany; the

# dybbuk's diary

menace of Jews coming here. On 19 June 1938, for instance: 'In Britain half a million Jews find their home... Just now there is an influx of foreign Jews. They are overrunning the country. They are trying to enter the medical profession in great numbers. They wish to practise as dentists. Worst of all, many of them are holding themselves out to the public as psycho-analysts...'

As if sinister white-coated foreign Svengalis weren't enough to terrify suburbia, it also warned: 'Aliens who can hardly speak English are now driving London taxicabs and forcing British drivers off the streets.'

Changes in ownership haven't changed the *Express* tradition.

## RENTAMOUTH

THE Tory MP quoted in the *Sunday Express*, demanding strict checks to stop Bosnians coming over for 'state handouts' turned out to be rentamouth Terry Dicks, the member for Hayes and Harlington. He cannot be accused of being anti-Muslim, nor is he against travellers receiving hospitality.

Not only did el Tel accept the Iraqi regime's right to hang journalist Farzad Barzofi, but he recently defended the flogging of a British subject accused of selling alcohol in the United Arab Emirates. Mr Dicks is decent enough to have accepted trips and hospitality from the Emirates.

And now the good news: editor Eve Pollard is getting the heave-ho from the *Sunday Express*. It was no place for a nice Jewish girl, nor apparently for her. And the bad news: she's being replaced by *Daily Star* editor Brian Hitchens, whose contribution to tabloid journalism has been to make the *Sun* seem like a liberal intellectual paper.

## BARNET FAIR

UNLIKE cab drivers, diary columnists don't have to do their 'knowledge'. Not that navigating has ever been a problem for dybbuks, but *Guardian* diarist Maev Kennedy referred on 3 August to 'Labour taking back Brent council, and the consequent election as mayor of Ellis Hillman, Trotskyite, subterraneanophile and Beloved Life President of the Flat Earth Society...'

Unfortunately, 'Barmy Brent', as Ms Kennedy called it, remains eccentrically true-blue Tory, which is probably why the tabloids have stopped reporting its goings-on. But Labour did win the neighbouring borough of Barnet for the very first time. Our old mate Ellis Hillman, who was a left-wing councillor when Red Ken was still trying to penetrate the Junior Primrose League, is mayor of Barnet.

Ever erudite ex-Habonimnik Ellis, star of the orthodox Yakar and the most un-orthodox South Place Ethical Society, is an expert on the Underground (tunnels, rather than politics) and, perhaps appropriately, also a member of the Lewis Carroll Society. He has an explanation for the recurrent number 42 in Carroll's works – something to do with the Book of Revelations. And he has brought a Lewis Carroll exhibition to Hendon's Church Farm House museum.

'Life here used to be so stodgy! We want to bring humour and fun,' the new mayor told Maev Kennedy when she visited his parlour.

I'm sure he'll do better than last year's deputy mayor who held a town hall ceremony to present his mongrel with a badge of office as Official Deputy Mayoral Dog. (If they'd stuck a blue rosette on

the animal it would have got elected in some places.) And I hope the *Guardian's* research library will provide Maev Kennedy with a map for her next foray beyond the North Circular.

## GRAVEN IMAGES

CHIEF Rabbi Jonathan Sacks invited me round to ask my advice on a few things that had been worrying him. 'Will we have Jewish grandchildren?' he asks. Such a scholarly man, but a traditional Jewish education can leave one so unprepared for married life!

While he tells me his troubles, I look around, admiring his taste in pictures – no Safed or Jerusalem townscapes, nor traditional Jewish themes, just: John Major with Jonathan Sacks, Margaret Thatcher with Jonathan Sacks, George Bush with Jonathan Sacks....

I suppose members of the United Synagogue, nay the entire Jewish community, should *kvel* at these reminders of the Chief's world standing. But I'm glad you can't photograph a dybbuk!

## WELL MAY YE SCOFF

INVITED to attend a workshop for youth club members organised by Nottingham Anti-Fascist Youth Arts Project sub-committee of the Notts Anti-Fascist Alliance (NAFYAPNAFA), I was about to decline (I've seen enough of workshops – oily and sweaty places – thank you, and besides I can't pronounce your name) when someone mentioned the magic word 'food'. So off I went.

Who should I meet among the folk showing off their ethnic fare but a well-known local Socialist Workers Party member who had brought some tasty-looking chopped liver. A JSJ purist ascertained it was *treyf* (unkosher). Nu, so where do you find a kosher butcher in Mansfield?

Then out came some youth clubbers to plant little national flags next to each dish, and the staunchly anti-Zionist SWP comrade found himself behind the old blue-and-white standard. Well may you scoff! I scoffed the lot, and everything else that was going.



# LIBERALISM OR LIBERATION?

**JS** It felt like there was a real gap between Mark Levene's timid article on identity (JS31) and the courageous-sounding introduction the magazine had added.

The article itself was filled with worthy and windily repetitious lists of 'most exciting prospects' for 'dumping Zionism' and sampling a whole new multicultural menu. But you could hear the sigh of relief every time Mark Levene turned to hymning traditional values of a Saksian kind.

All the old conservative clichés were there: secularism as a 'painful casting adrift' from one's identity; from fundamentalism as 'surely in many ways preferable to crass materialism' (like that naughty Don't Ask the Rabbi

column, maybe?); and what, dare someone of mixed descent like myself ask, does Mark Levene mean by 'changes in marriage and lifestyle patterns ... threatening the entire community's social profile'?

The article speaks with all-too-conscious daring of 'breaking free of' Zionism, but feels so much more at ease when commenting on its 'amazing track record'.

The ludicrous claim that Israel has built a unique, vibrant and dynamic culture and society', instead of a colonial backwater, takes one back to the provincial triumphalist days of the 1950s and 1960s which Levene claims have now 'run their course'. Days when the greatest poet in the Mediterranean, Adonis, was writing in Beirut at the heart of a circle of adventurous,

dissident, modernist writers; while a few miles away potty little Tel Aviv was ignoring all that and boasting about being 'the only modern city in the Middle East'. To say Israel should now get itself a 'niche' (like getting a new haircut), without even mentioning the invasion of the Lebanon, calls for some nerve.

Maybe Levene is suggesting that Israel should become a free-press zone for Arabic writers like Adonis and Naguib Mafouz when they're threatened by one-party states and religious fundamentalism? Maybe he's advocating reparations to Bir Zeit University for all the years it was closed down? Maybe you don't get to be part of Levantine culture by serving falafel and couscous, any more than you get to be part of Europe by singing in the Eurovision Song contest.

Maybe to join the club you need the humility to admit that Israel, with the highest per capita foreign aid in the world, has so far achieved pathetically little in the arts compared not only to Diaspora Jewish communities but to such unusual suspects as Syria, Iraq, Sudan.

This article seems to me to exemplify the difference between a liberal vision (addressed to 'good neighbours and citizens') and a liberatory one. I've always appreciated *Jewish Socialist's* openness to different voices, but I can't help thinking how Mark Levene's essay – like Philip Mendes' review a few pages further on – would have looked a lot more interesting, even 'exciting', in the *Jewish Chronicle*. When I open my eagerly awaited *Jewish Socialist* to read it cover to cover, I expect something braver.

Amanda Sebestyen  
London NW1

## JOIN THE NETWORK

**JS** I am writing to thank the Jewish Socialists' Group for its kind and generous donation of £20 towards the setting up of the Jewish Disabled Persons' Network.

I would like to get in touch with Jewish disabled men and women who want to get involved. This includes people with chronic illnesses, mental health difficulties, learning difficulties and physical, hearing and visual impairments. Please contact me by writing to the *Jewish Socialist* address.

Simone Aspis  
London NW2

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

## SHARP, FUNNY AND GENTLE

**JS** I had such a good time at the *Jewish Socialist* benefit in June I thought I'd write to say thanks!

Warm summer evening, central London venue, wonderful atmosphere and stunning line up – it was a lovely combination of real quality performances and very good fun!

With such an impressive bill I had expected a good evening but was surprised by how good it was. It wasn't like seeing just another comedy gig – it all felt very special and particular to the occasion.

The material was well focused, appropriate, sharp, funny and sometimes gentle – a quality not often associated with stand-up.

I heard one complaint. A friend was disappointed that he wasn't asked to put his hand in his pocket more often. He went home with more money in his pocket



Jeremy Hardy at the benefit.  
Picture: Ann Frankel

than he was entirely happy with.

The main difficulty this leaves you with is how to follow it – as follow it you must. We want more!

So, in short, great event, well done, when's the next one?

Debra Reay  
London E7

## MISQUOTED AND MISUNDERSTOOD

**JS** I applaud Bernard Misrahi's point that we must celebrate our own victories – it makes for a more positive outlook indeed.

However, my article was not simply an exposition of my viewpoint; it was a report on a conference, partly shaped by my analysis but also reflecting the mood and tone of the conference.

Bernard quotes me as saying 'rough treatment of aliens is now perfectly acceptable', and says: 'Ann Frankel is dismissing the opposition by writing this.'

Actually I didn't write it, I quoted it. Tony Kushner said it and the remark has quotation marks around it in the article for this reason.

Ann Frankel  
London E8

# LOST AT SEA

**JS** My son sometimes sends me your tabloid (I can only describe it as such) when there is a particularly vitriolic article which even he cannot stomach. He knows my views and he knows that although he is far more left than I am, we do agree more or less.

Your paper, which could do so much good, brings out the worst in Jews like myself. It does no good to admit the mistakes and errors of the past if you are going to capitalise on them in the future. Some of your pieces have been really charming, sympathetic and realistic but you are the most fascist of all. You are the greatest antisemites of them all.

Perhaps you don't realise that you are not being just or fair in your views – how will you manage when Israel and the Arabs make peace? What will you rant on about then? I have always believed as a socialist that the Jews and Arabs should talk peace – the same as the Irish – but have never heard such virulent condemnation of Israel from even the worst anti-Jewish

offenders here.

How dare you people even mention the Holocaust in your magazine. You are the ones who would throw the Israelites into the sea, you who would demean us all to gain credence with the Arabs (who spit upon you). Because we, the elder Jews, went meekly to the gas chambers you youngsters don't realise it could all happen here and however militant you are you can go just the same.

Just let me hear one word of criticism of things the Arabs have done instead of the constant harping on how we have done them out of a few miles of land, when the rest of their fellows own a quarter of the world. Why, think you, have they been unable to live anywhere but the camps? In all those years any bloody fool could have found somewhere even if, as you say, right is on their side. For God's sake it is 50 years almost.

If you would change the character of some of your more vicious articles you might just get a following of the sort of Jewish and non-Jewish subscribers you need. If, as you pretend, you have

so much admiration for the elderly Jews who went through two world wars, (the means tests, etc), how come you haven't a good word for the way in which they conducted themselves? Why do you hate us so? The truth is you youngsters are so confused in your attitudes you are not even communist (as I once was). You are anarchists who would tear down something without knowing how to replace it.

Try to get rid of the worst element among your contributors and write something acceptable for a change. Contrary to popular belief we do not bury our heads in the sand. We know exactly what is going on and why. So don't be so superior. You certainly have little to crow about.

Your paper is just about on a par with those that the British Union of Fascists used to print with the large noses. You are the same blood as we are. Those same Arabs will not hesitate to spill your blood. The torture article. How about Arab torture? Or do you think they don't do it? Don't be so naive. It is done all over the world. Socialists. My foot!

Rosalie Scott-Samuel  
London NW2

## RADICAL IMPRESSION

**JS** A friend recently bought several issues of your magazine in Sydney. I was impressed and encouraged by the spirit of the Jewish radical Bundist tradition which you follow.

I have long been searching for groups and people who are still committed to the Jewish essence of justice and respect. Reading *Jewish Socialist* has contributed to giving me a sense that I too am a part of that Jewish as well as broadly human tradition of resistance.

Sasha Shtargot  
Melbourne, Australia

**Jewish Socialist invites your reviews and articles. Please send contributions by 1 November for our next issue.**

## JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP NATIONAL DAYSCHOOL WOMEN, EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY

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Lunch, refreshments and creche are included in the registration price of £10 (£6 unwaged) or £8 (£5 unwaged) if you book before 22 October.

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Please make cheques/POs payable to Jewish Socialists' Group and send to JSJG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX

# BLINKERED VISIONARY

**As the PLO take over in the West Bank and Gaza, Simon Louvish takes issue with Edward Said's firm opposition to the process**

**E**dward Said is the world's second best-known Palestinian. Yassir Arafat provides the recognisable image of Palestine's stubborn struggle to be born as a legitimate nation-state, an inspiration to many for a generation, a figure of hate and vexation to many others. Edward Said has commanded no armies, stockpiled no weapons, sent no soldiers or guerrillas out to die. He has, with the force of his intellect, and with moral integrity, provided a cogent, passionate and compassionate voice articulating Palestinian hopes, anxieties and fears.

He has also conducted a parallel life-project, challenging the theoretical assumptions by which Western scholars have allowed Western politicians and conquerors to press the hegemony of the 'rational' west against the 'irrational' east. *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, *Covering Islam* and most recently *Culture and Imperialism* have single-handedly changed the nature of debate about Arab and Islamic culture among a wide swathe of European and American readers.

His latest volume, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination* (Chatto & Windus, £20), collecting together essays, op-ed articles, polemic and interviews from the aftermath of the Six Day War to the present day, bears witness to this dual role of intellectual maverick and Palestinian patriot. As Robert Fisk has noted in his review in the Independent, an air of mortality and summing up pervades this book, and we are now aware that Edward Said has been diagnosed with a life-threatening leukemia.

All this makes criticising him, from a standpoint of solidarity with his long struggle, but in a spirit of rigorous debate with his strongly held views about the current phase of the Palestinian fight for human rights and independence, doubly difficult. I do not wish to stand with Said's right wing enemies, the propagandists who denounced him as a propagandist, or libelled him as an apologist for terrorism. But to take issue with Said, now, is not to undermine his life's work, but to acknowledge the crucial importance of his position, as a moral and intellectual force.

Said, as everyone now knows, has set himself up as the leader of the principled opposition to Yassir Arafat's 'peace-deal' with Israel. He has denounced the Oslo agreement as a sham, a surrender, and tantamount to a collaboration with



Edward Said

Israel's colonial policies. The man who supported Yassir Arafat and the PLO for so many years, despite private misgivings, is now crying foul.

What are the consequences? For some years now it has been apparent, through various attempts to construct 'peace' meetings between Israeli and Palestinian writers, for example, that there has been a curious irony at work. Many diaspora Palestinians are still emotionally resistant to the idea that Israel has its own internal dynamic, its own social culture, with quirks and features that do not fit into the received ideas about what Israelis think and believe. It has suited both Arab opponents and Zionist cheerleaders alike to falsify the real anxieties, divisions and, indeed, resistance in Israel against the occupation and its ideological template.

Edward Said has repeatedly put on the record his support for mutual recognition, for a two-states policy, and for greater knowledge in the Arab world about both Israel and the United States. But when tested himself for such knowledge, disturbing anomalies turn up. In his current book, only one Israeli is singled out for honourable mention as a supporter of Palestinian rights – Dr Israel Shahak. Dr Shahak is well known in radical circles as a courageous individual among a small group of dissidents who have challenged Israel and

Zionism's precepts for many years. But he is hardly in a position to wield any influence on Israeli official or public opinion.

In a recent appearance by Professor Said to publicise his book in London, the same accolade surfaced again. Which Israelis should we be talking to? asked the mainly Palestinian audience. What about the author David Grossman? Not a true radical, answered Said. We should be strengthening Yisrael Shahak and Matti Peled (another of the small, brave band).

