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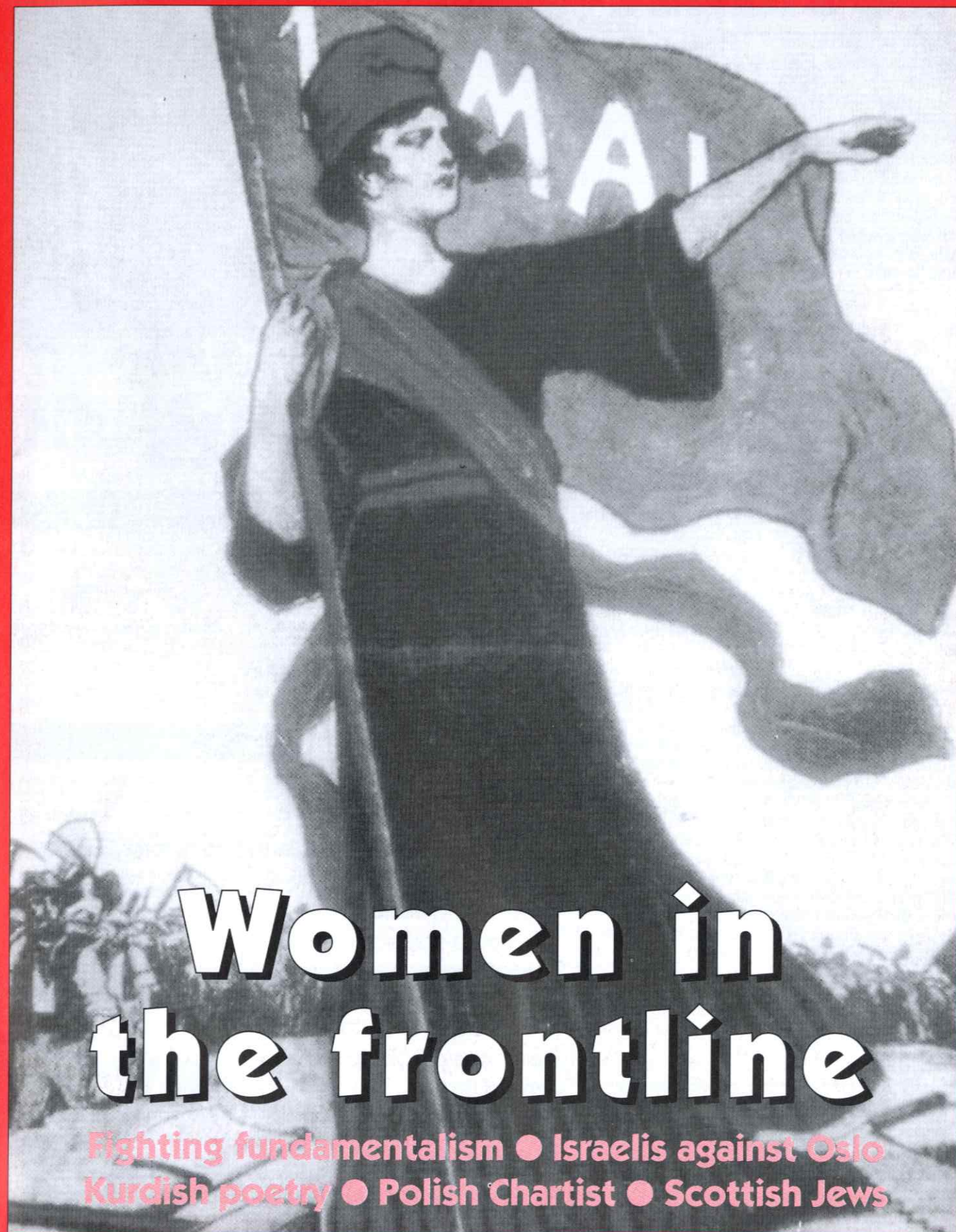
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# Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 33 ● Spring 1995 ● £1.50



## Women in the frontline

Fighting fundamentalism ● Israelis against Oslo  
Kurdish poetry ● Polish Chartist ● Scottish Jews



# Jewish Socialist

'What history and experience teach,' wrote Hegel, 'is that peoples and governments learn nothing from history.' Fifty years after the liberation of Auschwitz, we need only open a newspaper or switch on the television to have the horror of that lesson brought into our living room.

Rwanda, Bosnia, Chechnya – each day the atlas of human suffering grows. The cameras roll on to fresh fields, the people remain to die, from hunger, war and pestilence, exploitation and reasons of state. If the world is a Global Village, then undzer shtetl brent! (Our little town in burning!)

Before he went to Munich, Neville Chamberlain remarked in a broadcast how 'incredible' it was that the British people should have to worry about 'a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing!' In the ensuing decade many of his listeners learned of other faraway countries, and some didn't come back.

Chamberlain's successors keep out the refugees from today's policies, and exclude Black and Asian faces from remembrance of the Second World War. Conservative basic values do not include gratitude, nor contrition; humanity nor compassion.

The Israeli government today seems intent on appeasing its own far Right opponents, while convincing Palestinians it takes their peace to mean submission. PLO envoy Afif Safieh, whom we were proud to have at our Passover seders, has been denied the right to join his mother this year in Jerusalem.

'You were strangers, and know what is in the heart of a stranger,' our Bible taught. But in place of prophetic vision the Jewish orthodox establishment upholds an ever-narrowing fossilized conformity that makes strangers of ever more Jews. It is not only against 'assimilators' that we must defend the right to be different.

The road to Auschwitz began with the doctrine that some human beings are inherently inferior to others, and should not survive. That is why we raise the alarm when such pseudo-science is resurrected in today's world crisis. Within weeks of the Auschwitz commemorations, and not far from where their people were herded on the trains, four Gypsies were murdered in Austria by the new Nazis. And we are as angry over the torture of Moslems in Bosnia, or Christians in Sudan, as about the persecution of Jews anywhere. When we say 'Never Again!', we insist, never again to anyone.

We invite you to read on, enjoy – and join the resistance!

This issue was produced by an editorial committee consisting of Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ralph Levinson, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel, Charlie Pottins, David Rosenberg and Clifford Singer. Cover picture: May Day illustration from Germany, 1904, published in *Radical and Red Poets and Poetry*, an excellent new publication from the Working Class Movement Library, £9.95.



A new wave of Jewish feminism? See our special supplement, pages 14-23

Picture: Paul Mattsson

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A mysterious break in at the offices of the Colin Roach Centre and Hackney Community Defence Association is being blamed on Special Branch or MI5. The centre, which has led campaigns against local police corruption and violence, was secured by three sets of doors, one of which was double bolted. A high quality computer, a fax machine and tapes of a private meeting with a Sinn Fein councillor were taken. Other office equipment was smashed but several expensive items and jars of money were left untouched. The walls were daubed with puerile slogans. In a similar break in at the offices of the Campaign Against the Criminal Justice Act in south London, their computer's hard disk was stolen but the keyboard and monitor left behind. Donations can be sent to HCDA, Colin Roach Centre, 10a Bradbury Street, London N16.



## WORKERS GET MILKED, FIRMS TAKE HONEY

Israel's closure of borders to Palestinian workers has evidently inspired some employers to find new ways to make a profit – exploiting workers from overseas.

Manpower agencies persuade the job-hungry workers to sign contracts in their own country. They bring them in on temporary work permits, and take their passports, sending them to work for sub-contractors. Often the migrants are paid months in arrears, and the workers' rights group Kav La'Oved has found that some employers arrange for them to be sent home before they have been paid.

The boss sacks a worker whose permit has expired, then notifies the police that the worker is in the country without a work permit. The police do their duty and the worker is expelled, without a chance to sue the *ganef* (thief) employer.

The Danel Contracting Company brought in Romanian workers under a contract requiring them to work a 55-hour week for a monthly salary of \$1,500, of which the company would take half, plus a \$40 broker's fee each month. Kav La'Oved reported last September that for two months these workers had received just \$35 in lieu of wages.

Vassily Jordanov from Bulgaria was brought to Israel by the Ortal company, and sent to work for the Mei Arad company. His salary was paid to him two months late – \$288 net for a month's work, 10 hours a day. When Vassily was sacked by Mei Arad, Ortal wouldn't refund him the \$95 'security' deduction it had made from his salary. Jordanov was served with an expulsion order, in Hebrew, giving him three days to leave.