This is frankly ludicrous. Elsewhere I have noted the extent to which the Israeli media has been transformed by the Oslo agreement and subsequent processes in Cairo and the partial withdrawal from Jericho and Gaza. The taboo against the Palestinian voice has collapsed completely. Members of all Palestinian parties, Fatah, Popular Front, even supporters of Hamas, have appeared on Israeli TV, speaking in Hebrew (mostly learned in jail), and forcefully articulating Palestinian national demands.

Those who have followed the creeping changes in Israeli discourse since the Lebanon War of 1982 will not be surprised. Columnists like Boaz Evron, Sylvie Keshet, Ziva Yariv, Amos Kenan, B Michael, etc, have hammered away at official intransigence, to a mass readership, for many years. Authors like Emile Habiby and Anton Shammas have reached a wide Israeli Hebrew audience. The old denial has been eroding for a long time. Labour's election victory and subsequent leap into the uncharted waters of 'partnership' with the demonised PLO has simply burst a weakening bubble.

Parallel to this, Israeli business interests have, as they did in South Africa, signalled that enough is enough. Fifteen years of Likud fanaticism reduced Israel to near-pariah status. The post-Cold War reality required a new perspective or a decline into an economic pit. Put simply, the old scream of 'who on earth can we talk to – Yassir Arafat?' was answered with a very loud 'why not?'

Of course, Arafat's blunders over Iraq, the loss of the Soviet crutch, and internal divisions, made a deal with a weakened PLO a viable risk for Yitzhak Rabin, who had for years resisted talking to the PLO precisely because the long term result could only be a Palestinian State, which he opposed. But once Rabin and Peres had made the leap of recognising the PLO, the PLO had no choice but to enter into the new game.

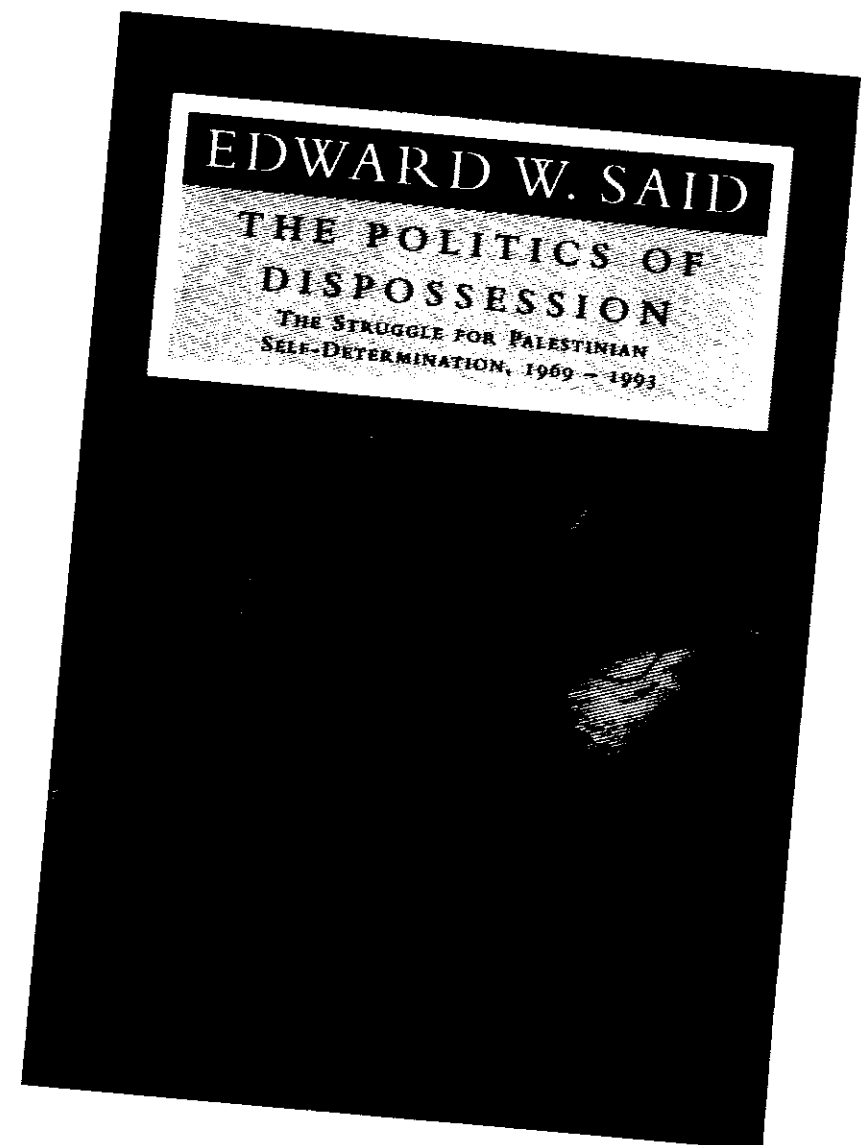
It is a game played for high stakes. Survival, nationhood. Every Palestinian is aware of that. From a position of weakness, Arafat wishes to seize on Gaza-Jericho to bore his way through to independence. Almost every Israeli expects a Palestinian State to eventually result. Edward Said does not. In fact all he prophesies is gloom and disaster, unless some mythical 'collective' campaign will convince the world that this is not the way.

I believe this position is extremely dangerous. Coming from such an impeccable source, it offers an excuse for Palestine's sympathisers in the West to wash their hands of the project now under way in Jericho-Gaza and throughout the West Bank. It leaves little room for the proposition that independence can, following Zionism's own experience,

begin in a limited manner and expand, in the teeth of Rabin's ruthless obstructionism, to its just dimensions (taking in the needs of Palestine's diaspora as well). I am not a prophet and cannot assert this. But the fact is that Palestinians are divided about this crucial turning point. Calling for action against this process is at best a cry of despair, at worse a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Knowing and loving Palestine is one part of the political struggle. But knowing and understanding Israel's internal processes is not an optional supplement. The terrible conclusion that I am drawn to by both Said's book and his spoken comments is that he is largely ignorant of these processes. This is a dreadful indictment of Palestine's most prominent thinker.

Because the Palestinians who are learning about Israel now are the politicians, the wheeler-dealers, the Fatah army chiefs and their security forces. They will make their deals in practice. Said will carp from outside. But he should be inside, within the process, a critical, vociferous defender of human rights and democratic aspirations. It is not that the emperor has no clothes – it is that he has torn them off, in grief and mourning, and rendered himself naked, in a world where the undefended are most likely to become victims once again.



# It's our Palestine too

**Manar Hasan, founder member of the Palestinian feminist organisation Al Fanar, was in Britain recently researching issues of 'family honour' in Palestinian society. Simon Lynn spoke to her**

## *Tell me about Al Fanar*

It is a feminist organisation which was established about 15 years ago in Haifa by Palestinian women in Israel. On the Palestinian side, the women's organisations were not independent, but were part of the political organisations. Because of that they could not really represent our interests as women. The Jewish, or Israel, feminists could not represent our interests because they were just looking at gender relations and not at our national and ethnic relations, which are a very important part of our struggle.

## *Were there specific issues you took up at the beginning?*

We took the view that you can't separate the national and social struggles in the way that the Palestinian women's organisations want us to. For example, most of the PLO organisations, or the parties inside Israel (Hadash etc) believe we are at the 'national stage' and that women must wait until the end of this stage to start our struggle. But we are not going to wait.

## *What was the response of the established organisations?*

In our first leaflet we criticised the entirely male local communal Palestinian leadership of the villages in Israel and its behaviour on Land Day each year when they simply made speeches but did nothing. The ideas were quite new; people started to ask questions and they were very, very interested. Three months later we published our first newsletter which was distributed to villages and towns all over Israel and the West Bank.

We organised our first demonstration in Nazareth in response to the murder of a woman because of 'family honour'. She was killed by her father and her brother because she was pregnant. For the first time the Arabic newspapers covered this issue. We couldn't achieve radical change, but we could at least start to speak about it; until then people had behaved as if it didn't exist.

## *Are there other issues about 'family honour'?*

There are a lot of other practices connected with 'family honour', like marriage between close relatives – or forcing girls to marry against their will. As feminists we do not like the term 'arranged marriages' because they are not arranged. We think that a woman has to decide about her future, her body – about everything. She should not be an object for whom decisions are made by her brother or family.

There is also an issue of female genital mutilation in the Bedouin sector of Palestinian society. Until we wrote a leaflet about it, no one recognised that this problem existed. We said it was a crime against children because the girls who have it done to them are between 12 and 14.

## *Do Israeli Jewish women originally from Arab countries face similar issues?*

No, this is very important right now. The Israeli state's main goal for the Arab Jews was to inte-

grate them into the Israeli nation; and their goal for the Palestinians was to keep them separate from the rest of the community. 'Family honour' was strengthened in Palestinian society by the actions of the Israeli authorities. For example, for many years, if a woman ran away from home because she was frightened of being killed by her relatives, she would be sent back to her relatives even though the authorities knew she was at risk.

## *Are the issues in the Occupied Territories different from those in Israel?*

No, they are the same. Al Fanar began to struggle on these issues in Israel, and on the West Bank another organisation started last year. At the beginning of the Intifada there started to be democratic change. For example in the first year of the Intifada there was only one murder of a woman because of 'family honour'. It was the first time that women started actively to participate in the national struggle.

The real democratic process was happening in the second half of 1988. The struggle was very spontaneous; after that it started to be organised by the parties in Gaza and the West Bank and the women started to return to their traditional functions because the parties separated the national struggle from the social struggle.

## *How has the Gaza/Jericho agreement affected the Palestinian feminist movement?*

It is part of a process – and, in my opinion, it has become a very undemocratic process which influences the women's struggle.

## *What about links with Israeli Jewish women and women's organisations in Israel?*

Some of them are quite supportive, but some of them can't yet understand the link between the national struggle, the struggle for equality between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, and the social struggle which is the feminist struggle.

## *What about the effect of Hamas and other fundamentalists on you as Palestinian feminists?*

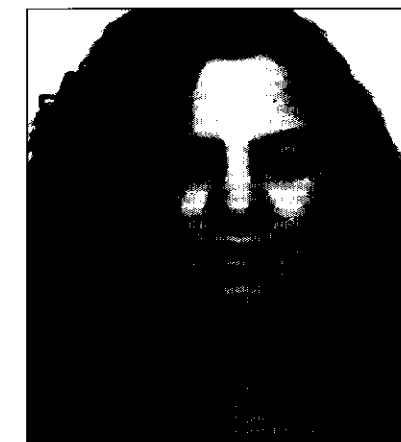
Of course they are against us because we are against patriarchy. In Jaffa, a few hours after the Hebron massacre, the local leadership held a meeting in the house belonging to the fundamentalist party, the Muslim Brothers. They refused to let us in. They said it was only for men. This was very serious; we said we can't accept this exclusion – it is our right to be there. So we went in and participated in the meeting.

## *Do you think the national democratic movement is making compromises with the fundamentalists?*

Yes, even the left wing, and this is a very big mistake for the national movement. Particularly since the Oslo agreement, the left have identified themselves as linked to the fundamentalists because the fundamentalist movement was the first to reject the so-called Peace Agreement. For us this is very dangerous, not just as women but as Palestinians, because it is an anti-democratic movement.

## POEMS BY ELEANOR LEVENSON

*Eleanor Levenson has been writing poetry since she was nine and was inspired to write about her Jewishness after reading 'I am a Jew' by Michael Rosen. She thinks that many of Michael's poems seemed like they could also be about her own family. She has had a poem published in a young writers' anthology called 'Go Green' and won a commendation in the 1993 W H Smith 'Young Writers' Competition'. She says; 'My poems are all based on the truth and whilst writing them, I have been able to explore my thoughts and feelings about what being Jewish means to me.'*



## SCHINDLER'S LIST

I was talking with my friends about what to see at the cinema on Saturday night,  
Louise said that she'd like to see 'Philadelphia',  
And Samantha said that she'd like to see 'The Pelican Brief'  
And Joanna said that she'd like to see 'On deadly Ground',  
And I said that I'd like to see 'Schindler's List'.

We ended up seeing 'Mrs. Doubtfire',  
And before it started there was a trailer for 'Schindler's List',  
And I said 'I'd like to see that',  
But none of my friends fancied it.

'I can understand why YOU want to see it' one of them said,  
Well I'm Jewish so obviously I'd want to see it she reasoned.  
Anyway, I went to see it with my Grandma,  
And I must have been the only one in the cinema under 70 years old.

And I thought what a shame it is,  
That those who really need to see it,  
And be educated,  
Are those who would rather see 'Mrs. Doubtfire'.

## MY WEEKEND

In my first year of junior school,  
we had to write about our weekend every Monday morning,  
and I'd always write that I'd been to Hebrew classes,  
and that it was boring or fun or I had a new friend or whatever,  
Yet still my teacher didn't know that I was Jewish,  
and even though she was my teacher for a whole year,  
and I wrote about my Hebrew classes every Monday morning,  
she didn't know I was Jewish,  
until I didn't go to church for the carol concert at Christmas.

## SHABBAT SHALOM

When my grandpa goes to Shul,  
My grandma drives him,  
And he gets out about two minutes walk away,  
And he'll say to his friends,  
'Shabbat Shalom, good Shobbos, my legs are killing me'.  
I don't tell him that on the way home,  
We always get stuck in a traffic jam,  
With hundreds of other old ladies,  
Driving home from Shul.

● If you want to make a donation to Al Fanar, please send it to them c/o Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX and we will forward it.



# Quotation marks and

**Stanley Mitchell strips the quotation marks from *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, an International conference held recently in London**

I hesitated for a long time before deciding to attend this conference, first because I have a horror of all-Jewish assemblies (I write as a Jew), second because the agenda smacked of intellectual narcissism – why did the Jew have to be in quotation marks? There was also a more serious reason. The preliminary list of titles and speakers spelled postmodernism and identity politics, which have helped to gut the socialist tradition. The final list was more balanced and, as a kind of anchorage, I asked *Jewish Socialist* whether I could review the conference.

There was no Jewish exclusiveness, instead amiable academics and a sprinkling of lay people, including an elderly gentleman soon to be puzzled, bewildered and angry. Old friends and acquaintances were there, and not everyone was Jewish. James Young, an American, who gave the keynote address on 'Jewish Memory in a Postmodern Age', was a Jewish convert, as was Grizelda Pollock, a Professor of Art History from Leeds.

The quotation marks round Jew mesmerised the conference. It registered some kind of identity crisis. What did it mean to be a Jew today in the Western world? – for only the Western world was addressed. Not even Israel was mentioned. If there was a crisis, it was well contained within the urbane, academic atmosphere, which was breached only once or twice.

The conference was dominated by two themes: allo-Semitism and memory. The term 'allo-Semitism', introduced by Zygmunt Bauman, scholar of the holocaust and postmodernity meant treating the Jews as other or different, as a people who wouldn't fit in.

This was a category, Bauman argued, which applied to the Jews ever since the diaspora. It didn't necessarily imply hatred of the Jews (antisemitism), it might indeed include philosemitism (love of the Jews). But the Jew remained irredeemably 'other'. Or rather neither one thing or another, 'out of place in every place' remarked Bauman, quoting Frederic Raphael. The Jew, in Bauman's words, was 'ambivalence incarnate', whether in pre-modern, modern or post-modern times.

But, in the postmodern age, as Geoff Bennington informed us in his paper on 'Lyotard and the jews', this ambivalence was the lot of all marginal people, who in this sense had become if not Jews then 'jews'. Lyotard uses the

lower case, as well as quotation marks, in order to indicate this wider category. In May 1968 they shouted: 'We are all German Jews' in solidarity with Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Lyotard, a postmodernist, means something different: we are all

homeless, without fixed identity, like the ancient Hebrews in the desert.

The Jew, then, or rather 'the jew', has become the primal figure for postmodernism. Judaism owes its present efflorescence in part to this disorientated and desperate aspect of post-Holocaust thinking. In effect, the Wandering Jew (or Eternal Jew, as the Germans call him) has been brought back to serve as a model for all the marginals of our time. Which is curious and ironic when the postmodernists insist so much on difference and the deconstruction of myth.

Geoff Bennington and Max Silverman both discoursed on quotation marks, lower cases and upper cases. Following earlier psychoanalytic discussions, I was moved to ask whether a Freudian slip was involved, whereby lower and upper case represented lower and upper class, in other words the class struggle, which had been suppressed during the proceedings. Bennington was furious. All academic niceties vanished. 'No, no, no,' he declared, 'that's all over!' and drew from his pocket a piece of paper, which he must have brought to the conference in anticipation of such a question. He read: 'The social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism', adding 'Karl Marx' and sat down.

I assume this was meant to put paid to the class struggle. While I respect Marx's analysis of class, I imagine he would be the last person to suggest class conflict, either in theory or practice, would not have occurred without him. Yet here was Bennington trying to dispose of the entire history of class struggle and therefore socialism with a single quotation from an early work of Marx, written before he had embraced socialism or formulated a theory of class struggle.

Marx does not write about Jews as a class in *On the Jewish Question*, from which Bennington quoted the final sentence. He treats the Jews as a commercial people whom the Christians had used as their practical alibi, while they got on with their other-worldly religion. The article was written in support of Jewish political emancipation, but Marx looked beyond this to a general human emancipation in which the Jews would lose their economic basis. He welcomed those Jews who were taking part in this larger struggle. The subtext of Bennington's reply was to suggest that Marx was an antisemite, if not a fascist, an easy thing to do if you conjure with quotations as deftly as you do with quotation marks.

There is, of course, an extensive literature on whether Marx was an antisemite or not and some of his outbursts particularly in regard to Lassalle are inexcusable. His mixed feelings at the time of *On the Jewish Question* are summed up in a letter to a friend in which he tells him that he has been approached by the 'head of the Israelites' in Cologne to draft a petition to the Diet on behalf of the Jews. The young Marx comments that, whatever his distaste for the Jewish religion, he will do so. The Jews were never at the centre of Marx's attention and marginal to his

# the Jewish question

socialism. But while he poured scorn on Jewish bankers in Europe, he had a sympathetic word for the plight of poor Jews in Jerusalem.

Bennington was followed by Adrian Rifkin who agreed both with Bennington's methodology and my appeal to class struggle, referring to the comparative state of the rich and poor graves in the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

It would be inaccurate, however, to suggest that politics had not entered the conference before my intervention at the final panel. Tony Kushner had given a fine analysis of racism and anti-racism in postwar Britain. And James Young had warned that any new history of the Jews would have to dispense with the received image of Jews as victims. Now it must include the Jew as oppressor – of the Palestinians. Which brings me to the second main theme of the conference – memory.

This was another point where academic politeness was breached. One elderly participant rose repeatedly, introducing himself as a survivor of the Holocaust who had more right to be on the platform than the present incumbents. No doubt he was a nuisance. But David Cesarani's response indicated something about the conference. While first-hand accounts would always be of interest, Cesarani conceded, this was not the place for them – here it was memory as such which was under scrutiny.

James Young, speaking on postmodern memory, warned that we could no longer rely on notions of objectivity and tradition. He wasn't simply saying that memory was selective – we all know that, and the way in which transmissions of the past depend on the transmitters, oppressors or oppressed, invaders or defenders. But if you deny any kind of narrative or structure in history, as the postmoderns do, what are you left with? It is one thing to be told by Bryan Cheyette that Primo Levi was sceptical about his own memories of Auschwitz, another to be informed by James Young that a collective Jewish memory had given way to a 'collected' one as in a museum.

One is tempted to ask: 'Who is the curator and who pays them?' (Which is why Jake Rosen's article on the Washington Holocaust museum, in *Jewish Socialist* 31, was so important, because he asks: 'Whose memory, whose myth – that of the victim or that of the resistor?') To dissolve the historical reality of the Holocaust into the imponderables of memory leaves no barrier to David Irving's fascist revisionism, which simply denies the Holocaust.

But there was a left-wing or anarchist post-modernism, too. James Young entertained us with an account of new conceptual art forms practised by 'memory guerillas' in Germany. In Saarbrücken, for example, the artist Jochen Gerz organised schoolchildren to remove cobblestones from the town square at night, engrave on them the names of concentration camps and the numbers of inmates from Saarbrücken and then return them to the square face down. The public learned of this, but signs were invisible. An intangible

memory had taken the place of the usual physical monument. The effect was haunting enough for the square to be officially renamed the 'Square of the Invisible Monument'. The monument was now securely lodged in the public's mind rather than in the centre of town.

I cannot do justice here to the multifariousness of the conference, which lasted two days and an evening, but one other new term might be of interest alongside allo-Semitism. This was 'hibernojudaism', which turned out to be the 'Judaism' of Joyce and Beckett, Irish 'jews' in the Lyotardian sense, exiles who were philosemitic. But the paper in question by Steve Connor was mainly concerned with feet in the work of the two writers and flat feet in particular.

By the end of the nineteenth century anti-Semitism had turned from the economic Jew (as in Marx) to the biological, racial and sexual deformities of the Jew. Flat feet was one of them and it appears that Joyce and Beckett were obsessed with feet, flat or otherwise. So much for 'hibernojudaism', not a serious contender with allo-Semitism. But other papers on late 19th and early 20th century antisemitism were extremely illuminating, in particular Ritchie Robertson's 'The Feminised Jew: Nietzsche, Harden, Weininger'. Here the whole Jewish body is under attack – for being sensual in the case of the woman, lecherous in the case of the male.

The male is under particular censure from these male critics of whom Weininger was a Jewish convert to Christianity. Jewish man is accused of emasculation, characterised by pliancy and adaptability, excelling at mimicry in place of creativity, lacking in backbone, in other words more like a woman. According to the paper of an absent speaker, Daniel Boyarin, Freud fell victim to this antisemitism. Worried by homoerotic feelings towards his father and his colleague Fliess, Freud in the milieu of antisemitic Vienna at the turn of the century adjusted the Oedipus Complex to a heterosexual model, making the son want to kill his father rather than be the object of his desire. Which means Freudian psychoanalysis rests on a concession to antisemitism.

I left the conference as Bryan Cheyette, one of the organisers, summed up. Having counted 250 heads in the audience, he concluded there must be at least 250 definitions of 'the jew'. What need of postmodernism, when there was the Talmud? I felt as if I had been in an academic synagogue for three days celebrating a High Holiday, a mixture of Yom Kippur and Purim, of mourning and clowning. Outside, the quotation marks evaporated into the rain.

# TAKING THE STANDS

**Fans are fighting back against racism in soccer, and now – belatedly – football's bosses are getting involved. Mike Gerber investigates**

Paul Elliot gives his support to the CRE/PFA campaign



Chandu, who is half-Asian, requests the anonymity of a false name. A British Rail guard and RMT transport union member, he supports Charlton Athletic, who, he points out, were recently commended as an 'example of good practice' by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Professional Footballers Association.

These two bodies are spearheading the Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign which is being stepped up in the 1994-95 season just underway. In their report, CRE/PFA comment: 'Charlton Athletic is determined that the club, which had been targeted for leafletting by the BNP, would not become a recruiting ground for right-wing organisations.'

Among the measures taken, Charlton warn that racist fans will be arrested and evicted, and season-ticket holders have their ticket revoked. Much solid work is done in the community, with visits to places such as youth centres and mosques, promoting an inclusive, non-racist, non-sexist image of the club. So Charlton's home, the Valley, is becoming a much friendlier environment on match days, in common with increasing numbers of grounds around the country.

Ninety-one of the 92 major clubs in England and Wales now support the CRE/PFA, York City being the exception, and the local Labour party is petitioning them to join in. The initiative was extended to Scotland in January. International bodies UEFA and FIFA have also made a stand.

It's important to remember, though, that the campaign is directed as much at clubs and players as at fans, because racism has contaminated all levels of the game.

And it's really only in extra time that the football establishment has started to get involved. The real credit for confronting the racists in the first place belongs to those much maligned masses, the fans, through the fanzines and supporters' associations that have mushroomed since the mid-80s.

Take Leeds United. Arsenal's black striker Ian Wright enthused after a match there last season: 'It was brilliant. They've got a thing down there petitioning against the nazis and the racial abuse black players take. It's a giant step because Leeds were really bad.'

As the CRE/PFA report acknowledges, Leeds' initial campaign was driven by the fans who formed a group Leeds Fans Against Racism and Fascism. This was in response to heavy targeting of the club by the National Front. 'With the success of the fans' campaign, Leeds FC officials realised they also had a responsibility to take action, and they have strongly publicised their commitment to eradicating racism and other forms of violent/offensive behaviour.' The club showed it meant it when, in 1988, 10 so-called fans were put on trial, and the message was rammed home in the Leeds programme.

At Charlton, too, it was the fans that led the way, explains Chandu. 'The first fanzine, *Voice of the Valley*, began campaigning after Charlton was kicked out of the Valley, but it also took on the racists.'

'In the 1970s and early 80s we had the B-Mob (B for British Movement) – the Charlton "firm" of that time. That put a lot of black people off. If a black player scored and Charlton won, say, 3-0, the mob would say it was 2-0. Oddly enough there was one black guy who stuck around with them. But the firm has disappeared. The tide's changing. I've seen more black faces at matches.'

'Such racism as remains is not organised. It's usually sufficient to tell the odd ranter to shut up and they do. Occasionally, though, you get these away games and all sorts of apparent Charlton supporters turn up. Last season at Southend and Bristol City, a mob turned up behind a British Movement banner. Who they were or where they came from I can't say.'

Charlton, says Chandu, is a very mixed area racially, not a breeding ground for the likes of the

BM or BNP. It's the same with Millwall next door. What about nearby Welling, I prompt him, with its infamous BNP bookshop? 'Apart from the bookshop, the BNP are nothing in Welling. Many Asians live there. I can only assume that such hard-core racists as there are come from out of town', by which Chandu means across the Thames in east London.

The East End has acquired an unenviable reputation for racist bigotry. Historically one of the most deprived areas in Britain, successive waves of immigrants, from the Huguenot protestants to east European Jews to the present day Bengalis, have settled there in close proximity to the indigenous population. When jobs and housing have been scarce, the fascists and their predecessors have sought to blame ethnic minorities, stoking up popular prejudices.

But there is another East End tradition of facing up to the fascists, seen most recently when black and white anti-racists helped defeat the BNP in local elections. One of the most encouraging developments in those elections was when West Ham United, the local club, joined many other groups in a public statement urging supporters not to vote fascist.

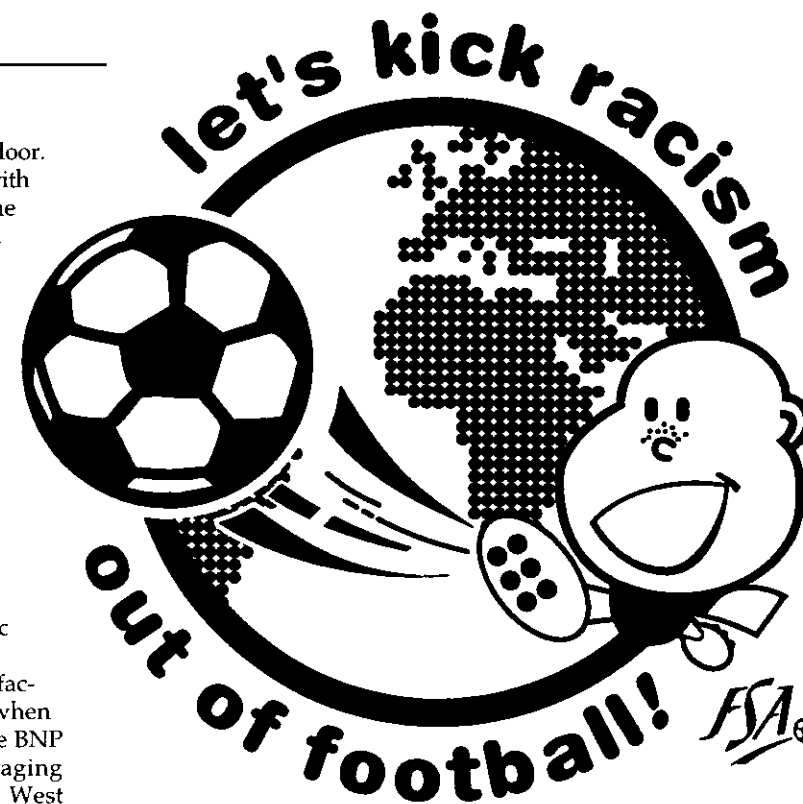
This represents a major advance at West Ham. 'The club went from being the first to feature black players in a big way, to a long period when West Ham was pretty much an all-white team,' says Dave, a Jew and anti-racist campaigner of long-standing.

'I started going to matches from 1966. We had Clyde Best, Ade Coker, Clive Charles, John Charles. It was okay when the black players played well. But otherwise they got more stick.'

Then from the mid-70s, the NF started campaigning outside the ground. 'You could get West Ham-NF sweat shirts, and I remember people in the crowd with nazi badges. When the Anti Nazi League was first formed, some football people put their name to it, Jack Charlton, Pat Crerand. But West Ham, where it was all going on, did nothing.'

Dave believes the board was weak and capitulated to the racists. It was at a 1980s West Ham-Spurs match that he heard a section of the crowd chanting 'Never felt more like gassing the Jews...', a perversion of a popular song. After a further incident, Dave and another anti-racist fan wrote to the club. They recieved a one-line acknowledgement but no follow-up. 'Now, they've got CRE billboards. Outside they warn you can be thrown out for racist abuse. That's a big improvement. If someone makes a complaint now, there's a better chance of getting a response.'

Dave has hit on a facet of racism in British soccer that is usually overlooked, antisemitism. This struck me forcibly at a CRE/PFA press conference earlier this year. They were announcing the latest phase of their campaign, to which the Football Trust had contributed 50,000. The speakers included PFA chief executive Gordon Taylor, CRE chair Herman Ouseley, and black footballers Paul Elliot (since retired) and John Fashanu. The mood was one of cautious optimism. Then I called their attention to an article by a black Arsenal fan, Syd Jeffers, who wrote '... being black and going to Highbury wasn't a problem.... However, antisemitism was',



directed at the rival team Tottenham Hotspur. Did the speakers have any comment?

A Gazza dribble could not have wrong-footed them more than my simple question. Gordon Taylor proposed I talk to Arsenal. First I spoke to a couple of fans. Mike Francis, editor of fanzine *The Gooner*, said it was stupid: 'I know more Jews who support Arsenal than Spurs.' Miguel Ferros of the Independent Arsenal Supporters Association said soccer reflected society: 'Wrongly, antisemitism is not seen as such a problem in this country. It's more acceptable to call someone a yid than a nigger.' Both thought Arsenal antisemitism wasn't such a problem anymore. But Syd Jeffers, whose article triggered my question, remained pessimistic.

With some difficulty I extracted an interview out of Ken Friar, Arsenal's managing director. He preferred to talk off the record but was happy to say: 'We're doing several things against racism, antisemitism, and foul and abusive language. But if we disclose too much, it would be like telling a burglar what precautions you are taking against him.'