Under an international

convention signed by Israel, the authorities are supposed to check work contracts and make sure workers know their rights. The Ministry of Labour has a Department for Migrant Workers, which checks work permits, and recently began monitoring minimum wages. But it hasn't checked the manpower companies, says Kav La'Oved, and doesn't give migrant workers written information in their own language, nor addresses to which they can turn for help.

Kav La'Oved began as a service to help Palestinian workers from the occupied territories, and found itself called upon to advise and assist Jewish workers from Russia and Ethiopia. Now yet another section of people need its help.

● Information from Kav La'Oved – *Workers Hotline*, 78 Allenby St, Tel Aviv, POB 2319 Zip 61022.

member Donald Kenrick and Sian Bakewell. Donald Kenrick is a longstanding activist for Gypsy rights.

● On the Verge, £5.99 (plus 75p p&p), from UHP, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts AL10 9AB.

## GYPSY RIGHTS

The problems faced by Britain's Gypsy communities in the light of the Criminal Justice Act are highlighted in an updated edition of *On the*

*Verge: the Gypsies of England*, published by University of Hertfordshire Press. On the Verge has been written by Jewish Socialists' Group

## ENGLISH HERITAGE

Anyone who writes to MPs is used to guarded replies that promise to look into the matter or explain why they're sitting on the fence. But John Townend, Tory MP for Bridlington, doesn't beat about the bush.

A constituent wrote asking his MP to support the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill introduced by John McFall MP, outlawing the hunting of wild animals with dogs, and making hare-coursing illegal. He was surprised by the MP's reply. Declaring himself a champion of individual 'freedom', Townend wrote: 'Hunting and other country sports are part of our traditional heritage.

'I wonder if you feel strongly and have campaigned against the immigrant communities in this country having ritual slaughter by halal on animals. In my opinion this is far more cruel in that live animals are strung up by their legs, killing them with knives without them being stunned. If John McFall was so concerned at cruelty to animals, why hasn't he brought in a Bill to stop these ritual killings rather than banning the countrymen of England from pursuing traditional country sports that have been followed by our forefathers for centuries.'

Townend uses an emotive and inaccurate description of halal slaughter (in which, as in shechita, the animal has to be killed with one cut), and a dubious moral argument: 'A is bad, but so is B'. Equating killing for 'sport' with killing for meat, he makes no distinction between 'heritage' and religious beliefs; but distinguishes between 'our' traditions and those of minorities (all dubbed 'immigrant'), insinuating that his opponents favour the latter.

# PEACE IN OUR TIME?

Arafat is finished. He was called in to sign the agreement, and in the same stroke of the pen he signed his death certificate, politically. He is there in order to fulfil a mission, the mission was designed for him from Washington and Jerusalem, and if you are fulfilling the wishes of Washington and Jerusalem you can no longer fulfil the wishes of your own people. This peace is a peace between kings, above the heads of the people.

This may sound like the rhetoric of Hamas or other Palestinian rejectionists, but is, in fact, the view stated by Israeli leftist Roni ben Efrat, editor of *Challenge* magazine and spokesperson of the Israeli-based Committee for Democratic Action, when she was interviewed by Simon Lynn and Charlie Pottins on a recent visit to Britain.

The Committee, composed of Jews and Arabs inside Israel, prides itself on being 'the only ones in the Israeli Left or peace movement who remain completely and outspokenly opposed to the peace initiative'.

Roni ben Efrat believes they are starting to fill a vacuum created by the compromises of the official peace movement, manifested by the demise of the more radical single-issue campaigns and growing frustration among ordinary Palestinians at the absence of tangible gains from the peace negotiations.

## Euphoria

Oslo was a shock for many people, done behind the backs of the people. It was a shock for people in Fatah itself. Many people supported the peace process for good reasons. At first it threw the people in the Palestinian community into a kind of euphoria, but then very quickly into a position of 'wait and see'. At the very beginning people did not go out on the streets to oppose it in spite of the fact that people did see the

problems. People wanted to see what would come out of it, and this is something very natural. At this point the Left was in a very difficult position, because if the population is in a state of 'wait and see' you have to understand what is going on but you have to wait and see with them. You can't push them more than they can go. People thought that maybe there was some secret document which showed there was something else [beyond what they were told], but there was nothing. In the meantime of course you are losing time.

At the beginning of the intifada there were growing segments within Israel that would certainly agree to a Palestinian State and would go for it if the Israeli leadership pushed towards that direction. If Rabin, when he took power had used the mandate he had from the people to really push for a genuine solution, like in South Africa, then he would have had the support for that. The problem is he didn't want to because Labour and Likud do not want a Palestinian State.

Women in Black have gone home. Yesh Gvul are not active any more as far as I know. There is no peace movement on the streets today. The Israeli peace movement as a whole usually gets involved in struggles when the victims are strong. We've seen it in Lebanon, we've seen it in the intifada. But the dangerous thing, well perhaps not dangerous, but, the really disappointing thing that happened this time with the Israeli peace movement is that they took an active role in pressing and convincing the Palestinians to accept the this deal in spite of the fact that they knew that it amounted to nothing. They were deluding them. People in Peace Now were saying very proudly 'We've told our Palestinian friends that it's better put your foot in the door and keep the door a little bit open so in the future you can open it wide', which is sheer

nonsense of course. They were really pressing the Palestinian people to go into it 'because this is the game in town now, and there is no other choice'; later on when they had done that and were on their own, they just left them there, alone in the cold. When the administration started to crash down on the Palestinians regarding the closure, and deportations, and all those violations of human rights, this 'left' forgot all its obligation to human rights – all in the name of the peace process.

## Opposition

The Committee orients itself towards the radical secular Palestinian opposition. They recognise though that this sector is weak as compared with the fundamentalist Hamas movement. They are sure however, that Hamas cannot deliver liberation.

Hamas is not really working for the abolition of Oslo: what they want is to establish themselves as an opposition to Arafat. And they want to be the ones who will negotiate with Israel. So Hamas here has a very interesting role. Their real enemy at this stage is not Israel, and not the Occupation, because if this were the case they would go together with the left. Their struggle today is how to establish themselves as the leadership, and here they have two tasks. First they have to convince Rabin that they are the answer, and for this they have to show that they are the ones who real rule the street – to make life quite tough for Israel in the terror attacks and to get Israel to realise that they are a force that has to be taken into consideration. The second element that Hamas has to convince is the population. And here they have to demonstrate that they are the ones who can show Israel that they can organise strong military operations as opposed to 'this weakling Arafat who has become a traitor and Rabin's

yes man. Continues on next page

Roni ben Efrat concedes that secular Palestinians have made unnecessary concessions to Hamas, especially with regard to women, which has strengthened the hand of the fundamentalists.

At the beginning of the intifada, when all the Palestinian organisations went together with Hamas, especially Fatah, they agreed not to fight on issues relating to women, and I admit that the left wing was too soft on this issue.

If the Committee's counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza are weak, there is little comfort to be drawn from the role of Palestinian representatives who are working inside Israel.

Instead of seeing Arabs in Israel as having independent interests the Communist Party and the Arab Democratic Party are giving the Israeli government full, unconditional support – on closure and the peace process – in spite of the fact that Israel is underfunding councils, confiscating land, continuing to ignore 'unrecognised' villages, concentrating Bedouin in certain villages and taking their land without compensation.

Roni ben Efrat knows that there are no quick fix solutions. Her Committee is currently putting considerable energy into English language publications putting forward their overall perspective, like their recent booklet, *Autonomy vs Statehood*.

The situation is indeed more complicated today than it was during the intifada. During the intifada the patterns were clear; it was obvious that if people just held on, they would be able, with time, to force Israel into more concessions. Now that all the cards have been dropped by Arafat they have to build a new leadership, and we know very well that a leadership takes years

# TELL IT IN ASHKELON

Ashkelon Prison was built by the British in the days of the Mandate. It's a nondescript sort of place, easy to miss in the dusty backstreets, the tangle of rusty fences and untidy little workshops – a far cry, indeed, from the precise formality of Oslo town hall.

The same day Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat were in Oslo receiving the peace prizes, named after the inventor of high explosive, I and a few others were outside Ashkelon Prison to present a very different sort of peace prize to Ashkelon's most famous inmate. Since we were not allowed to visit Mordechai Vanunu, we gave the Sean MacBride prize – a handsome medal of Irish silver – to Yael Lotan and Aki Orr, on behalf of the tiny band of campaigners working in Israel for Vanunu's release.

There were seven of us from Britain, an odd mixture: Paul Ostreicher a canon of Coventry Cathedral and former chair of Amnesty International British Section; Sir Roy Shaw, former secretary-general of the Arts Council; Susannah York, actor, Rosamund Horwood-Smart and Alex Milne, barristers, Sabby Sagall of the Campaign to Free Vanunu in Britain, and me.