Fair enough, but he added two things that cannot go unchallenged. 'When Tottenham fans start pulling out the star of David flag, it could create problems.' That's a classic case of blaming the victims. When Spurs fans first started flaunting these flags, it was a stand of pride against the antisemitic taunters.

Mr Friar also said: 'If we gave too much publicity to our anti-racist campaign, we could end up with a problem we never had to start with.'

The experience of supporters' organisations suggests this logic is flawed. If decent fans had been so timid, the victims of soccer racism would still be isolated.

● For more information, contact the Football Supporters Association, PO Box 11, Liverpool L26 1XP. They have details about fanzines and independent supporters associations.



# The night Jewish Socialist saw stars

● Pictures by Ann Frankel

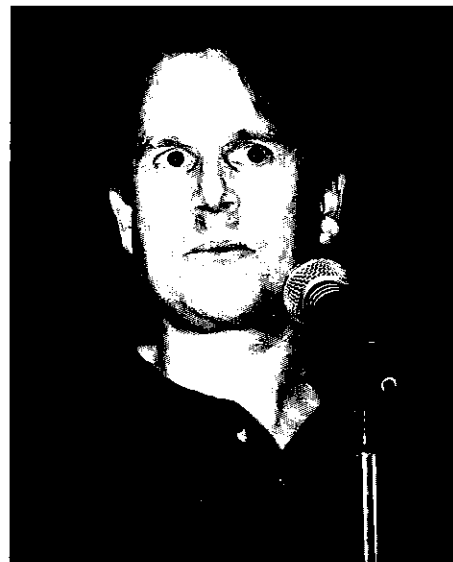
● On a balmy night in June a glittering array of Jewish Socialists gathered in London's fashionable Southampton Row for a fundraising night of Jewish comedy. Tickets had been sold out hours before but the foyer was still full of people. Not even the sad news of the death of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Menahem 'Messiah' Schneerson could dampen our spirits. Messiahs may die and rise again but this was the night we saw stars.



▲ Jeremy Hardy had no need to worry about wearing his black shirt.

◀ Linda Smith: Looking for John Major in Brixton.

▼ You must be joking.



▲ Jo Brand: 'I'm not Jewish; I'm not a socialist; I don't know why I'm here.'

◀ 'Oy, oy, oy...' 'oy, oy, oy...' 'Don't start. We've heard that one already.'



▲ Julia Bard of Royte Klezmores rehearses a delightful antizionist melody.

▼ Arnold Brown: 'Keep your yarmulkes steady...'



▲ 'Don't worry, it'll be all right on the night,' compere Ivor Dembina (left) reassures impresario Warren Lakin (right). 'But Ivor, this is the night.'

◀ 'Just smile, Mum, and pretend you get the joke.'



# A nice bit of material

**Britain's expanding Jewish comedy scene reflects a community now more willing to question its taboos. David Rosenberg interviewed Ivor Dembina on the eve of his 'Stand Up Jewish Comedy' show at the Edinburgh Festival**

It wasn't very long ago that a Jew standing on a public platform criticising Israel or pointing out Jewish racism would be branded a treacherous self-hater, a threat to the community and a tool of 'our' enemies. Today Ivor Dembina and a growing number of Jewish men and women are strutting on stage doing just that – in the name of comedy. Far from being attacked or heckled, their humour strikes a chord with Jewish audiences, allowing them to relax and recognise their fears and prejudices.

Of course there have always been Jewish comedians, and the hallmarks of Jewish humour – its irony, its self-deprecation, its ability to see the other point of view, however absurd – have become an integral part of mainstream comedy, especially in America. But something new is happening. Rather than just individual quirks and relationships being exposed, the new Jewish comedy is touching on big communal concerns and political issues, and the community seems more than ready to receive it.

Ivor Dembina stumbled into 'Jewish comedy' almost by accident. A well-known promoter and compère of comedy events on the London circuit in a thriving alternative comedy scene, he says: 'I had always done stuff about being Jewish, just as a subject, I'd talk about sex, talk about drugs, talk about politics and talk about being Jewish. It was just one of those things in my act.'

But then the Jewish magazine *New Moon* asked him if he could organise entertainment at their first birthday party, using Jewish performers.

'They put on this event and there were 300 people there, mostly Jewish. Where had these people come from? I was amazed. So I got in touch with a couple of other Jewish performers and said: 'Let's put on a show in a small venue (the Canal Cafe, in West London), target it towards the Jewish community and see what happens. It was six nights; purely an experiment. We didn't write any special material for it. We were basically doing our normal material and trying to adjust it to a Jewish audience. It was packed out.'

'Now, to be honest, the shows weren't very good, but clearly there was something there. We decided to do a few more gigs. For me personally I discovered how much of my funniness is connected to being Jewish. After a long period of atheism, secularism, socialism and rejection of all things religious I rediscovered that part of my Jewishness that I liked, and when I began performing to

Jewish audiences I began to discover the issues which Jewish audiences are interested in – like secularism, fascism, antisemitism, Israel and so on.'

This new-wave Jewish comedy benefited from its novelty value in a community that generally keeps its laughter and tears behind closed doors.

'In the first instance, the Jews went just because it was Jewish. It was just "spot the Jew". Instead of a night going to a quiz, or Israeli dancing or a speaker talking about walks round the East End of London, people went just because it was Jewish in the way that Jews *do* reflexively support things.'

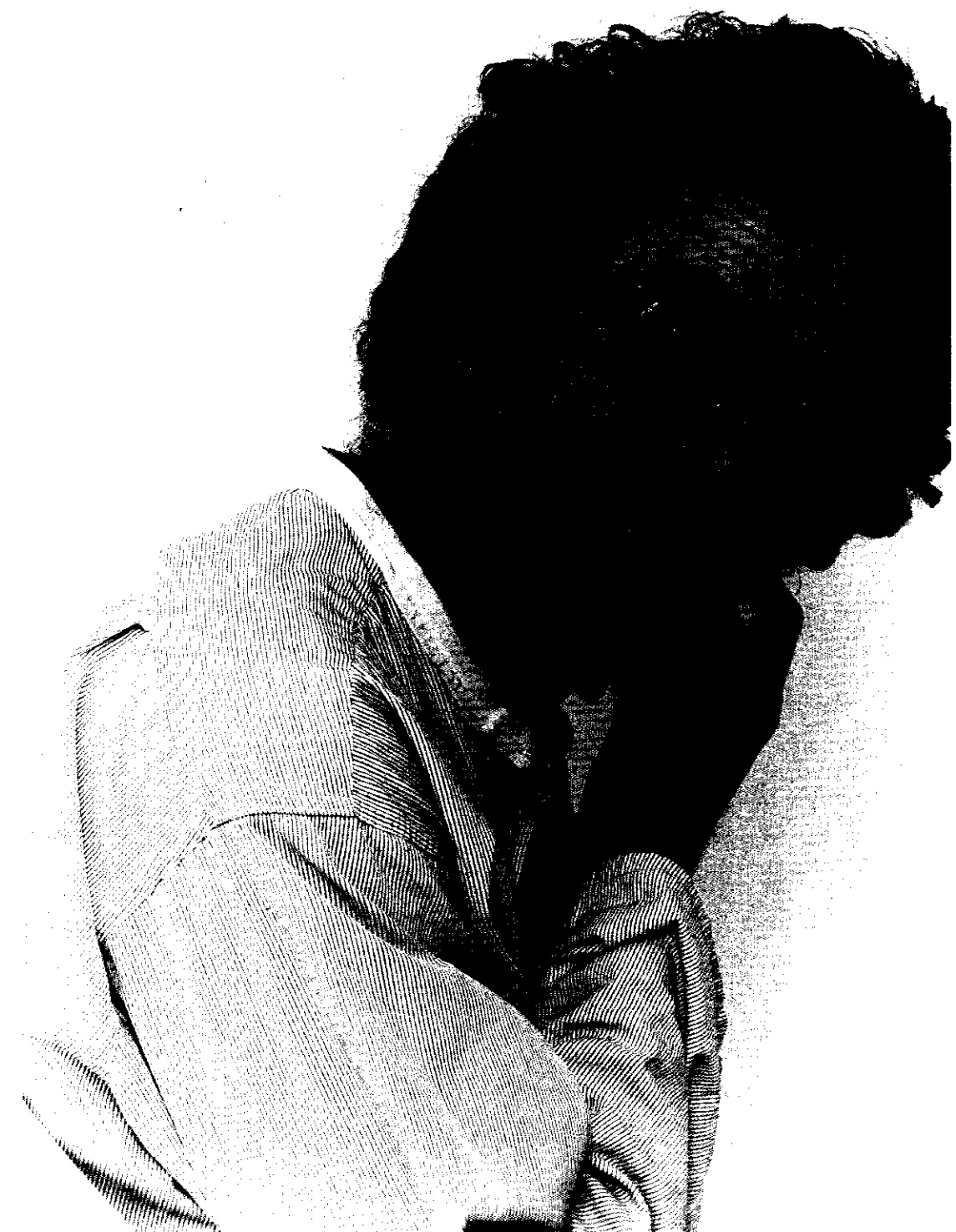
At first Dembina trod with care. 'In the early days I wasn't used to seeing older people in the audience and I censored myself. I was also nervous about doing anti-Zionist stuff. But now I don't care. That's partly to do with my change of attitude but partly because I'm a better comedian, better at getting an audience to listen.'

He is still aware of particular sensitivities but feels more confident now in dealing with them.

'Say I was doing a gig to an audience and someone said to me beforehand, look we've got some Holocaust victims, I would be very careful about what I would do. You've got to acknowledge antisemitism but also acknowledge that antisemitism and racism and fascism aren't simply the province of gentiles. You get racism among Jews. As far as a Jewish audience is concerned, the only issue where you are aware of the temperature in the room is on Zionism. They are not used to hearing people criticise Israel in public. But you can do it if you are funny enough.'

If there is a greater boldness in the issues covered, there is also a different style and tone in today's Jewish comedy as compared with earlier influences.

'Good comedy is reflective of its time. Take Lenny Bruce – he was basically saying at the time: 'Look, here we are, the richest country in the world but really if we just look under the surface there is a whole load of shit.' Woody Allen, Jackie Mason are great comedians of their time. They reflect the Jew as a person trying to make sense of his new found status as an immigrant who has somehow managed to establish himself with a certain prosperity and security and yet at the same time trying to reconcile the neuroses that still accompany that, of still being an outsider. Mason and Allen are operating in a period of boom, relative prosperity, relative security. But now we are back in a period of great uncertainty and conflict.



Ivor Dembina: 'As far as a Jewish audience is concerned, the only issue where you are aware of the temperature in the room is on Zionism.'

Picture: Edge Tate

We can no longer solve these conflicts through self-deprecation. Now it is about asserting what is good about your culture, yet being honest about what you feel is bad; not being private – only Jews telling jokes to each other – but going out and saying: 'This is us, this is what we have to tell you.'

On this point Dembina seems to part company with many of his contemporaries. While they are happy to open up touchy Jewish issues, many Jewish comedians are still performing their Jewish material within the bounds of the Jewish community. Dembina has a different project. 'About six months ago I decided that this thing that's bubbling around is only going to be significant, cultur-

ally speaking, if it can be taken out into a broader audience, to anyone; if someone is going to write a comedy act about being Jewish which is going to be universally appreciated. Otherwise we stay in the ghetto.'

He is determined to be part of a comedy that crosses cultural and class boundaries. 'I was brought up with the notion that it's all right if a Jew tells a joke about Jews, but when a non-Jew does, it comes out offensive. At an emotional level I understand that and I have also experienced feeling uncomfortable when someone is telling a joke about Jews, but intellectually I know that's wrong. If something is funny, it's funny and I think we



can only really feel safe as Jews when we can sit back and relax and allow or accept that non-Jews find us funny.'

When he does address a mainly Jewish audience he urges them to be honest to themselves inside and outside the bounds of the community. The message he feels he is conveying is: 'Let's talk about what we are really like and let's talk to Gentiles about what we are really like. Let's talk to Arabs, let's talk to blacks about what we are really like. There is nothing to be afraid of. You've got more to fear if you feel yourself running away. Working class people in this country respect you if you stand up and say where you are, and state: 'I'm a Jew, yeah there's bits of it I'm proud of and bits of it I'm sick of.'"

Dembina's repertoire currently includes a football song routine that moves from Jewish assertiveness to an exposure of the crude Jewish chauvinism that lurks behind 'commonsense' Zionist platitudes. He has aimed this routine at a white working class audience. 'They can tune in to the cultural reference. With their image of Jews, they are not used to someone coming on and saying "we are the Jews, we are the Jews..." They find it funny that I have embraced their culture and that we are not that different.'

The conflicts and contradictions of comedians from minority groups moving beyond their cultural base is currently being hotly debated within the Asian community. Dembina acknowledges their difficulties. 'I'm sure it's more difficult for them. We are now second, third generation, on our feet, economically independent from our parents. The traditional fabric of the Jewish community is largely broken up. People moved out of the ghetto to the suburbs. The extended family has broken down, lots of intermarriage, lots of divorce, single parenthood. My understanding of the Asian communities is that the parents still wield a lot of power. They are in a different predicament to us because they are at the sharp end. To an extent there is an argument for only going to their own community to build up solidarity. It is very hard for an Asian comic to go out and interest a white audience when there is a body of racial hostility out there at the moment. But they have got to find a way of looking outwards.'

The desire to cross cultural boundaries is partly being frustrated by notions of 'political correctness' – a reflection maybe of how anti-racism is often undermined by a liberal multiculturalism. 'People are very careful about doing stuff about blacks, Jews, gays, Irish. Sex has opened up a bit. The men now are much more honest about their own sexism. That's healthy. I'd like someone to come along and say: "I just can't stand the Irish" and say why. I would rather they did that than avoid it. I'd like someone to come along and say "I can't stand Jews" and say why. Let's hear it, rather than have it going on behind our backs. I'd rather it all comes out.'

He admits that he shied away from a joke about Jewish/black relations at the *Jewish Socialist* benefit. 'I did censor myself with one joke that I quite often do, performing to an all Jewish audience, that I didn't do at your place.'

'I got here a bit late tonight. The reason is I

came by cab from Richmond. The cab driver was a nice fellow. He was a black person. He said "Where you going?" I said I'm going to Holborn and he said "Holborn, that's a bit of a slep, isn't it?" I said what? He said "It's a bit of a slep". You mean 'shlap'. Shlap is a Jewish word. He said "Don't blame me, I'm only a shvartzer."

'Now that's a good joke but I ran away, partly because I didn't know what proportion of the audience weren't Jewish and wouldn't get it because they wouldn't know what the word 'shvartzer' meant. I can't make my mind up about the joke. It's a joke that is really funny to Jews.'

That dilemma aside, Dembina found the *Jewish Socialist* benefit, with its mixed audience and strong line-up of mainly non-Jewish acts supporting a progressive Jewish cause, a great experience.

'It was an interesting audience, I guess about 60% Jewish, but also it was an unusual audience because they were very well informed. It was really enjoyable. As a show it worked well. The kind of benefit I really hate is where you have about 15 acts and they come on and do five minutes each, wave the flag and fuck off. The best way is to have three or four acts. The selection of acts was very good. It was a good mix. I particularly enjoyed providing the Jewish framework to essentially non-Jewish acts. That worked very well. The audience enjoyed that as well. The compère was Jewish and he was jumping on and off and relating to them on that level. It was also the only socialist gig I know where you had smoked salmon backstage!'