Vanunu has now been in solitary confinement for more than eight years. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison after a secret trial,



Picture: T Smyth

having been kidnapped from Britain. His offence, as an Israeli citizen and former employee of the Dimona nuclear weapons factory, was to tell the world – via *The Sunday Times* – what was going on. He is literally a prisoner of conscience.

Did we achieve anything? Well we disagreed pretty sharply with the president, Ezer Weitzman during a lively half hour discussion, particular in his use of words like 'spy' and 'traitor'. We also argued our case on television and radio and our visit was widely reported in the press in Israel as well as Britain. Soon after our return Dedi Zucker, a member of the Knesset, visited Vanunu and found him in good heart, encouraged by recent events. It was the first such visit by

an Israeli MK.

The politicians who deceived the Israeli people and the people of the world in order to build weapons of mass destruction in secret – weapons designed to kill indiscriminately – are rewarded with Nobel's money. I fancy that Vanunu's reward is the thanks of ordinary people. Like the prophets, he is likely to be remembered rather longer than the politicians.

Jacob Ecclestone

Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists

● The Campaign to Free Vanunu needs help and funds to build on the recent solidarity activities that marked 3000 days of Vanunu's imprisonment. The address is: 89 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL. Tel/Fax 0171-378 9324

# FIRE FIGHTERS

A number of anti-fascist demonstrators were arrested, charged and prosecuted in Gravesend, North Kent in 1993. But magistrates acquitted them without needing to hear their defence.

Following their acquittal, however, the names, addresses and home phone numbers of two of them, appeared in the fascist magazine *Target* with a suggestion that their homes be visited. There followed a spate of telephone calls and letters, from C18/BNP – one headed 'fire warning' and threatening to send 'extra central heating' on a winter night about 3am.

At about 2.30am on 19 January, inflammable liquid was sprayed through the letter box of one of those who had been targeted, and set on fire. Alerted by a smoke alarm, she and her family were able to put out the fire. 'C18' had been sprayed on her front wall.

We call for support and solidarity for all those in Kent who are opposing racism and fascism.

Jewish Socialist is appealing for donations to restore the burnt out home of the two antiracists, and to support them in continuing the fight against fascists and racists in Kent.

● Please send donations, marked 'For Kent antiracists', as soon as possible to Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

# PEACE IN OUR TIME?

Continued

and years to build. We must admit that there is a crisis and start to look for new alliances and new forces within Palestinian society, within the Palestinians in Israel, and within the Israeli democrats, who are still looking for peace with justice, so we can start

everything from the very beginning.

● *Challenge* magazine is available from PO Box 32107, Jerusalem 91320, Israel. *Autonomy vs Statehood* and other publications are available from Hanitzotz, A-Sharara Publishing House, POB 1575, Jerusalem, Israel.

**FREE BOOK!**  
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**see back page**

# IKEY'S IQ

Discredited theories linking 'race' and intelligence are resurfacing in America and finding some receptive listeners here in Britain. A new book by Charles Murray and Professor Richard Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve: intelligence and class structure in American life*, has been welcomed by their New Right allies in Britain as having spoken the 'truth that dares not whisper its name'.

According to CARF (the magazine of the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism) the book claims that African Americans perform badly in tests because they are less intelligent than whites and that the average American IQ is falling because of 'dysgenic factors' which include 'immigration by non-European stock and the relatively high fertility rates of the white and black underclass'.

The authors believe that affirmative action programmes are doomed to fail and that welfare payments encouraging low IQ women to have babies should be stopped. Writing in the *New York Review of Books*, Charles Lane described how the book had been influenced by racist 'research' published in the *Mankind Quarterly*, a journal subjected to repeated protests in the 1970s over the 'race' theories it supported.

When the *New Republic* published extracts from the book, many of its staff publicly rebelled against the editor's decision to feature the book. Yet Murray and Herrnstein's general ideas received a surprisingly uncritical welcome in the *Jewish Chronicle* from regular columnist Chaim Bermant. This in turn prompted a strong reply by reader Anthony Rudolf, part of which the *JC* published. The full text of Rudolf's letter is printed below.

By aligning himself with Murray and Herrnstein and by taking pride in their dodgy generalisations about so-called groups, Chaim Bermant is on dangerous ground and close company he would normally abhor. They actually write: 'It is possible to look ahead to a world in which the glorious hodgepodge of inequality of ethnic groups – genetic and environmental, permanent and temporary – can not only be accepted but celebrated'.

So there we have it: Murray and Herrnstein in effect conflate the genetic and the environmental. Now, nobody any longer argues that there is no genetic component to intelligence, but what is beyond argument is that environmental and social factors play a real part in the life chances of individuals within groups, none of which has in any case been unmixed for centuries.

What Murray and Herrnstein write is that Ashkenazi Jews 'test higher than any other ethnic group'. But whatever the two may think, this does not mean that Ashkenazi Jews have what Bermant calls 'the highest intelligence of all'; and although he concedes that wealth and virtue do not necessarily go together, I am astonished to find him agreeing with their second conflation when he writes:

'intelligence isn't everything...some people with a very high IQ can display a very low level of conduct'. Intelligence is a complex concept and IQ tests are notoriously fallible and culture-bound. But even if the IQ test was a culture-free measuring rod, he appears to be saying that not just criminality, but the very poverty of ghetto blacks, is itself low level conduct. They are poor because they are stupid. Is that it? Or are they stupid because they are poor? The deprived deserve to be deprived, God's in his heaven, all's right with the world.

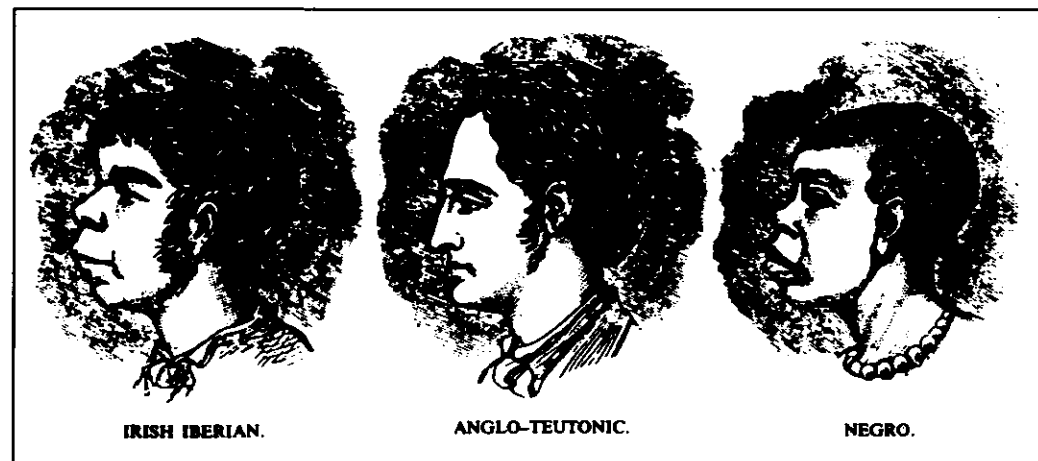
## Slippery

The truth is that the genetic factors, even when glossed as psychological, are irrelevant, and to invoke them in non-medical contexts leads down a slippery slope of racial prejudice and group targeting. There is enough variation and overlap within and between all so called ethnic groups to make collective generalisations both odious and irrelevant. The variations and overlap are proof positive that – given the compassion and the will – there is much work which can be done to level up rather than leave things as they are, in a kind of caste system. Murray and Herrnstein are in effect supplying the rationale for pulling up the drawbridge. The rationale is, or will be, used to serve, a right wing political agenda – and they want all those on the

receiving end (all of them Olympic champions or swimmers in Bermant's way of thinking, just as all Jews, ie Ashkenazi Jews, are Nobel prize winners) to clap their hands on their *tokkus* and shout bravo, as my grandmother used to tell her children when they complained they were bored. Let us not forget that Murray is a well known guru in Conservative party circles.

Ashkenazi Jews may still be an ethno-cultural (though not ethnic) group, and indeed, as a long-time contributor to the *Jewish Quarterly* with its easily identifiable constituency, I must believe in some version of this myself – although where this leaves my fellow contributors, the 100% Sephardi Morris Farhi, and the 75% Sephardi/25% Ashkenazi Gabriel Josipovici, I'm not sure. But the Murray and Herrnstein theories are completely at odds with the great vision of Micah which Bermant quotes, a vision without which all our intelligence is nothing. These theories have no relevance whatsoever to the lives of *anybody* outside the over-privileged urban middle classes of the west who, miserably and predictably, wish to pull up the drawbridge and reinforce the fortress society. I ask of Bermant, where on this occasion is his intelligence? On re-reading his article, can he truly say he has done justly, loved mercy, walked humbly with his God?

Anthony Rudolf



Early American examples of 'scientific racism' from *Harper's Weekly*

# STANISLAW BRUNSTEIN

## 1915-1994

Stanislaw Brunstein, who passed away quite unexpectedly, was an artist with a style of painting all of his own.

He loved and was fascinated by the Jews of Poland, amongst whom he grew up and in whose midst he lived until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. They were the subject he loved painting most. But his pictures of them are not like two dimensional photographs: they are all untitled – he leaves it to the viewer to draw his or her own conclusion about them.

Since the Holocaust it has become the custom to describe the exterminated Jews of eastern Europe as the Jews of the *shtetl*, creating the impression that they were curious, almost exotic, creatures. But this is not how they appear in Brunstein's pictures. His Jews are full-blooded people with a lifestyle of their own, with their daily joys and struggle for survival.

Each picture tells a story. When you look at the Jew pushing a wheelbarrow with a soda water siphon, searching for customers, with no one taking any notice of him, you can almost see his wife and four or five children at home waiting for him to bring a loaf of bread. The tailor and his sewing machine form one single tool. The machine is the tailor's yoke; there is no clock in the room; he is the slave of the machine. The blacksmith bent over his anvil uses not only his arms but his whole body to knock the horseshoe into shape. You can almost hear the clanging of the metal. The cabman on the coach box suggests that he probably lives in a basement. Like the tailor with his sewing

machine, the talmudist and his *sefer* – religious book – look like one piece; you cannot tell where the man ends and the book begins.

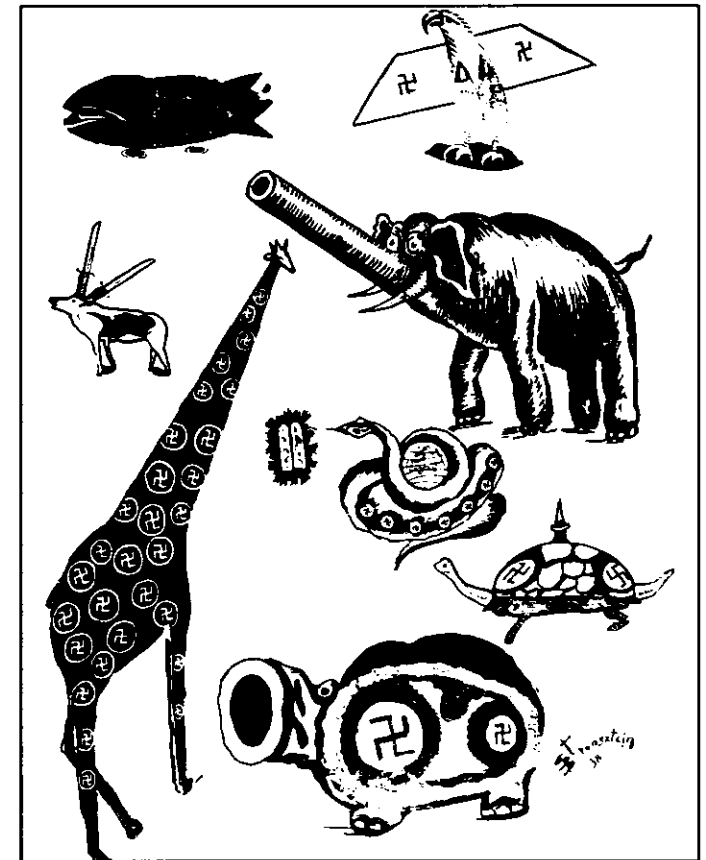
I have mentioned here only four pictures, two of which hang in my flat and two more chosen at random.

Stanislaw Brunstein was born on 27 October 1914 in Warsaw and studied theatre design there at the Academy of Fine Art. At the same time he attended lectures at the Warsaw University.

Antisemitism was rampant in Poland at the time. Encouraged by the Prime Minister's call in the Sejm (parliament) to boycott Jewish businesses, pickets of hooligans appeared in front of Jewish shops to direct away the Poles who tried to enter them. In the university Polish students forced the Jews to stand in a corner of the lecture hall and make their notes on each others' backs while the university authorities looked on. There was even a case of a Jewish student being thrown out of a first floor window. Fortunately he was not badly injured.

For a time Stanislaw studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris. Back in Warsaw he worked in the Yiddish theatre and on the left wing, satirical magazine *Szpilki* (Pins). This was indeed a 'prickly' journal, and was severely censored by the government. It took great courage to work for it since its contributors risked being sent to the Polish concentration camp in Kartuz-Bereza.

When the Nazis occupied Warsaw he fled to the Soviet Union. At first he was made welcome there, and worked in the Yiddish theatre with Ida Kaminska, Dzigan and



A Brunstein cartoon in *Szpilki* – German prime minister Göring invited Polish dignitaries to a zoo famous for special exhibits

Shumacher and others. Soon, however he was invited – very politely – to the offices of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, for a routine check. They accused him of being a Polish government spy and they demanded to know what task he had been given to fulfil in the Soviet Union. As he could not provide an answer, after having been kept in a single cell for some months, they sentenced him to eight years in Vorkuta, one of the harshest slave labour camps.

When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union their government was forced to conclude an agreement with the Polish Government in Exile, then residing in London, according to which the Soviets released all Polish citizens under arrest. Stanislaw then joined the Polish army under General Anders which subsequently became an integral part of the 8th British army. Later, in Italy, he took part in all the battles of the Polish army: Monte Casino, Ancona, and all along the Adriatic coast to Bologna.

When the war was over he studied for a year at the Royal Academy of Art in Rome before coming to England to be demobbed. He settled in London where he worked in the Yiddish theatre in Adler House, the Grand Palais and the Alexandra Theatre.

Soon afterwards, he married Esther Zylberberg and they had two daughters, Lorna and Denise. It was a hard struggle to support a family, but he kept painting. He exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and at the Ben Uri Art Gallery (he later became a fellow of the Ben Uri). Solo exhibitions followed here and abroad, in Montreal, Toronto, Buffalo. His pictures can be found in many private homes in this country as well as in Canada, the USA, Switzerland and France.

Preparations were in progress to celebrate his 80th birthday on 19 October last year, but days before that, he drew his last breath.

May this tribute be instead of a flower on his fresh grave.

Majer Bogdanski

# CANADIAN CLUB

There's something rotten in the state of Canada. The government is taking time to prosecute Nazi war criminals who found refuge there. An elite army unit which tortured and murdered civilians while on UN 'peacekeeping' duties in Somalia has had to be disbanded. A government agent has been accused of helping neo-Nazis who targeted Jewish people and trade unionists.

An amateur video shown on television included soldiers of the Canadian Airborne eating vomit and faeces at initiation ceremonies, and a black recruit having to crawl

on all fours, with 'I love the KKK' smeared in excrement on his back.

Footage shot in Somalia depicted members of the paratroop unit complaining 'We ain't killed enough niggers yet'. The Canadians displayed a Confederate flag in their camp, and one sported a Celtic cross tattoo, symbol of the racist Aryan Nations gang. A private in the unit was found guilty last year of beating to death a 16-year old Somali boy, Shidane Arone. The video shows several soldiers ritually torturing him to death.

Antiracists say disbanding the 650-strong commando

unit will not help, since the men will simply be spread among other units and that anyway racism has not been confined to this unit. In Victoria soldiers went on recruiting drives with Nazi swastika flags and Aryan Nations business cards.

Journalists have been investigating links between Canadian troops in Somalia and the neo-Nazi Heritage Front. Canadian Jewish Congress president, Irving Abella, was on a death list drawn up by the Canadian Nazis. He has voiced doubts about a report clearing Grant Bristow, an agent of the Canadian Security

Intelligence Service (CSIS, roughly equivalent to M15) of serious misconduct.

Bristow was a founder member of Heritage Front, whose leader Wolfgang Droege reportedly recommended that 'a few of the [Jewish] congress leadership be taken out in order to intimidate the rest'.

The official report denies that Bristow used government funds to help the Nazis. Irving Abella is not convinced. He says: 'When he went into the Heritage Front, the organisation was a weak, underfunded, disorganised group. But when he left, it was organised, it was operating from coast to coast across Canada, it was issuing hit lists, and it had lots of money for all the things it wanted to do.'