Having now developed his own show, Dembina wants to test it in front of a general audience and, if it is successful, take it abroad to America, Canada, Australia ... even Israel. That's a long way off at the moment. Meanwhile he has a more mundane task to contend with – fighting for an audience alongside other political comedians in an atmosphere in which political comedy is marginalised and dismissed.

'Comedy is an art form and, like any art form, it has an agenda. That agenda is set by capitalism. At the moment we are in a period of comedy nihilism. Everything is reduced to nothing. The successful comedy is Paul Merton, Vic and Bob, Frank Skinner – people who take a pride in having nothing to say. They are funny but basically the needs of capitalism at the moment are that we don't have a consciousness about what we do. We are individuals where nothing is important. Nothing has any meaning. Nothing has any value.'

'These comedians are popular and successful for having nothing to say. I think that is a tragedy. This means that in order to be a political comedian you are at war with these other comics. You are fighting for the ears of the audience and you have to be twice as funny. An atmosphere has been created where there is an in-built prejudice against comedians who want to be political. You can give yourself a reason for the audience to listen, and being a full-frontal Jewish comic, which I have become over the last year, gives my show a structure and it gives the audience a reason to come – to listen to Jewish comedy.'

But it is a kind of Jewish comedy that is looking outwards and making the right, or rather, left, connections.

# Digging the music

**DA** In your research are you concentrating on particular regions or periods?

**JR** I'm concentrating on the available sources – the oldest date back to the turn of the century, some extend back into the 19th century, continuing on up through performers who grew up within the tradition. We're going to deal with the klezmer revival also, as an outgrowth of klezmer music. The sources I used for my paper on the doina were from Eastern Europe, America and Israel from about 1905 until the present day. There are still performers who've been playing doinas all their lives, and in Israel there are a number of young performers; it's an ongoing part of their tradition.

**DA** Have you found performers who've got continuity with the tradition in Europe?

**JR** We're just starting our research in Eastern Europe. I don't think we're going to find much in

**'The term klezmer is problematic; it was never used by the musicians themselves'**

terms of klezmer music among Jews because the Stalinist regime made such a heavy crackdown on Jewish culture and identity. Our only chance of finding klezmer amongst Jews will probably be in Roumania where they didn't seem to crack down on ethnic identity to the same extent. But one interesting area of research has been klezmer repertoire among non-Jewish performers. A lot of older performers in Hungary, Roumania and the western part of the Soviet Union, probably Poland as well – mostly gypsies – knew klezmer repertoire from before the war because they had played with Jewish bands or because Jews had played in their bands or because they had played for Jews. Some of their children have carried on. There are non-Jewish brass bands in the Ukraine who play a lot of Jewish repertoire.

There's a shared repertoire between Jews and non-Jews that goes back at least as far as the 19th century. You might have found the same melody among Roumanians, Greeks, Turks, Jews, Armenians and so forth, but that doesn't necessarily mean that when the Armenians played it they were playing klezmer music. But some researchers, in Hungary for instance, are interviewing gypsies and asking them: 'Did you play

for Jews in the past? What melodies did they ask you to play?' So they are defining it more by the context than by the actual pieces.

Our most immediate task is to document as many of the older performers as we can while they're still alive. We have done productions like *Yikhes* – a reissue of old klezmer recordings with substantial documentation. We've done a lot of work with the Epstein brothers in Florida who started out playing in the mid-1920s, and a documentary recording of their music should be out at the end of this year.

**DA** Do recordings from Europe differ from early American ones?

**JR** Many of the early American recordings were made by immigrant musicians, so it's often hard to tell. But the American recordings made after the 1920s and '30s, especially the tunes composed by musicians who were born in America, tended to be more sophisticated harmonically and perhaps have more complicated melodies. But the ways that they performed them were simplified – fewer grace notes, less improvisation. I think that's partly the result of America, partly the result of the recording industry. They standardised melodies that had never been standardised. In the old days everyone had pretty much their own version of a melody.

**DA** People are calling all sorts of things klezmer these days.

**JR** The term klezmer is problematic; it was never used by the musicians themselves. The first person to use it to describe this genre was the Soviet musicologist Moshe Beregovsky who was working in the Ukraine from the 1920s until his death in 1961. But the musicians just called it music or Jewish music, or maybe referred to it by the name of one of the dances, like freylekhs. Klezmer didn't start being used as a general term for this music until the 1970s when it was taken up, I believe, first by The Klezmerim from Berkeley, and then by some of the musicologists. It evolved into a general term for traditional eastern European Jewish instrumental music. But most of the groups performing this music realised that if

**Joel Rubin has been acclaimed as the greatest clarinetist of the klezmer revival. Working in Berlin with his partner, Rita Ottens, he is documenting and recording klezmer from around the world. Dena Attar talked to them**

**Ivor Dembina will be discussing the politics of the new Jewish comedy at a Jewish Socialist readers' meeting on Wednesday 28 September, 7.30pm, at Friends' House, Euston Road, London NW1.**



Joel Rubin  
Picture: Andreini

#### Recordings available

Yikhes Fruhe  
Klezmer: Aufnahmen  
von 1907-1939.  
Trikon, CD.

Patterns of Jewish  
Life (Judische  
Lebenswelten).  
Recorded live in  
Berlin, 1992.  
Spectrum Wergo,  
double CD.

Brave Old World: The  
Joel Rubin Klezmer  
Band. Cassette. And  
Brave Old World (NB  
same title but  
different content  
from the previous  
item, also with Joel  
Rubin). Flying Fish, CD  
(FF70560) and  
cassette.

Rubin and Horowitz:  
Bessarabian  
Symphony (clarinet  
and accordion).  
Spectrum Wergo  
(SM1606-2).

they wanted to attract a larger audience they were going to have to include other kinds of repertoire. Now the term has been stretched so far that it almost doesn't have any meaning any more. It's come to be a catch-all phrase for any kind of Yiddish music – a whole bag of different styles that range from traditional wedding music to the various fusion attempts of some of the younger groups, to Giora Feidman.

DA European bands like the Budapesters are doing straight copies of American arrangements.

JR There's a real danger that it becomes like the telephone game. Instead of learning from authentic sources, people are learning from each other, and then it starts getting more and more removed. If you start learning from inauthentic sources then you're not learning the style, you're learning somebody else's impression of what the style was, and I think that's a real problem. My impression of the klezmer revival is that there are very few groups that have something original to say.

DA What direction do you see the revival going in?

JR I think of the groups that are performing professionally, each one is trying to create an identity that is going to sell. The tendency is to try and innovate, mostly by bringing in other musical influences from outside, art music or jazz or rock or some mixture. It's going in different directions but it's not really a tradition any more. Most people who are performing this are cut off from the tradition; it's completely out of context. The peo-

ple who are really interested in the tradition and the archival sources tend to be people who aren't playing the music professionally or who are playing semi-professionally or locally.

RO You're the only exception.

JR Myself and Andy Statman, but he's not even making a living from it any more. Kapelye tried to do it but more with the folk songs, not with the instrumental music.

RO It's not an economic thing; tastes have changed.

JR It's aesthetic. Klezmer music as a genre really outlived itself. It developed within the context of traditional Jewish life in eastern Europe where it served a specific religious function actually, although many of the klezmerim tended to be more liberal-minded than most members of the community because they had a lot of contact with the outside. As long as that society functioned as a unit the music was necessary. In America it served more of a nostalgic function. If Jews wanted Jewish music then they had klezmer music up until maybe the 1940s or '50s but at that point the whole Zionist ideal took over. The idea was that Yiddish was out and Hebrew was in; everybody wanted Hava Nagila, Tzena Tzena, Mayim Mayim. The musicians maybe didn't like the Israeli music as much as klezmer but they knew where their bread was buttered and played whatever was wanted.

[In the diaspora] there was also this big split between the ultra-orthodox and everybody else – the Hasidim had their own repertoire so the more flexible klezmer musicians started playing Hasidic music because they realised, these guys each have 10 or 12 kids and each one of them has a wedding.

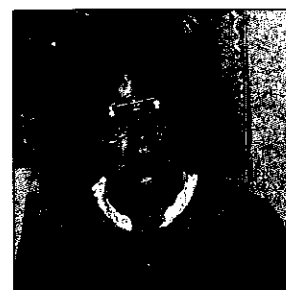
In Israel you find klezmer music only among the ultra-orthodox. For some reason the Hasidim there didn't feel the need to eradicate klezmer music from their repertoire in the same way that the American and probably the English Hasidim have done.

DA What's the atmosphere like in Berlin for researching Jewish music?

RO In some respects it's the best place in the world, believe it or not. A lot of institutions are interested in our work. Not the Jewish community in Berlin, who boycott us. They have supported klezmer music but they invite non-Jews because they are less dangerous. This community has a special story; a special make-up. There's a big change now because all the old leaders who were survivors are dying.

JR Galinski, who had been leader of the Berlin community since 1946, died two years ago. He wasn't interested in culture. German Jewish culture died with the Hitler years; there hasn't really been anything to replace it. The Jewish community is very non-unified; it's a mishmash of German Holocaust survivors, displaced Poles, new Russian immigrants, economic immigrants from Israel, and a smattering of others like Americans and French.

RO In order to belong to the community you have to go up to the office and register. Officially the community has 10,000 members, but a lot don't want to sign up because of the history of registration or because they don't agree with the politics of the leadership.



Dena  
Attar

JR We think there are twice as many. At least half the Jews that we know aren't registered. I didn't register because I didn't like their political agenda – especially their cultural politics. But there is an incredible amount of interest in Jewish culture in Germany, especially in Yiddish culture, mostly among non-Jews. Obviously a lot of it has to do with trying to come to terms with the past, but it makes a very good climate for us to present Yiddish culture to an open-minded audience. More than 10 groups are performing Yiddish music in Berlin, but most of them are non-Jewish.

It's symptomatic of Jewish politics in Germany, generally, that Jewish people don't take this music seriously. Each little group wants to be the only one that is doing Jewish things. We've managed to find a lot of partners in non-Jewish cultural institutions who have a specific interest in Jewish culture; they take it much more seriously than the Jewish community itself. My experiences with Jewish communities in America weren't that different. The main difference is that in Germany it's the official expression of Jewishness, whereas in America you've got 1,000 different synagogues, each more or less independent, and they don't get funding from the government like in Germany.

That hasn't slowed us down much because we just don't work with them. But we're very concerned about the situation in Germany now, and about the situation in Russia. If Zhirinovsky comes to power we're going to clear out faster than you can say klezmer. In Germany a synagogue was bombed recently and there was very little protest. In Berlin, I think, about 1,000 people protested, in a city of four million. Not only that, but the leader of the largest fascist party, Franz Schonhuber, went on to say that the only bad thing the Germans ever did was to lose the two world wars.

RO And the courts have decided that the 'Auschwitz lie' is no longer punishable. It's a very frightening climate, with Zhirinovsky openly saying that he wants to make a pact with the German Nazis who are already organised in the east. I don't want to give the impression that we're in mortal danger. A lot of our friends work actively in anti-Nazi groups, and the response to the attacks on Turks showed clearly that there is a very strong opposition.

JR But we're worried about what's going to happen after 1995, the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. There's an inkling that the government and state institutions are prepared to say it's over now, we don't need to help the Jews any more; our obligation is finished. What's going to happen after that, we really don't know.

● Dena Attar plays fiddle in *Royte Klezmores*, an all-women klezmer band

# Confusion

## Mike Heiser discovers the boundary-crossing music of Tzimmes

The term 'world music' is not without problems. On the one hand it seems to emphasise the linked nature of various musical cultures, and not to put various popular music styles such as Samba and klezmer in their own little ghettos, policed by the labels 'ethnic' or 'folk'.

On the other hand, mixing different musical styles can rob each one of their specificity and they can end up sounding like slurred imitations of one another.

Most Yiddish songs performed in English sound bland to me, robbed of their *kheyn* (charm). But last year in Barcelona I chanced upon a singer performing Yiddish songs in Catalan, to a rapt audience, which was as willing to respond to the gestures in *Az der rebe zingt* (which deals with disciples who mimic every gesture of a hasidic rabbi) as any audience I have seen when the song is sung in Yiddish.

Crossing musical boundaries is nothing new. a whole host of examples of classical composers using folk tunes spring readily to mind – Haydn or Dvorak symphonies or Shostakovich's use of Jewish folk melodies. Klezmer music borrowed from gypsy music and vice versa.

So what has all this got to do with Tzimmes? It is not usual to find Modern Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino songs performed together. Tzimmes – four musicians from very different Jewish backgrounds, based in Vancouver – do this.

They have issued a debut CD (*Sweet and Hot*) and two of their members, Moshe Denburg and Myrna Rabinowitz, gave a con-

cert at the Finchley Reform synagogue in London in May this year.

There are differing traditions to Yiddish, Ladino and modern Israeli music. Yiddish draws upon a rich legacy of performing traditions (the comic song, the theatre song, the lullaby). By contrast most of the popular Ladino tunes have a plaintive air to them. Can the same forces sound equally convincing in all styles?

Judging from both the CD and the concert, the answer is mixed. *Rozhinkes mit mandlen*, one of the all-time Yiddish standards, sounds curiously disoriented, at least on the CD, due perhaps to a jarring modern Hebrew rather than Yiddish accent on the last syllable of *Hamikdosh* in the first line and the strumming accompaniment to the chorus. The *kheyn* was missing, at least for me.

Other songs were more successful, for example Myrna Rabinowitz's limpid rendition of Gebirtig's *Vos makhstu epes Moyshele*. The audience in Finchley responded best to Klezmer-like standards such as *Chiribim* and enjoyed their Yiddish version of *Home on the Range* (complete with Lone Ranger style accompaniment) and *Sheyn vi di levone*.

The ladino songs like *Avre tu puerta cerrada* owed much to the performing tradition set by the *Paravim*. Songs like *Morenica* come across convincingly. The Hebrew songs tended to have a soft-focussed religious and peace message.

The CD is well-documented, with full transliterations and translations. Another string to Myrna Rabinowitz's bow is that she is a Yiddish teacher. It is a refreshing change on a record sleeve to see the Yiddish transliterated throughout using the YIVO standard, as we do in *Jewish Socialist*.



# STRIKING A CHORD

**Dena Attar gains a world view on music at a London conference**

A staggering assortment of ethnomusicologists, cantors, hassidim, professors and klezmerim assembled at City University in London in April for the first International Conference on Jewish Music. It was organised by Alexander Knapp, the Joe Loss Research Fellow in Jewish Music, who launched the first session of day two with a report on Chinese enthusiasm for Jewish music.

As the day's theme was the music of oriental Jews this was bewildering, as was the next half hour. (We were being intensively educated in a gloomy basement hall with a half-hourly change of lecturer.) Professor Xu Buzeng from Shanghai delivered a paper on Jewish musicians which began as a rather pointless list of all the refugee Jewish musicians who had settled in Shanghai up until 1939, but suddenly resolved into a clear picture and the answer to a question: why does China make all those violins? Answer: It was an historical inevitability brought about by the arrival of dozens of Jewish violinists fleeing from Russia and other parts of Europe.

As for the link between Jews and Chinese music, we had the example of A Eshalamov, a Russian Jew who devoted his life to developing the music of Peking Opera and even wrote Chinese operas himself.

Startling revelations continued throughout the day. Professor Johanna Spector demonstrated that the Cochin Jews in India had once had close connections with Yemenite Jews, a finding first established through her comparisons of their musical traditions and only later confirmed by centuries-old documents. Dr June Alison Sealy described her research amongst London's Indian Jewish commu-

nity, who have managed to preserve a distinct identity for generations in India but are finding it much more difficult to resist the forcefulness – cultural, educational and religious, particularly neo-religious – of London's majority Ashkenazi community.