## INHERIT THE WIND

Ever since I sat in the one and nines with my choc ice cheering Red Indians from Brooklyn (I wanted the Injuns to win long before it became fashionable), I've known there were lots of Jews in Hollywood. Where else, except crime, could they go, when the WASPs had grabbed almost everything else, and City Hall was run by Catholics? We amused ourselves counting 'Jewish names' among the minor credits (they wound them slower in those days), and knowing the 'real names' of the stars.

Was it good or bad for the Jews? Well, it kept a lot of good-looking young people and two-bit writers off the streets. But as for the powerful Jewish movie moguls, Neal Gabler's *An Empire of their Own - How the Jews Invented Hollywood* shows how easily they were bullied by an Austrian housepainter who had changed his name (you'll never make it with a moniker like Shickelgruber, kid), and later by a Mid-West chicken-farmer called McCarthy.

Now the *Spectator*, never noted for original ideas, has discovered that Jews run Hollywood. William Cash, son of the Tory MP of the same name, isn't sure 'whether there's a cabal', but...

His article is defended by the *Spectator's* Dominic Lawson, son of Nigel; Auberon Waugh, son of Evelyn etc, etc.... You don't get on in the British media by changing your name!

From exposing Jew-run Hollywood, to unmasking Red Russian agents in the liberal press, the *Spectator* has turned its guns on the godless Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. 'Gimme That Old Time Reaction! Gimme That Old Time Reaction....'

## GOOD BOOKS

Rabbi Julia Neuberger, seemingly available for panels, quotes and *barmitzvahs*, is against humanists making 'Thought for the Day' broadcasts on Radio 4 because these should be about 'spirituality'. As one of this year's Booker prize judges (G-d knows why) she was 'implacably opposed' to

# dybbuk's diary

James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*, declaring the punctuation 'shocking', and the language 'inaccessible'.

Rabbi Julia no longer shepherds the flock at South London Liberal Synagogue. Hopefully a notorious best-seller, full of odd language and punctuation, and a shocking amount of bloodshed and begetting, will continue to be available (King James version, I hope) in Streatham (where, funnily enough, the local kosher butcher is called Kelmans).

## ALL RELATIVE

'Michael Howard is a good and honourable politician. We may be second cousins but we are not exactly close. We don't even send each other Christmas cards...' said Harry Landy, director of London City and Westcliff properties (chairman Tiny Rowland) and former deputy chairman of the Anglo-Israel Bank (*The Times*, 22 October 1994).

## HOWARD'S WAY

Kani Yilmaz was invited to Britain to address MPs last October, but as he stepped out of Westminster underground station he was grabbed by police and shoved into a car, to spend the rest of his visit in police cells.

The Home Office said Yilmaz, European spokesperson for the Kurdistan Workers Party, should never have been allowed into the country; that his presence was 'not conducive to the public good'; and he was being deported for reasons of 'national security'.

Perhaps they meant Turkish 'national security'? Thousands of

Kurds have been killed by Turkish security forces, dozens of villages wiped off the map. But Turkey is a NATO ally, and valued trading partner.

A couple of weeks after Yilmaz's arrest, Home Secretary Michael Howard addressed members of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women (AJEX). They were about to honour old comrades who had died defending democracy against fascism. Someone asked the Home Secretary what he was doing about Nazi thugs like Combat 18.

Unlike Kani Yilmaz, who has committed no offence in Britain, several of these Nazis have criminal records.

C18 boasts of its part in racist attacks. It has been exposed in Granada TV's *World in Action* and Channel 4's *Despatches*, as well as in numerous published articles.

But the Home Secretary, with all the resources of Scotland Yard, Special Branch and MI5 at his disposal, told amazed AJEX members that it had proved impossible to track down those who were behind C18 or spreading antisemitic material. No one can accuse him of prioritising Jewish concerns. Let's look forward to Howard's end.

## LA BENEVOLENCIA

Sarajevo's Jewish community centre needs your help in continuing to offer medical and pharmaceutical services and food relief on a non-sectarian basis to Sarajevo's embattled people

Further information from, and cheques marked to 'La Benevolencia' to CBF World Jewish Relief, Drayton House, 30 Gordon Street, London WC1H 0AN  
Tel: 0171-387 3925, Fax: 0171-383 4810

## WORDS AND MUSIC

An endearing moment in Paul Robeson's career came at the end of a concert he gave in Moscow in 1949. Asking for quiet, the great black singer spoke about his good friends, Shlomo Mikhoels and Itzik Feffer. Then he sang *Zog nit keyn mol...* (Don't say it's the end...), the song of the Jewish partisans.

Mikhoels, director of the Moscow State Jewish Theatre, and Feffer, a leading Yiddish poet and Red Army colonel, had both been members of the Jewish People's Anti-Fascist Committee set up to win support for the Soviet war effort, and both were to perish in Stalin's purge of Jewish culture. Paul Robeson's intervention did not save them, but it has saved his reputation, in my mind.

Not long afterwards the US State Department took away Robeson's passport because he was a Communist.

And now, a not unrelated tale from the Belgian Jewish progressive magazine, *Points Critiques*, whose December 1994 issue was devoted to classical music. In 1948, Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich composed his 'Jewish Songs'. According to Yuli Turovsky of the Russian orchestra, song No 11, 'Happiness' included the words '*Vratchami stali nashi synovia*' — 'Our sons will become doctors'. Trouble is, that could be heard as '*Vratchami Stalina chi synovia*' — 'Stalin's doctors'.

The composer had to be persuaded to alter it to '*Vratchami nashi stali synovia*', so as not to get mixed up in the infamous Doctors' Plot, when Kremlin doctors, mostly Jews, were accused of plotting to poison the mighty leader!

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JEWISH SOCIALIST PUBLICATIONS

## DON'T ASK THE RABBI



I am always pleased to pass on to you the wisdom of my fellow rabbis. I am very grateful to Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks for his inspiration and guidance in the preparation of:

### ARE YOU A JEW?

A test you can do by yourself in your semi-detached home.

Do you believe that:

- 1 God dictated the 10 commandments to Moses?
- 2 God has a long white beard?
- 3 Women should keep their hands off the *Sefer Torah* and stay in the kitchen preparing chicken soup?
- 4 Adam and Eve lived in Stanmore?
- 5 God said to Moses that Jews should send their children to private schools?
- 6 Reform Jews celebrate Easter?
- 7 Gays and lesbians are worse than Reform Jews?
- 8 Sex with non-Jews is dirty and dangerous?
- 9 Masorti are more of a threat than neo-Nazis?
- 10 Jonathan Sacks is a profound intellectual?

Nu, so how did you score?

10/10

*Mazeltov! You're Jewish! Your children are Jewish! And your grandchildren, please God, will also be Jewish.*

Less than 10/10

*You're not Jewish. (Please apply to the address above for your free Christmas tree and crucifix. Wear them in good health.)*



# The veil of liberation

**Dave Landau looks at the repressive ideas of Islamic fundamentalists Hizb-ut Tahrir**

In the western popular imagination fundamentalism is sometimes seen as synonymous with Islam. In fact fundamentalism of all kinds, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu, has been on the rise throughout the world. There is a danger that by focusing on Islamic fundamentalism we will fuel anti-Islamic racism.

So why an article on Hizb-ut Tahrir, an Islamic fundamentalist group? Because at present this organisation is very active on college campuses, stirring up antisemitism in confrontation with Jewish students and in its recent rally in Wembley, which attracted several thousand people. Clashes in colleges have given it publicity in the press and it is a focus of concern for the Jewish community. So it is important to understand the nature of this organisation and develop an effective socialist response to it.

Hizb-ut Tahrir means Islamic Liberation Party. It believes in *Khilafah*, the establishment of an Islamic state everywhere in the world, and *Khilafah* is the name of the organisation's newspaper.

## Antisemitism

There is no question that Hizb-ut Tahrir is virulently antisemitic. Article after article and leaflet after leaflet repeats a passage supposedly attributed to Mohammed: 'The hour of resurrection will not occur until Muslims fight Jews and the Muslims kill them, until the Jews hide behind the rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees say: O Muslim! O Abdullah! A Jew is here behind me, so come and kill him' They publish and distribute leaflets entitled 'Battlefield, The only place for Muslims and Jews.' In a leaflet headed 'Zionist-NUS plot', they say 'the Jewish doctrine is purely racist claiming the Jews are the chosen nation and the rest of mankind are born to be slaves to this master race.' In the same leaflet 'They (Jews) have made the world submit to them using the exaggerated holocaust. Read holocausts have occurred on a larger scale to the natives of America...'

In another leaflet we find 'the Jews, the lowliest of the disbelievers on earth' and 'Jews, the lowliest people on earth'. In an article on hijacking they say: 'If the plane belongs to a country at war with the Muslims, like Israel, it is allowed to hijack it, for there is no sanctity for Israel nor for the Jews in it and their property and we should treat them as being at war with us.'

In all but one of these examples, the antisemitism comes from leaflets or articles which are about Israel – condemning Arab Middle East regimes for their capitulation to Zionism and US imperialism. This is important. Over and over again Hizb-ut Tahrir parades its vile reactionary positions under the banner of anti-imperialism. It can be said that the fundamentalists have usurped this banner, taking it from the Marxist-Leninists who held it in the '60s and '70s.

## Misogyny

Hizb-ut Tahrir exhibits hatred and a totally oppressive attitude towards women: 'Any woman who puts on perfume and walks past a group of people

and they scent it, she is an adulterer'; 'If a woman is about to go out she should remember that she is not going out to display her beauty or attract men's attention but to attend to life's necessities like shopping etc'; or worse: 'Allah directs the husband to advise the wife when he fears the wife's disobedience, then if this action meets with no success then the husband is directed not to sleep with his wife, and finally, if he feels justified that her actions will damage his position in Islam, then to beat her in a gentle manner (in no way physically harming).

## Homophobia

For Hizb-ut Tahrir lesbians and gays are perverts to be put down and an expression of western decadence: 'The latest obscenity is their allowance of homosexuality ... The Western Capitalist nations leave the Church to uphold the morality of their peoples, yet the Church cannot even look after the morality of their own establishment.' Then again 'The Islamic verdict on Homosexuality – Ibn Abbas reported the Prophet of Allah as saying: "If you find anyone doing as its people did, kill the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done." In a public meeting a speaker from Hizb-ut Tahrir said: 'Twenty years ago if you were queer you weren't allowed anywhere. They'd kick your door down ... Now they adopt kids, they can have a family. This is moral decline.'

## Anti-Hindu

Hizb-ut Tahrir are vicious in their incitement against Hindus. 'There has never been any major attempt to convert the Muslims to Hinduism, because, intellectually it is very difficult to convince any normal human being to worship the cow or monkey or the sexual organs of the female'; '...Vegetarian Hindu nation we hear about all the time. Muslims are cruel to eat meat but for the Hindus to kill other human beings it is perfectly all right'; 'Why are they openly allowing temples to be built on Muslim lands and allow the import of cheap Hindu culture?'

In their monthly newsheet for East London *The Muslim East Ender* we find: 'It is unacceptable to feel more in common with those that worship among other things, cows and who happen to be placed by Allah in brown bodies than with black, white, yellow, green or spotted Muslims.'

## Democracy and anti-imperialism

Hizb-ut Tahrir have no time for democracy. What is interesting and important is that their attack on democracy uses anti-imperialist rhetoric and borrows from the Marxist critique of bourgeois democracy to which many readers of *Jewish Socialist* would subscribe. Thus democracy is 'government of the rich, by the rich for the rich and stuff the rest'. In a country where *The Sun* is the most popular newspaper, it is not surprising that people support British aggression in the Gulf, and 'democracy is merely the glossy shop front for capitalism ...'

## Anti-Islamic racism

There is a dialectical movement around the question of Islam at the moment with on the one hand the emergence of a specific anti-Islamic racism, and on the other, the rapid growth of Islamic fundamentalism. These two feed off each other and the relationship between imperialism and the countries where Islam is strong. This is particularly so in France. Anti-Arab racism has been virulent in France for decades, but recently it has become specifically focused against Islam, Islamic fundamentalists providing an excuse to attack the whole Arab community. This has to be considered in creating a strategy to combat Hizb-ut Tahrir and Islamic fundamentalism generally.

For example, the French Government has cracked down on the wearing of headscarves in schools by Muslim girls. Organisations like Hizb-ut Tahrir have instigated a campaign of civil disobedience – girls have been expelled for wearing headscarves and this has been followed by mass demonstrations. What stand should progressive forces take? I would argue that the slogan of the campaign for abortion and contraception rights shows the way here: 'Not the church, not the state, women should decide their fate'. In this instance the 'Church' – the mullahs and fundamentalists – are opposed to the state. I believe that we should be opposed both to the coercion by fundamentalists to make the young women cover their heads and the ban by the French state. Like so many positions it appears abstract, but could take on a campaigning character if there were a strong women's movement within the Muslim community in France.

## The responses

The response from the Jewish Board of Deputies was predictably to go to the Home Secretary and the Attorney General to ask them to ban the literature and meetings of Hizb-ut Tahrir.

The Union of Jewish Students and individual Jewish Societies have taken the matter up vigorously – picketing Hizb-ut Tahrir meetings, going into the meetings at considerable risk, and shouting against the antisemitism. They have taken up the questions of homophobia and anti-Hindu racism. They have demanded that college authorities ban the meetings and, at the School of Oriental Studies (SOAS), had that demand met. The last National Union of Students conference agreed to oppose Hizb-ut Tahrir activities on campus.

The left, specifically the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and Socialist Organiser have campaigned against bans of Hizb-ut Tahrir declaring themselves in support of their right to free speech. In SOAS, the RCP responded to the college authority's ban on Hizb-ut Tahrir by holding a meeting themselves with a representative of Hizb-ut Tahrir as the principle speaker. Socialist Organiser compared campaigns to ban Jewish Societies by anti-Zionists with the present campaign by Jewish Societies to ban Hizb-ut Tahrir. Nevertheless, the left generally sees fundamentalist ideas as anathema.

What should we do about Hizb-ut Tahrir? I believe that organisations that incite racist violence, advocate genocide against Jews; and promote vio-

lence against women, lesbians and gays, should not be allowed a platform any more than fascist organisations like the British National Party. This is not an abstract question about where the line would be drawn regarding free speech. Jewish, Hindu, lesbian and gay and Muslim women students who are not prepared to conform to rules of 'modesty' genuinely feel under threat. In colleges of further education in areas like Tower Hamlets the threat to Asian women is very real. This is a question of self-defence.

Does this mean that we should campaign for bans by the state or college authorities? There is a grave danger in this approach. We would, in effect, be forming, or trying to form, a block with the racist state, part of the same European machine which is launching a massive repression against Algerians in France in the name of anti-fundamentalism. I believe this plays in the hands of Hizb-ut Tahrir, confirming their propaganda lie that Jews, lesbians and gays, feminists and other 'degenerates' are lined up with imperialism against them. It polarises the issue in the way they want it: fundamentalism v imperialism, rather than the way we want to expose it: the oppressed v racism and fundamentalism.

Criticising the demand for a ban, arguing that it is not the way forward and might play into their hands is one thing. Campaigning against the ban and for freedom of speech for Hizb-ut Tahrir is quite another. If, in response to the threat of militant action led by those under attack, the college authorities decided to ban a meeting of the BNP, are we to believe that the SWP and Socialist Organiser would campaign for their right to free speech? Of course not, though perhaps the RCP would!

If we believe that Hizb-ut Tahrir ought not to have a platform, a start would be to ensure that organisations such as students unions and left organisations do not give them a platform.

A further step would be direct action to make it impossible for activities to go ahead. But if such action were organised solely by Jews, or in conjunction with non-Muslim forces, it would simply polarise the issues along the wrong lines of Muslims versus anti-Muslims.

Of course 'No Platform', cannot be the sum total of the campaign against Hizb-ut Tahrir. The central task is to combat their ideas. This can be done without actually debating with them; by organising meetings and producing literature exposing their lies, as well as picketing their meetings.

We need to force an alliance with progressive, anti-fundamentalist forces within the Muslim communities. Such an alliance would have to challenge both organisations such as Hizb-ut Tahrir and anti-Islamic racism. This kind of alliance would be able to organise the meetings and literature to oppose their ideas, and even become the basis for direct action. Such an anti-fundamentalist anti-racist alliance would undercut Hizb-ut Tahrir's influence.

There are already moves to create such an alliance. Bengali anti-fundamentalists in Tower Hamlets with groups like The Jewish Socialists' Group are trying to develop a movement to challenge fundamentalism of all kinds. Women Against Fundamentalism has brought together women from diverse background. What we need to do urgently is to take steps to construct an alliance in colleges and universities.