Sara Manasseh described the Iraqi Jewish pilgrimage tradition as it now takes place in Israel, with musicians reserved in advance to accompany participants on the bus tours, playing both specifically Jewish and straightforward Arabic melodies. Marilyn Herman reported on her 10 months in Israel with a Bet Israel (Ethiopian Jewish) band learning and performing zefen, their system of communication through music and dance. Music and dance, like performers and audience, are inseparably connected for this community.

The last, even more crowded day concentrated on Ashkenazi music. Joel Rubin, analysing the Romanian-Jewish doina, played eloquent illustrations on clarinet, waking up the hall and getting the most heartfelt applause of the day for reminding us of the real life power of music – for once there was a collective agreement to ignore the half-hour limit.

I enjoyed Jaclyn Chernetz's explanation of cheironomy – hand signals used to prompt lay readers of the Torah – largely because of the delicious irony of hearing her reveal details of this little-known practice. I pass over the hassids, cantors and classical music professors, not just because other papers were more interesting but because I think it significant that so many women, who have traditionally been musically disenfranchised within Judaism, are now at the forefront of research into Jewish music.

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Young Communist League members and others demonstrate in Manchester in support of Spanish republicans fighting Franco, 1937

# MANCHESTER'S RED ARMY

The recent demise of the British communist movement has led to a flurry of attempts to write its history. But crucial gaps are being left. There is a tendency to neglect organisations which were subsidiaries of the party. In recent research on aspects of the history of the Young Communist League, I was struck by the important role played by Jewish young people in particular areas, especially in the Thirties, and felt that it would be useful to share some information on this – a part of left history which is in danger of being forgotten.

The YCL began to establish itself as a part of the social networks of Jewish youth in parts of Manchester and east London from the late twenties and early thirties. One of the highpoints of activity by Manchester YCLers during this period was their leadership of the April 1932 mass trespass on Kinder Scout. This event resulted in several arrests, a significant fact about which has been described by a participant in the action: 'As we got back into Hayfield, there was a row of police, stopped everybody, and they were picking out who they wanted, who they thought were foreign looking; if they were Jewish, it would set prejudice against them when the trial took place.' The fact

that some of the key activists and leaders of the Manchester YCL were Jewish was used by police to try and isolate the organisation, but it actually expressed one of the organisation's strongest points. The YCL gained credibility by becoming an integral part of a significant community, and the vehicle through which many young Jews combated increasing attacks on them by the fascist movement.

We are looking here at an example of political culture in a small community constituted around distinct strata of the local working class; strata which were marginalised as a whole, and for whom a shared sense of being considered low in status by others helped to crystallise a commitment to radicalism. This process developed in a few areas to the point that the YCL became a predominately Jewish organisation. Although it can hardly be considered a totally trustworthy source for information on labour history, Derek Jameson's autobiography can be taken seriously when he remembers being 'a very rare fish indeed in the Hackney YCL – the first among them who was not Jewish .... Many belonged to orthodox families who did not mix with gentiles. Even the hall where we met belonged to the local synagogue'.

**During the 1930s many young Jews joined the communist movement. Mike Waite examines what inspired them**

Ewan MacColl has also recorded ways in which communism and Jewish culture overlapped in the YCL, this time back in Manchester, 'We used to meet in the room of the YCL secretary at the time... below a shul – and we used to meet on a Friday so you'd see everybody going upstairs to the shul with their kind of yamulka on and all the rest of it. We'd be going in the backdoor to a YCL meeting, and then after the meeting some of us would stay and we'd go in and eat gefilte fish – so in a way, those of us who weren't Jews were being initiated into the Jewish way of life as well'.

The way the YCL put down roots amongst Jewish youth in the Thirties is further illustrated by one young Jewish woman concerned about plans by Mosley's British Union of Fascists to open a headquarters in her area of Manchester. She was drawn into activity alongside communists. The extent to which communism was accepted in her circles, making it seem quite natural to take the steps that she did, is conveyed by her casual references to recognising familiar things – she hears of an anti-fascist circle through an old school friend, she mentions the meeting place in relation to a place she already knows,

'On the day of the official opening (of the BUF headquarters), I went along to witness the event.... I came face to face with an old school friend.... She was enthusiastic about a new club she had joined called The Youth Front Against Fascism and War, which was situated over Syd Abraham's garage in Waterloo Road. She asked me if I'd like to go, and I agreed.

'It was a social and political club, whose members, many of them Jewish, were very concerned about the growth of fascism in Europe and particularly about the way it was manifesting itself in this country under the leadership of Oswald Mosley.'

In his sociological study of British communism, Kenneth Newton identifies some factors in the conditions and life-style of Jewish communities in the Thirties, and in aspects of Jewish culture and belief, which helped lay the basis for the significant levels of recruitment of Jewish people into the communist movement. These included established traditions of Jewish radicalism and political activism; affinities between communism and Judaism in relation to such shared values as non-asceticism and the importance of learning, and a belief in social justice; 'the slum conditions and economic instability of the east end which contrasted strongly with other parts of London'; and the fact that both communism and Judaism were cast within an internationalist framework.

Thus for some young Jews whose parents were Jewish emigres from Russia, joining the communist movement could serve the function of creating a link – more psychological than real – with the 'old country'. Emanuel Litvinoff's autobiography provides a wealth of images which suggest the ways in which Jewish messianism and socialist or communist radicalism had common roots, 'One of

my jobs at 14 was as an apprentice in the ladies garment trade... elderly tailors sat cross-legged on their benches stitching away... waiting – according to their predilection – for the Messiah or the red day of reckoning.'

While these factors and pictures tend to stress the affinities between some peoples' Jewish identity and their communist sympathies, other explanations of the attractions of communism for young Jewish people present the political creed as an escape route from a marginalised identity – a way of handling and expressing an identity that was in no way mainstream. The experience of being Jewish, working class and young was already to feel oneself 'in opposition' in a number of ways. Becoming a communist was a way of building on that identity, of turning it around and using it positively.

Although becoming a communist could be a step that simply confirmed how marginalised one was from the mainstream political culture, it could also represent a way of promoting your concerns more effectively. It did link you into a national political party – one that affirmed your entitlement to live as a full member of the community in Britain, and fought those on the fascist right who opposed that entitlement. Raphael Samuel has written that 'for my mother's generation, commu-

nism, though not intended as such, was a way of being English, a bridge by which the children of the ghetto entered the national culture'.

One interesting area to consider in looking at the way that the class politics of communism operated within the Jewish community is how it allowed young people to see through and criticise the myths about 'us all being Jews together'. The exploitation of Jewish workers by Jewish bosses was often justified by such assertions of com-

mon identity, but YCL sponsored opposition to such devices helped lay the basis for the left wing anti-Zionism which has been a significant if minority response to the course of mainstream Jewish politics over the last five decades and more.

The complexity of such processes can be further illustrated by looking at one example of how communism caused one young woman to alter her attitude to the Jewish faith. Breaking with religion was a feature of many young peoples' socialisation into the communist movement, but in the case of people from minority groups which faced oppression and prejudice, a distinction was sometimes drawn between the rejection of belief, and continued respect for the cultural background they were from.

Rose Kerrigan had always been pragmatic about religion, going to the synagogue because she 'liked to listen to the choir....and another reason was it took me away from the chores'. Her move to atheism came at sixteen when somebody said to her, 'people say God knows, it means nobody knows', and she realised it was 'absolutely true'. She emphasises that she rejected her religion, 'though not her people'.

**'For my mother's generation, communism, though not intended as such, was a way of being English'**

● Further reading:

Ewan MacColl, (1990) 'Journeyman' – an autobiography, London: Sidgwick and Jackson

Derek Jameson, (1988) 'Touched by Angels', London: Ebury Press

Hilda Cohen, (1989) 'Bagels with Babushka', Manchester: North West Shape/ Gatehouse Project

Emanuel Litvinoff, (1972) 'Journey Through a Small Planet', London: Michael Joseph, reissued in 1993 by R.Clark, London

Joe Jacobs, (1979) 'Out of the Ghetto', London: J.Simon, reissued in 1993 by Phoenix press, London

# 'If we were starry-eyed, it was because our eyes shone with faith in the future'

They used to say we were a special breed: products of the steam-age semi-ghettoes of London, Manchester, Leeds, second or third generation immigrants, a radical upsurge picking up the pieces left by the collapsed East End Jewish Radicals, a current turned towards socialism and internationalism by the 1930s slump and the threat of fascism and war.

The clothing and furniture factories where most of us worked buzzed with militancy. The Russian revolution spurred us on to the hope, nay, the certainty, of world revolution in our time.

The Cheetham (North Manchester) branch of the Young Communist League, in its heyday in 1936, numbered 200, 90% of them Jews won by anti-fascist campaigning and the drive for aid to Spain. From that branch came most of the Manchester Jewish members of the British Battalion of the International Brigade; Monty Rosenfield, Ralph Cantor, Cyril Bowman, Jud Colman, Benny Goodman, Abie Starr, to name a few I remember.

Communism, for many, meant universalism, a rejection of what was seen as 'narrow nationalism', Jewish, British, any other. Some of us, though, held tight to our Jewishness; for us, Marxism was a means of understanding the social process, not of explaining the purpose of existence. Even those who subscribed to unbelief often did so, I think, a little uneasily.

Generally, though, we were a confident generation, not much given to internal probings or self-analysis. Criticism we shattered with our dialectical thunderbolts, and we had no doubts about our political wisdom. The coming revolution would sweep away all social problems, including anti-semitism, including fascism, the last gasp of capitalism.

Militancy, the kind of toughness which brought Jewish communists into the forefront of actions like Cable Street, pride in our working-class origins, these were the badges we wore. And yet, because the old always contains the seeds of the new, even then small doubts were stirring. There were doubts that exploded into revolt in 1956 when the Khrushchev revelations unleashed a torrent of questions and self-criticism. As from a centrifuge, demands for explanations flew in all directions, among them for one on the theory that anti-semitism was merely a capitalist conspiracy to split the workers.

Even before Khrushchev spoke, Jewish communists had been up in arms, the Slansky trials, the infamous 'doctors' plot' frame-up, the destruction of Soviet Jewish cultural life and the murder of its leading lights during the 'shvartse yorn' from 1948 to 1952, caused one after another of the Jewish Communist Party members to question, defy, fight and leave the Party. Of course, there were those who did not, and some among these were the most vociferous critics of Israel and of all Jews who would not agree with them. Among the rebels, Dr Hyman Levy, Chimen Abramsky, Arnold Posner, Issy Rennap, Dave Nesbitt, Joe Garman, Mick Davies, myself, to name a very few of the Jewish-conscious Jews of the CPGB.

It was Issy Rennap who led the small band of Jewish CP members in Manchester who in 1969 formed the core of 'Progressives for Peace in the Middle East'. Issy died in 1972. I wrote his obituary in the New York 'Morgen Freiheit'. He should be remembered wherever politically progressive Jews gather together, for without him and his guidance the Jewish Socialists' Group would not, I think, exist quite as it does today.

We made a lot of mistakes in our youth. We made them, we learnt from them, and that is the best lesson we learned. And if we were starry-eyed, it was because our eyes shone

with faith in the future. The light I see in the eyes of young people today has more in it, I think of the glare of desperation. Should we be surprised? The post-Holocaust generation is beset with problems we could not imagine: problems nuclear, environmental, of political betrayals and of strange ideologies opening up in a world we now see as infinitely more complex than we once considered possible.

And capitalism is not yet finished with. Some of the blame must rest with those of my generation, all of my generation, not just the Communists, who saw things too simply, questioned too little, accepted too much. Not surprisingly, history let us down.

Of one thing, though, I am sure. The resources of reaction, though greater than we once imagined, are not boundless. The complexities of social change will be grasped sufficiently to ensure that the future society will be a socialist one, and a somewhat more human socialism, I think than the one we might have been ready to settle for in those days.

**Aubrey Lewis, a founding member of the Jewish Socialists' Group, first became politically active in the Young Communist League in Manchester in the 1930s**



● Aubrey Lewis died in 1987. This article was first printed in the JSG members' bulletin



# Israel's dirty tsitsis

***Jewish History, Jewish Religion: the weight of three thousand years***  
by Israel Shahak with a foreword by Gore Vidal.  
Pluto Press, £11.95 (pb)

Israel Shahak was born in Poland and survived Belsen before going to Palestine in 1945. In Israel, where he recently retired as a professor of Chemistry, Shahak is known as a critic of Zionism and a civil rights activist. His political activities began, he says, when he saw an orthodox Jew refuse to allow his phone to be used on shabbes to call an ambulance for a non-Jew who had collapsed. The Rabbinical Court of Jerusalem cited Talmudic sources and confirmed that the Jew in question had acted correctly, indeed piously.

Since that time Shahak has developed a powerful critique of the Jewish religion. He has documented many instances where reactionary and inhuman parts of traditional Jewish teaching have influenced political ideologies in Israel. A lot of what he says is convincing, and this book certainly opened my eyes to some appalling things.

The basic book of the Habad (Lubavitch) branch of Hassidism, for instance, states that all non-Jews are totally satanic creatures, 'in whom there is absolutely nothing good'. Habad propaganda has specifically attempted to persuade Israeli military doctors and nurses to withhold medical help from 'gentile wounded'.

Similarly, in 1973, a senior chaplain in the Israeli Army issued a booklet which said: 'In war, when our forces storm the enemy, they are allowed and even enjoined by the halacha to kill even good civilians, that is, civilians who are ostensibly good'.

In another illustration of religious fundamentalism in Israel, Shahak notes that Jewish burial associations have a monopoly over the burial of all Jews except kibbutz members. The custom of these associations has been to circumcise the corpses of non-circumcised male Jews before burying them, without asking the family's permission.

The catalogue of inhuman beliefs and activities by orthodox Jews is a grim one.

We all know that the recent Gaza-Jericho agreement between Israel and the PLO has been attacked by many orthodox Jews on the grounds that Jewish law forbids the relinquishing of an inch of 'Jewish land'.

I had regarded this viewpoint as just a cover for political expansionism, but Shahak argues persuasively that it is just one part of a coherent ideology which is inhuman and revolting – 'fascist' in a true sense. Although many secular Jews in Israel despise and reject many aspects of this ideology, its influence on mainstream Zionism has increased over the years, as has its corrupting effect on Jewish life generally.

So far Shahak is undoubtedly saying

**'Although many secular Jews in Israel despise many aspects of religious ideology, its influence on mainstream Zionism has increased over the years, as has its corrupting effect on Jewish life generally.'**

true and important things. His book is a good example of liberal humanism at its best, exposing injustice and not caring who he offends – a stand that has needed considerable courage over the years.

His book also, however, shows the limitations of liberal humanism. Shahak says explicitly that he is not a socialist, an understandable position for someone who has had to fight the nominally socialist establishment in Israel. This leads to weaknesses in his analysis. He notes, for instance, that many American rabbis supported Martin Luther King and the campaigns against racism in the

50s and 60s. Now it so happens that Maimonides held dreadful racist views, and some of the rabbis were no doubt aware of this. Shahak argues that either they were racists who only wanted to win Black support for American Jewry and Israel's policies, or else they were 'accomplished hypocrites, to the point of schizophrenia, capable of passing very rapidly from a hidden enjoyment of rabid racism to a proclaimed attachment to an antiracist struggle – and back – and back again'.

This is not a useful perspective. Ideologies are not things that every person either accepts completely or utterly rejects. Each person – like each social institution – is a battleground in which competing ideologies constantly fight for dominance. Just as institutions are a mixture of progressive and reactionary elements, individuals are the same.