# Protect & survive

**James D Young delved into a North Carolina archive and unearthed a story of solidarity with anti-fascist survivors of Nazism**

In my autobiography, *Making Trouble: Autobiographical Explorations and Socialism*, I recalled that 'Some of my sharpest memories are the memories of attending the cinema in Grangemouth in the 1940s. I vividly remember men, women and children coming out of the local cinema in 1945 as films were shown of the Nazis' concentration camps, particularly of Belsen and Auschwitz, with tears streaming down their cheeks.' That experience left an enduring impression on me, and my recent discovery of an important archive in an American university revived some of those painful memories at a moment when fascism is experiencing a renaissance.

When the Allies were landing on the beaches of Normandy in commemoration of D-Day, I was in the USA, sorting through a cache of papers in the Special Collections' Library at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Although the archive of the International Solidarity Committee (ISC) was donated to Duke University by Phil Heller of the Jewish Labor Committee in New York in 1960, no historian had taken the trouble to look at it before I went to Durham in April 1994. The letters in that archive will revise aspects of German history during the Nazi era, in particular the extent of internal resistance to Hitlerism.

The ISC was founded in 1945 by socialists in New York to provide food, clothing and medicine for anti-fascist survivors of the gas chambers and the concentration camps. The ISC attracted some of the leading intellectuals in the western world, and the archive contains letters from Victor Serge (the Belgian-born novelist and socialist activist), Ignazio Silone (the Italian anti-fascist novelist), Irving Stone (the American biographer), James T Farrell (the American novelist) and many others.

The priority for the ISC was to assist surviving German socialists, particularly those involved in building the Labour Colleges, and the 16,000 exiled Spanish socialists and anarchists living in the South of France. To qualify for care parcels, anti-fascists need to have their biographies authenticated.

The rich ISC archive contains many letters from German, Austrian, Italian, French, Spanish and other socialist survivors of the struggles against fascism. Many of them are full of harrowing stories, and in the fullness of time I will incorporate them into a book on fascism and anti-fascism. The letters from the German socialists show that from 1933 to 1945 they were more involved in anti-fascist activity – such as industrial sabotage and producing illegal leaflets and newspapers – than has

been asserted by many historians.

In his monumental study of Hitler, the influential right-wing German historian, Joachim C Fest, insisted that 'among the many participants in the [German] opposition not a single representative of the Weimar Republic' survived the resistance struggle. Far from being true, several representatives of the Weimar Republic survived the struggle against fascism and played a role in the revived socialist movement in West Germany after 1945.

Moreover, Fest's dogmatic assertion is refuted in a letter written in 1949 by Paul Hertz of New York to the ISC asking for help for Lore Agnes. Hertz wrote: 'Lore Agnes ... (in Dusseldorf) is 61 years old and sick.' She was living on an old age pension of 32 marks a month. In her earlier days a friend of Karl Kautsky and Clara Zetkin, she had been well-known before 1933. Nor did the Nazis succeed in shutting her up after 1933.

She had been, Paul Hertz continued, one of the most outstanding women of the German Social Democratic movement. She had been in prison during the First World War and had been a member first of the National Assembly and then of the Reichstag until 1933. The fearless Jewish woman, Jeannette Wolff, born in 1888, had spent her life promoting the socialist cause in Germany and Holland as 'a key Party functionary'. She gave a very moving account of her struggles in a long letter of thanks to the ISC.

She was a passionate internationalist who refused to turn her internationalism into 'a sort of international jingoism'. It needs to be emphasised that she did not submerge or lose her ethnic identity. Depicting her political work before 1933, she wrote: 'At the same time I belonged to the provincial leadership of "the German Citizens of Jewish Faith", an organisation which took as its task the struggle against National Socialism. Unfortunately the bourgeois democratic parties underestimated National Socialism and found our zeal to combat it excessive.' But Wolff was always a socialist and an internationalist.

She fought the Nazis all the way: 'After the reichstag fire we carried on our work with bleeding hearts.' In 1933 she was arrested, abused and degraded in the streets of the Westphalian city of Hamm, and imprisoned for about two years without trial. Then, when she was released, she resumed her underground work as a socialist propagandist. As she put it: 'After the Grynspan affair in Paris the pension [Dortmund] was closed and the guests taken into custody. We were not only Social Democrats but Jews and star weavers which was doubly bad.'

**What emerges from this archive is the evidence of resistance to fascism throughout Europe**

Wolff's family ended up in the Riga ghetto. One daughter never returned from an interrogation by the Gestapo; another daughter was transported to the extermination camp of Stuttoff near Danzig, and on the day before its liberation by the Soviet Army, was gassed with the whole hospital. Jeannette Wolff's husband and son-in-law died in Buchenwald.

In her harrowing account of the end of the Second World War in Germany, she wrote of 'the prison at Krone, our last stopping place, everybody was to be killed on the next morning, since no prisoner was to fall into the hands of the enemy alive. The Soviet bombardment began. At 8.15am the doors of the prison opened. We were free.'

But there are other equally interesting, moving and historically important letters in the ISC archive written by German socialist survivors of the Holocaust. The individual stories of human tragedies dominate many of them. When a depressed and lonely Philipp Faith wrote to the ISC in New York for help in 1949, he said: 'I am 55 years old, war-invalide (sic) from the first War and don't know what to do in my present catastrophical (sic) situation. I am living in a Polish camp. All of the inmates are supported by relatives and committees. It's impossible to exist without any support.'

After escaping from concentration camps in Germany, one Austrian Jew wrote: 'Later I succeeded to escape, and I attempted to go to Palestine in an illegal transport. We were caught by the English, robbed completely and interned at the island of Martinique, I stayed there for 5 years.' He continued: 'I wrote to Vienna and was notified that all my relatives were killed by the Nazis. I decided to stay in Italy and wait till I can go the way all Jews want to go.' But not all the Jewish anti-fascist survivors wanted to go to a national home in Palestine; and some, like Jeannette Wolff, stayed in Germany to fight for de-Nazification.

Some of the letters written by the survivors of the Holocaust are quite short; and there are pages and pages of brief entries about men, women and children who needed care parcels of food, medicine and clothing. The entry for Gustave Klingelhoefer noted that 'the editor of the Party newspaper *Sozialdemokrat*, Jewish or half Jewish, [had] lived underground'. The entry for Rita Sprengel recorded that she had been in 'a concentration camp in 1933/34, underground work, 1941 arrested because she helped Jews to flee to Switzerland, four years concentration camp'.

What emerges from this archive is the evidence of resistance to fascism throughout Europe. But the abiding impression is of the overwhelming humanity of ordinary people in countries all over occupied Europe during the Second World War – people who hid Jews, socialists and radicals from the Nazis. Writing to the ISC from Rome in 1947, Federico Reissmann said: 'Writer is the nephew of the former social democrat *Landtagsabgeordneter* (district representative) Edmund Reissmann who was killed by the Nazis in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Many of his relatives are no longer alive. He and his family were only saved by the helpfulness of the Italian people who gave them shelter, food and protection.'