No doubt many of those who fought racism so heroically along with King held deeply ingrained sexist attitudes at the same time (though often less so than many people, partly as a result of the contribution that women made to the struggle).

As socialists one way to win people to our side is to recognise that this mixture of liberatory and oppressive attitudes is bound to exist, and to build on the enlightened bits that we can find in everyone – and that means everyone.

A consequence of this is that it isn't necessary to follow Shahak when he describes modern organised racism as 'demonic', defying analysis by 'any presently understood theory'. To accept this position is to write off certain people as having no positive characteristics – exactly the kind of exclusion that fascist ideology promotes, and that Shahak utterly condemns.

People who are brutalised and frightened from an early age will do horrible things and construct ideologies to justify them. Socialists have to believe that our essential humanity remains intact despite the conditioning, and that they can reach out for this humanity.

These criticisms are easy for a British Jew to make. Shahak is a brave man who has spoken out against injustice in his country and become very unpopular in the process. Anyone who wants to change the Jewish community so that it stops siding with the forces of reaction should read this book.

Raphael Salkie

***Israel: Politics, Myths and Identity Crises***  
Akiva Orr  
Pluto Press, £10.95

Akiva Orr is one of a handful of left wing Israelis washed up on these shores towards the end of the 1960s who I used to regard as our Shlikhim (emissaries) from Another Israel. For a time they enlightened some of us left wing diaspora Jews about the nature of the Zionist state, opened Palestinian minds to possibilities of co-operation without capitulation and, if only by their novelty value, even stimulated the lazy brain cells of the British left.

These essays throw an interesting sidelight on things, almost brilliant now and then, but not the illumination we need. Jewish Socialists familiar with the Bund's programme or with Austro-Marxism, anyone who has followed events in Bosnia (or even thought about the capitalist United States) will be amused by the publisher's claim that 'The book breaks new ground by offering an entirely new principle for ethnic politics – the separation of ethnicity from the state, rather than the conventional right of nations to self-determination...'

Orr is much more useful recounting bits of history that should be chewed over by anyone claiming knowledge of the Jewish State, or the state of the Jews. I recommend his detailed essay on the Kastner case. Forty years ago the Israeli government sued an elderly Hungarian Jew who had accused Dr Rudolf Kastner, a leader of Hungarian Jewry during World War II, of helping send Jews to their deaths by his dealings with the Nazis. The government lost its case. Kastner, a prominent Mapai (Labour Party) official, whose testimony implicated Jewish Agency leaders, was assassinated before an appeal could be heard.

In my youth we discussed the 'dilemma' of leaders like Kastner, without the heat later fanned up against Jim Allen's play, *Perdition*, which was based on the case. But somehow we didn't make the connection with the cruel fate of others, on whose heroism we were raised, such as the poetess and Zionist pioneer, Hannah Senesh, who returned to Hungary to organise resistance but was captured and tortured to death. Akiva Orr's account ends by noting that last year Tel Aviv city council decided to name a street after Rudolf Kastner. Evidently modern bourgeois Zionism is less romantic, more honest, in its choice of heroes.

There are two theoretical pieces on the national question in Palestine. Tracing differences within the left

# Orr-thodoxy

between Matzpen and the Communist Party, Orr questions the left's often mechanical repetition of the 'right to self-determination' formula. While acknowledging that those who have defined themselves in struggle won't give up 'merely because someone else refuses to define them as a "nation"', he criticises the 'two nations, two states' perspective. This worthwhile discussion requires a less superficial reading of socialist theory. Marx's support for Irish independence, for instance, wasn't merely aimed at 'weakening the British empire' but at strengthening unity between Irish and British workers.

The main purpose of this book is to challenge the claim that Zionism is inseparable from 'Jewish identity'. Orr describes the Union of Jewish Students'

**'Trying the beat the Zionists on their own ground, Orr has strayed off the path of materialist analysis into an idealist morass'**

(UJS) hysterical attack on the Jewish anti-zionists of *Return*, when they obscenely equated 'assimilation' and mixed marriages with Nazi gas chambers (and the National Union of Students' cowardly acceptance of such 'arguments' to ban *Return* as 'racist'). Clearly we can't look to such representatives of the educated Jewish young for a rational discussion of Jewish identity, or for a real fight against fascist anti-semitism.

But as a Marxist I am amazed to hear Moshe Machover quoted as saying: 'there is no material basis for the existence of Jewish communities outside Israel', and to see this taken as a prescriptive statement. Akiva Orr removes the mask from UJS ranting or from his Golders Green landlords's psychological stake in Israel, only to reveal an equally mystifying false consciousness. 'Zionism is primarily an attempt to provide a

political solution to an ethnic identity problem,' he says. But why should ethnic identity be a problem? Orr (a mathematician like Machover and Lewis Carroll) declares: 'Secular Jewish ethnicity is as solid as the smile of the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland.'

This should please the religious orthodox, for whom Rabbi Akiva displays much respect. They keep the 613 mitzvot (commandments), he assures us (oh yeah?); whereas 'the notion that Jews consist of an ethnic entity ... creates the need for a secular definition of this ethnicity ... There is no secular definition of Jewishness.' Apparently young Israeli's have a problem of 'fuzziness' (hasn't Akiva's mathematical logic heard of 'fuzzy sets'!). But why, except in a state where one's civil rights are determined by 'ethnic' category, should anyone need to bother their head with 'definitions'? Why can't a cultural heritage just be enjoyed?

Where is the real, everyday – as opposed to Shabbos – Jew, with an outlook formed, however imperfectly, from the material world and its struggles? Allowing that politics has a psychological dimension, that this is a book about 'identity', and that it is addressing the Zionism of relatively comfortable, suburban British Jews rather than of 19th century Russia or post-Holocaust DP camps, doesn't Jewish insecurity merit some historical-material analysis?

Instead, Orr tells us the identity problem causes insecurity: 'The cause of this threat is externalised. They interpret every comment and joke about Jews as anti-Jewish racism. The state of Israel serves as a prop to overcome this insecurity.'

Trying the beat the Zionists on their own ground, one-time striking mariner and syndicalist Akiva Orr has strayed off the path of materialist analysis into an idealist morass. Though his unfashionably kind words for Leon Trotsky do him credit, I can't see the founder of the Red Army agreeing that 'the only way to beat ideas is with other ideas.'

Nor with inverting reality to explain away the real problems of masses of people by individual psychology, in a way startlingly recalling Cold War academia. Apart from stimulating debate, *Israel: Politics, Myths and Identity Crises* has the merit of illustrating just how far mere 'anti-Zionism' falls short of Jewish Socialism.

Charlie Pottins

# Hitler for youth

## Holocaust books for young people

I start with a warning: if as a parent (or even as a person) you're after a novel or a short story, suitable for children or teenagers that talks about gas chambers, and provides some over-arching picture of why or how the Final Solution happened, read no further. If it exists, I haven't found it. This begs the question, why not?

There is, I guess, a final squeamishness, that says to writers of fiction: this business is too ghastly, too much at the very extreme of human degradation to be 1) turned into fiction, and 2) given to children. Fiction is potentially immoral with its closeness to lying, bullshitting, invention and fantasy. Children, we think are to be protected from ultimate and irredeemable evil. ('There must be hope,' we might say.)

But what about memoirs? Someone telling it like it was? Survivors' tales have a logic and pattern of their own. Attempting a memoir seems to discourage writers from looking up from their grim experience and outwards to the wider picture. The power of the tale is in the account of the last crumb of bread, the incredible coincidences and haphazard chances that enabled them to survive, without such tellers being able to find the means to contemplate the whys and wherefores of the Final Solution itself.

The body of literature for young readers that deals with the Nazi persecution may be grouped like this: 1) memoirs; 2) fiction clearly based on memoirs; 3) fiction by survivors 4) fiction by people who were never there. The phrase 'Nazi persecution' covers a massive area including e.g. fleeing from the Nazis in Germany or Austria, hiding in Holland, Denmark or France, survival in ghettos, joining the resistance in Poland, life in labour or death camps, living with survivors after the war and so on.

When it comes to the matter of 'good' or 'bad' writing, I confess a certain reluctance to committing myself. If what is obviously a memoir is, at times, slightly banal, slightly clichéd, does this matter? On the other hand, what is clearly a fiction may be gripping, breathless, power-

ful etc. but may be just too slick, too manipulated for comfort. So-called literary criteria might simply not be appropriate here. I have to say, of the many pieces of writing about this period I have read, some of the most moving have been the least 'literary', typed up by cousins and passed through the family.

### 1 Memoirs

'The Diary of Anne Frank' is extraordinary for being a text that is informed by something outside of itself. The whole time we read it, we know that this is something fleeting, something about to be extinguished, and yet the writer doesn't know it. We are like the classic audience of melodrama who wants to shout, 'Look out he's behind you!' and yet we can't. Anne is trapped like a butterfly in a picture, always alive but always dead. There is now a documentary book for children to support it called *Anne Frank 1929-1945* by Richard Tames (Franklin Watts 1989). It is excellent and necessary.

Hans Peter Richter's classic three volume memoir *Friedrich: I was there* and *The Time of the Young Soldiers* (originally published in England from 1971 now in print in Puffin Plus). It covers the period of Richter's life from 14 to 20. It is the story of a German, non-Jewish youth, compellingly written in a deadpan, witnessing tone, as he sees the growth of Nazism and takes part in the war as a soldier.

Ilse Koehn's *Mischling Second Degree* (USA, 1977; now Puffin Plus) is the account of a 'half-Jewish' girl. Her parents divorced in 1937, Ilse went to evacuation camps, joined the Hitler Youth, her grandmother is killed in Theresienstadt and only after the war does she piece together the full story.

### 2 Fiction based on memoirs

*The Summer of Aviya* by Gila Almagor (Collins 1991 - from Am Oved, Israel 1986) arose out of a stage show by Almagor telling the mysterious tale of her life in orphanages and reuniting with her survivor mother. It's quite short and slightly eerie. Johanna Reiss's *The Upstairs Room* (Harper Trophy USA 1972) is one of the best reads in this whole selection, telling the story of a Dutch Jewish girl who was hidden in

Holland. Churlish to say it, but of course this is not the Final Solution. It shows non-Jews at their best.

Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (Collins Lions since 1971) and now on the National Curriculum lists, is the account, brilliantly told, of a Jewish family who escape from Germany in 1933. Again, not the Holocaust, Doris Orgel's *The Devil in Vienna* (Simon and Schuster Sprint 1989 - originally 1978) comes closer, set in Austria in 1938 and relates the Nazification of school and the like. Similar territory is covered by Sonia Levitin in *Journey to America* (Macmillan Aladdin, USA 1987, originally 1970) But closest and most heartrending is *The Cage* by Ruth Minsky Sender (Macmillan, Bantam, USA 1986). It is the only one of these books that takes us to Auschwitz, the heroine being a survivor of the Lodz ghetto before that. Jewish Socialist readers will enjoy the anti-Judenrat moments and general Yiddishkeit. Order it from your American friends.

### 3 Fiction by survivors

This includes the inspirational *Uncle Misha's Partisans, A Story of Young Freedom fighters during World War Two* (Shapolsky USA 1988). Motele joins the partisans in the forest and has to take on an assignment against the Nazis. Jewish resistance, yes! *The Man from the Other Side* by Uri Orlev (Houghton Mifflin, USA 1989 from the Hebrew 1989) is a tense account of a boy who is trying to survive on the fringes of the Warsaw Ghetto. He becomes involved with a non-Jewish Pole who is doing the run in out of the ghetto along the sewers. It's a tough, unsentimental account of survival. Highly recommended.

### 4 Fiction

This includes Christa Laird's *Shadow of the Wall* (Walker 1990) set in Warsaw 1942 and the sequel *But Can the Phoenix Sing?* (Julia Macrea 1993) includes the uprising. They're OK-ish. Geoffrey Treases, veteran lefty English children's writer has tried to bring Nazism nearer to home with *Tomorrow is a Stranger* (Piper 1989) which has Paul and Tessa on Guernsey during the war. *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (Collins Lions 1991) is set in Denmark and is therefore in the



Nazi propaganda poster: 'Youth serves the Führer. Every ten-year-old into the Hitler Youth.'

optimistic vein - nearly all Danish Jews survived. It won the top US children's book award.

Also available are:

Jane Yolen *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Puffin, USA 1990) mostly set in Yiddish Poland - plenty of Jewish culture.

Rhoda Kaelis *The Last Enemy* (Pulp Press, Canada 1989) based on survivor's testimonies.

Sigrid Heuck *The Hideout* (Prairie Books, Canada 1988) about survivors in the immediate post-war.

Carol Matas *Lisa* (Lester and Orpen

Dennys, Canada 1987) and its sequel *Jesper* (Orpen Dennys, Canada 1989) both set in Denmark.

*Maus, A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman (originally Pantheon USA, now Penguin) and the sequel *Maus II, A Survivor's Tale and here my troubles began* (originally Random House 1991 and now Penguin 1992) are, in my book, amazing, unique, five-star greats. Very Jewish, ideal for reluctant reading offspring (e.g. mine) and totally un-schmaltzy.

A non-fiction account intended for a young readership is *Smoke and Ashes* by

Barbara Rogasky (Oxford 1988). It is thorough, analytical and very careful on the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust. When and if you are ever asked about Mengele then Lucette Matalon Lagnada and Shella Cohn Dekel's *Children of the Flames, Dr Josef Mengele and the Untold Story of the Twins of Auschwitz* (Pan 1992) gives both an account and allows the survivors to tell their stories. Is this something that children/teenagers can be told? Conventionally we would say no, but why not?

Michael Rosen

# Rewinding history

*Voices of the Holocaust*  
Compiled by Carrie Supple  
and Rob Perks  
(British Library)

Voices of the Holocaust aims to give young people like me an insight into events related to the Nazi genocide. Unlike many text books, the audio tapes provide first hand information from a variety of people who witnessed the rise of Nazism and the Second World War. We are told how their lives were affected and of the everyday traumas they faced; they discuss issues such as anti-semitism, the occupation, the ghettos and life before the Holocaust.

The tapes provide us with a powerful picture of life in an atmosphere of race hatred. Peter Prager recalls his teacher making the Jewish children in his class stand up so that he could draw a picture of their heads on the blackboard. He was trying to show that Jewish heads were deformed and had a different shape to Aryan heads! 'Well, don't be frightened, it's not your fault that you are inferior, but that's just the way nature has made Jews.' This type of information stirs the emotions and is upsetting, but we need it if we are to understand what happened.

With the new rise of the Far Right in Europe, there has never been a better time to remember our ancestors and what they endured during the Second World War. It is of fundamental importance that we do not allow such atrocities to occur again. Prevention is the key, but this can only be achieved through understanding the events leading up to the Holocaust and also through facing the horrors of exactly what did take place during this time.

Barbara Stimler: 'Snow, and you are walking, walking. No food, no nothing, we are just living on snow, and when we were resting we just flopped on the snow. The snow was building up on the shoes. It was just terrible. And then eventually, I don't know how they got it but they got wagons, and put the girls in

the wagons, the ill ones, and we had to push it. But that was not so bad already then, because the blankets were slipping from their hands, we didn't have no gloves, and it was very very cold. And one day they took the wagons into the forest, you know what they have done with them, they killed them there. And we are marching, marching and marching. And still no food.'

We may think we know what happened, but the truth is that for most of us, our knowledge is limited. Facts and figures are not enough if we are to ensure the same thing never happens again. The Nazis are returning and although we may think we are safe in Britain, are we really? British National Party membership is rising, and this is the pattern all over Europe. We may feel

**'The tapes provide us with a powerful picture of life in an atmosphere of race hatred'**

unable to change social conditions but we can prevent ignorance.

Our predecessors went through this struggle, and many lost their lives in the process because of their unwillingness to deny who they were. They were proud of their heritage as we should be now – we must not forget this history.

The tapes are easy to follow and I found them far more memorable than any textbook. Most importantly, they provide an emotional viewpoint which is of vital importance to anyone studying modern history.

Simone Citron

● *Voices of the Holocaust, a resource pack for school students and their teachers, is published by The British Library National Sound Archive, 29 Exhibition Road, London SW7 2AS.*

The Child Manuela  
Christa Winsloe  
trans by Agnes Neill Scott  
Virago Lesbian Landmarks,  
£5.99

'No one can be truly free if, as a child, their education has been authoritarian and repressive, designed to teach them how to submit to the conditions of life as laid down by society rather than to adapt these conditions for their own fulfilment,' wrote an unnamed publicity person on the jacket of a book called *Children's Rights*, published 22 years ago – though it feels like 100.

Now we have the national curriculum, so quickly and so mistakenly accepted by so many teachers, but which inevitably and immediately became the expression of the government's narrow, authoritarian and repressive 'educational' policy. Why did anyone expect otherwise? What else could any national curriculum become that was constructed by the state for the state and imposed on children (even if it were more benign under a Labour government)?

These are not new debates; indeed, depressingly, they seem to recur in each generation. Each time progressives argue convincingly that rigid, repressive systems of education are a feature and a prerequisite of totalitarianism, the right attacks their work and dismantles their achievements.

Nowhere was this clearer than in Hitler's Germany. *The Child Manuela* by Christa Winsloe is the book of the tragic and challenging film, *Mädchen in Uniform* (dir Leontine Sagan, 1931), about a boarding school for the daughters of army officers. The film takes place in contemporary Germany, a powerful warning of the dangers of an education system geared to obedience and conformity. The book, which was written in 1934, a year after Hitler took power (now reissued by Virago), was moved backwards to the turn of the century for fear of censorship.

Manuela is the daughter of an officer in the Prussian army – a handsome, sparkling but shallow man whose income does not match the social activities necessary to his career. Wherever he is posted, the family has to follow, and the dictates of his regiment override the needs or wishes of his wife and children. When her mother dies, Manuela is sent to a school appropriate to her background and to her prospects, where her intellect, independence and emerging

# School of sorrow



lesbian sexuality are ruthlessly stifled and her spirit is broken.

In a powerful portent of what fascism would bring, Christa Winsloe describes Manuela's introduction to her new life. After an interminable list of instructions and prohibitions she was given her wardrobe key with a number:

'You're No 55,' said Marga.

Manuela looked up at the number above her wardrobe: a black '55'.

'Your clothes will be marked 55. Your shoes will be in box 55 in the boot-room. Your coat and your hat will be hung in the cloakroom by the hall, in compartment 55. Your wash-basin is No 55, and so is your bed.'

Manuela felt herself slowly turning into No 55.

'Well, now I'll take you to Marie to

get your dress. Just tell her you're No 55 and then she'll know.'

Her clothes are then locked away, never to be worn without permission, as Marie explains: 'If you try to run away, you see, then everybody knows your uniform, don't they?'

The headmistress is terrifying and monolithic, communicating partly by striking the floor with her stick; the girls are required to curtsy deeply to her – different grades of curtsy are prescribed for superiors of different states. The teachers include the beautiful Fräulein von Bernburg, the object of Manuela's love, whose heritage and position demand that she stifle her natural sensitivity and warmth, and Bunny 'who was no longer a person and so had nothing to fear in this world'.

The conditions are extreme and the plot is dramatic, but what makes Christa Winsloe's fictional school so chilling is not how strange it is, but how familiar and recognisable.

Its assumptions about children and education and their relationship to the rest of society are still current and have gained strength in the anti-intellectual, authoritarian atmosphere of Thatcher's and Major's Britain.

Testing at 7, 11, 14, 16 and 18, league tables of schools, long term underfunding in the state education system all combine with rising poverty to deprive children of the right to an education that will enable them to take control of their lives, to shape their own future and to liberate themselves from the fear or reality of totalitarianism.

Julia Bard

# Jew the obscure

*Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society*

Brian Cheyette  
Cambridge, £35

'Yes. T.S.Eliot was antisemitic but genius can be forgiven a little political incorrectness, can't it?' We have probably all come across remarks of that ilk which neatly separate the aesthetic from ideas and ideology. In literary analysis the writer's attitudes to 'the Jew' have been marginalised.

In his book *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society* (shades of literary imperialism here as both Joyce and Shaw are extensively discussed) Bryan Cheyette analyses literary representations of the Jew between 1875 and 1945 in the context of a 'semitic discourse' and rightly resists attempts to typify writers as antisemitic or philosemitic. The problems raised by the contradictory constructions of the Jew, and the efforts to textually 'fix' the Jew, when studied in terms of the Semitic discourse reveal new insights into the works of writers ranging in time from George Eliot to T.S. Eliot.

The keynote for this thesis is Matthew Arnold's seminal essay *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold conceived Hebraism and Hellenism as culturally polarised but with points of influence. For Arnold, hebraic virtues included hard work and moral duty, ie the hebraic philistinism of the Victorian middle classes compared to the hellenic ideals of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, beauty and truth. Whilst Hebraism and Hellenism could be discussed as cultural influences, Arnold also constructed them as outgrowths from different racial stocks – the Semitic and Indo-European peoples respectively. But hellenic culture could assimilate the best aspects of Semitism/Hebraism; it is those universal, hellenized Jews such as Heine, who transcend the divide, whom Arnold saw as his ideal, the hope for the Victorian universalist state.

Arnold's notions of Hebraism and Hellenism reappear in different forms in writers as diverse as George Bernard



Shaw, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. This conflation of culture and race is seen again in Shaw where different national identities, particularly that of the Jew, are deemed to disappear within the new socialist order. But, as Cheyette points out, there is an ambivalence in the construction of the Jew. While Shaw debunks the late Victorian 'socialism of fools' which associates anti-capitalism with a virulent antisemitism, the Jews in his plays — an assortment of radicals, revolutionaries and capitalists — are nonetheless confined through their 'disorderly' Jewish nature and are unable to transcend their hebraic fixity. Whilst there is a certain quirky tension to Shaw's Semitic discourse in such plays as *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah* this is lost in his later essays. In these Shaw characterizes the Führer as 'Joshua Hitler'. With unfortunate perversity the biblical Jewish warrior is metaphorically linked to Hitler who is paralysed politically and socially because of the hebraisation of National Socialism and its fixation on the Jews.

It would be difficult to spot much

**CASABLANCA, the magazine with a bite instead of a sound-bite, wishes Jewish Socialist a snappy new year • INSIDE CASABLANCA:** John Berger indicts Schindler's List • Charlie Pottins unveils the Workers' Bug • Fiona Pitt-Kethley measures the fascist phallus • Eleanor Margolies deciphers free-market Poland • Daniel de Souza launches the mother of football tackles • Joe Slovo denounces squatters •

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ambivalence in the lines:

'The rats are underneath the piles.  
The Jew is underneath the lot.  
Money in furs.'

The modernist T.S. Eliot polarised the disorder represented by 'the Jew' in opposition to the classical exactitude of Greek thought. In his perceptive chapter on Eliot, Cheyette demonstrates how the poetry at times expresses Eliot's own repressed identification with the protestant hebraism of his unitarian background, his early vocations in the 'Jewish' professions of finance and journalism, and his feelings of estrangement as a 'foreigner' in Britain.

In contrast with Eliot's authoritarian quest for a hellenic orderliness and continuity to be set at the heart of European culture, James Joyce mocks Arnold's thesis in the form of the 'Jewgreek', Leonard Bloom, a major protagonist in Joyce's great novel, *Ulysses*. Whilst the other writers discussed in Cheyette's book grapple with the problematic indeterminacy of the Jew as a textual figure, Joyce throughout his works turns the whole process on its head and celebrates the unstable and ambivalent representations of the Jew. Thus, *Ulysses* is used to subvert literary conventions that try to order reality. This is reflected in Joyce's wonderfully absurd conjunctions of word and image, for example, the hyperbolic biblical imagery of 'ben Bloom Elijah' ascending 'amid clouds of angels' ... 'over Donohoe's in Little Green Street'.

Sexuality, empire and financial scandals are other themes around which this discourse is analysed. The sexually voracious Jewish male and the beautiful oriental Jewess consistently appear in the novels and plays of imperialists like John Buchan and socialists like Shaw. The Jewish 'type' also remains strongly consistent throughout the years covered by this book. Trollope's Jewish men have lustrous eyes which, with an almost comic consistency, are set a little too close together. (Presumably Christian eyes are set at the regulation distance.) Eyes play a prominent part in these racialized narratives. In John Buchan they are 'mysterious', in H.G. Wells the east-end Jews are 'bright-eyed', in G.K. Chesterton the eyes are 'fierce, red-brown'.

It is on Britain's entry into the Boer war, with all its imperialist ramifications, that the significance of Jewish representation becomes most explicitly anarchic and fragmented. The 'loyal' Jew could be constructed as well as the forces of Jewish capital which are invoked by Kipling and Belloc as unnecessarily destroying the lives of British soldiers for their own interest. The



George Eliot: 19th century Judeophile.

Marconi financial scandal, which erupted prior to the 1914-18 war was another source for varying constructions ranging in time from Kipling to T.S. Eliot.

In this book Cheyette has highlighted the ambivalent construction of the Jew. The Jew then becomes a kind of prism who refracts and presents new insights into the world that these writers are attempting to describe. In reading the literature in this way the 'slippery' Jew reveals the tensions in the narratives presented by the late Victorian and Edwardian writers but also threatens the boundaries which more modern writers such as T.S. Eliot strive to maintain.

This perceptive book deserves to generate further debate on representations of the Jew. However I did have relatively minor problems with some areas of the book. There is a small but significant error in the chapter on H.G. Wells where Lewis in *The New Machiavelli* is on one page cited as representing Rufus Isaacs, on another Herbert Samuel. Or was he representing both? Is this another instance of Semitic confusion?

Within the constraints set by the book I wondered why Virginia Woolf was excluded and how Jewish writers such as Zangwill and Isaac Rosenberg would have been perceived from this theoretical perspective.

Cheyette follows his analysis with a call for a radical re-reading of the texts in a postmodern context which celebrates the indeterminacy of the Jew and the impossibility of imposing a 'fascistic clarity' on meaning. James Joyce shows the way here. As I finished the book I recollected a television programme shown a year or so ago on art and the Nazis. One witness at the time was so inspired by a parade through Munich that she couldn't wait to get home and start tidying up.

Ralph Levinson

Putting my own books in groups and alphabetical order, after twenty years of chaos, I was struck by the names of the anarchist writers, Paul Goodman, Sam Dolgoff, Fredy Perlman, Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman ... most of the books by anarchist writers from the States on the shelves are by Jews. I realise that in the great conspiracy Jews dominate all the important areas of writing such as, well, Marxism and art therapy but it had slipped my notice that here was another area Jews were prominent in. Sam Dolgoff in his *Fragments: A Memoir* (Refract, £7) perhaps teased out why it was that so many Jews in the States became anarchists: 'long before social security the immigrants helped each other ... They created a vast network of co-operative fraternities and associations of all kinds to meet expanding needs — summer camps for children and adults, educational projects, cultural and health centres, care of the aged etc.'

Many of these Jewish anarchists lived to a ripe old age, their involvement — and indeed persecution spanning continents. Crucial to so many of that generation was the Russian revolution, and its failure. People like Mollie Steimer and Senya Fleshin (*Fighters for Anarchism*, Libertarian Publications Group, £2) and Goodman and Berkman (see for example *Living my Life*, Pluto 2 — volumes, £3 each) were shattered by the experience of the never actually existing socialism. They at least survived, when many Jews — including thousands who returned to *Der Heym* to join the revolution did not. The American anarchist Jewish tradition is dim now, but we do have Noam Chomsky!

The British Jewish anarchist tradition has no Chomsky, and its existence is barely known. A few bits of old timers have appeared in the last few years — anarchist Jews do have a long life. The best source book is Rudolf Rocker's *The London Years* which is unavailable (though someone did tell me they'd maybe seen it in the States in Yiddish — confirmed sightings welcome), and deserves seeking out — or reprinting. Rocker himself was not Jewish but was a German, invited to edit a Yiddish anarchist journal. He learned Yiddish when he found out his translator was taking liberties with his text and thereafter threw himself into the Yiddish anarchist movement.

If only Pauline Podbrey had read some of these people! Her new autobiography *White Girl in Search of the Party* (Haded Books of South Africa, £10.95) describes her and her husband's disillusionment with communism while serving as journalists

## the shelf

on the English language radio station in Hungary. This was prior to the 1956 uprising and the petty and mind-bogglingly stupid attempts by the regime to pretend that all the workers were happy workers under Stalin's leadership makes the reader want to scream. That so many otherwise intelligent people were taken in by this is hard to believe. Especially that so many Jews were taken in, given the anti-semitism of Stalin and his proteges.

The most interesting part of the book covers the author's relationship and marriage in South Africa (to which she had emigrated as a child from Lithuania) to an Indian communist. Even her Bundist father opposed the marriage and her mother was shunned in shul on Yom Kippur, even though her mother fanatically opposed the match. Marriage across the colour divide was not then illegal in South Africa — just impossible.

Marxism of course is divided on the 'Jewish question' (what's the Gentile question by the way?) and *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: the history of a debate 1843 — 1943*, by Enzo Traverso (Humanities Press, £15.95) is an excellent place to start. This book is very readable and explains the debate between (mostly Jewish) Marxists as to whether Jews should have national rights (Bundists), territorial national rights (Zionist Marxists) or seek assimilation (Trotsky, Luxemburg etc).

I was amused to be reminded that Engels once described the Jews of Posnania as 'the dirtiest of people' and to discover that he divided the European people into historic and non-historic nations, the latter of which would and should be assimilated into the former.

Traverso gently supports the Bundist position.

Glas — a magazine of new Russian writing, has brought out a special issue of Jewish writing, *Jews and Strangers* (Glas, £6.95). There are a couple of articles worth mentioning. One is a wee gem, part of a report by the Russian writer Nikolai Leskov, commissioned by St. Petersburg Jewish Community for the Czarist government in the 1880's. It describes Jewish socialists as having 'activities not justified from the point of view of reason made wise by experience, and they are criminal in the eyes of the law. Jews (of this type) doom themselves to certain death for the sake of humanity which (does not) want to recognise equal rights for Jews ... It is difficult to imagine a greater sacrifice.' It is indeed.

Much of the rest is predictable, the pogroms, the resistance, the daily anti-semitism of the passing stranger, of the school room, until the article by Lev Anninsky which describes how the 200 year dialogue between Russians and Jews is coming to an end. 'The troublesome race is leaving at last', mostly for Israel 'where they are invariably called Russians just as in Russia they never stopped being Jews'. A Russian Jew I met recently from Oxford tells me the same story. In Oxford his friends are Russian.

Finally, to return to where I began. Anarchists operated outside the law, but they weren't the only ones. There's a revised edition of *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America*, by Albert Fried (Columbia, £11.50). The names of many of these gangsters, who mostly came from the same slums and tenements as the anarchists are now familiar to us, not least from cinema. Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel, Dutch Schultz and the others. Right wing, union-corrupting, murderous thugs they may have been, but they were our right wing, union-corrupting, murderous thugs and even got profiled in the J.C. This racy book outlines their history and it's fascinating, but me? I'll stick with the anarchists, they're too much for the J.C.

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