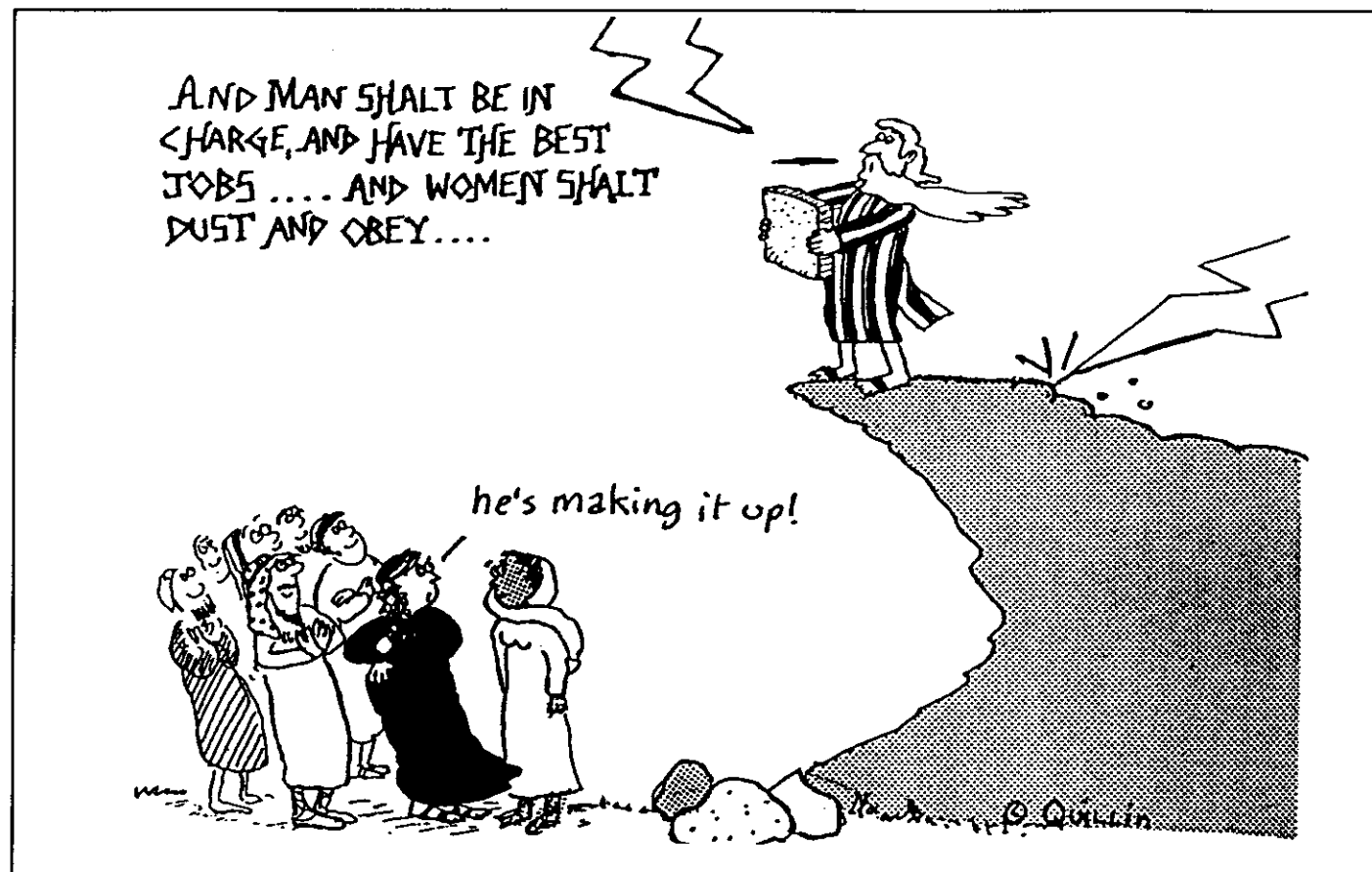


Refugees from Nazism

For readers who are familiar with the history of 20th century European socialism, and the fate of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht at the hands of German army assassins in January 1919, there is a very interesting entry on the fate of one of Liebknecht's sons. It reads thus: 'Artist-painter, about 43 years old son of the German socialist leader Karl Liebknecht. Left Berlin in 1933 because of Nazi-persecution, went to Paris to live there until 1940. Was arrested, interned, forced to serve as "prostataire", worked in the French underground, fled to Switzerland where he lived with his family until recently. The whole family came to Switzerland badly nourished, underweight – the child is sick with tuberculosis. Wife: Berthi Liebknecht, musician, gym-teacher – 45 years.'

In keeping with the spirit of the 'Karl and Rosa' of Alfred Doblin's fine novel, 'both returned to France to teach in a camp for displaced persons'. Although the ISC archive provides no more than some important pieces of evidence dealing with the European socialists' resistance to Nazism, the letters deposited in it are important testimony to the opposition to the Holocaust at a time when 'the assassins of memory' like David Irving are still trying to deny the existence of the Nazi gas chambers and extermination camps.

# WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?



**We don't have much to thank the Chief Rabbi for, but his report and review on Women in the Community has sparked off unprecedented debate and activity by and about Jewish women.**

**Last November the Jewish Socialists' Group organised a dayschool to explore some of the issues which are beginning to emerge. Participants, most of whom were not members of the JSG, came from a wide range of backgrounds and traditions: pensioners and students; orthodox and secular; Jewish and non-Jewish; women and men. The result was a day of creative, challenging and informative discussion which had implications for everyone in and around the Jewish community.**

**We have reproduced some of the contributions from the dayschool on the following pages in order to continue that important and stimulating discussion, and welcome responses from readers.**

## Rights and rituals

**A**s a Jewish feminist, I believe we have the right – and the need – to reinvent Judaism for the late 20th century. We must do this in a way that includes our feminist and socialist values and modern human and liberal sensibilities. But this also raises major questions: if we change Judaism, how authentic is it? If I'm an atheist, why participate in ritual at all? Is it really possible for feminists to 'reclaim' something of value from a deeply patriarchal religious system?

First, some examples of what Jewish feminists are doing. Having noticed that Jewish tradition has ceremonies to mark marriage, death, 'coming of age' and the initiation of male babies into the community, but none to mark some of the most crucial 'transition moments' in women's lives, Jewish women have started creating their own rituals.

Some of these are celebratory ceremonies to mark life-cycle events such as giving birth, first menstruation, menopause, retirement; others are mourning rituals for often unacknowledged losses such as miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth, infertility or hysterectomy. In creating these rituals, many women use existing Jewish traditions as a springboard, but freely add their own songs, dances, poetry and prose. They do it themselves, to meet their own real needs, with no rabbi or leader officiating.

As well as creating new rituals, some women are radically reinterpreting or reaffirming old ones. Jewish divorce, for example, has traditionally been a ceremony in which the women's part was minimal and token. New forms of this painful but sometimes necessary ceremony have been created in the US in which both partners acknowledge their anger and broken hopes, name what they gained and lost in the relationship, and release each other with the support of their friends around them. (This can also release the friends from having to take sides).

In Britain, women's Rosh Chodesh groups are flourishing. Rosh Chodesh was once a monthly two-day festival of the new moon and a particular holiday for women. Now many women are taking it back as their own festival, and an occasion to meet, talk and celebrate. Hopefully we will soon see the creation of lesbian and gay marriage or commit-

ment ceremonies drawing freely and selectively on Jewish traditions, and adding what is missing.

Undoubtedly the female Jewish tradition which is hardest to transform into something acceptable or desirable to a feminist consciousness is the custom of Taharat Mishpacha ('family purity' – the name makes me shudder) and Mikvah, the monthly post-menstrual immersion in a ritual bath. Nevertheless, some Jewish feminists (mostly, our transatlantic sisters) have seen in this the ultimate challenge, and have set about radically altering its meaning and practice, rather than simply ditching it.

They reinterpret the mikvah experience as a 'rebirth' rather than a purification, see the menstrual time as a time they choose to be mostly with women rather than as a time they are not allowed near a man, and suggest that Talmudic and

Biblical associations of menstruation with uncleanness and impurity are errors of translation from the Hebrew. (For further reading see Take Back the Waters: a Feminist Re-Appropriation of Mikvah in Lilith, summer 1986.)

All this is based on an understanding of feminism that demands something more than equal participation in an unreconstructed male religion. It says, in effect: Jewish men have created rituals to fulfil their own psychological needs; those needs are not ours, and we

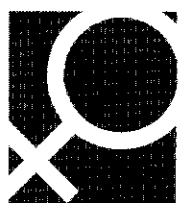
have the right as Jews to create our own thing for ourselves'.

This is fine, but it could be argued that it does not go far enough. It often leaves unchallenged the misogyny at the heart of the tradition. For instance: on Simchat Torah, I can go to the most 'liberal' and 'alternative' of synagogues where I can dance with everyone irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, personal beliefs and someone will eventually pass me the Sefer Torah to dance with.

Now, many women find this a poignant moment, very moving, since as women it is the first time they have been 'allowed' to touch the sacred scroll. But I recoil, I refuse to hold it. I move away and let someone else take it. I can't dance with it because I know what's in it. It's not just myths and fairytales. It's the history of man's vic-

**'Some Jewish feminists want to do more than battle with our oppressive source texts and liturgy; they want to change them'**

**Can anything creative come out of the conflict between feminist aspirations and Jewish ritual? asks Jenny Goodman**





tory over woman in our culture, and it contains, among other things, the victors' approving account of their destruction of women's ways and women's lives. I – literally – can't embrace that. (No, I'm not saying that Jews started patriarchy! But we did our bit.)

On the other hand, this Sefer Torah, whose content, even when chanted by a woman, is undoubtedly patriarchal and oppressive (and often quite bizarre), is the source and springboard for the millennia of very varied Jewish cultures that have followed – including the richly creative utterly secular cultures that have flourished in recent times. If I cut myself off from it completely, am I not sawing at the root of the tree on whose outermost branches I'm sitting?

Some Jewish feminists want to do more than battle with our oppressive source texts and liturgy; they want to change them. They adjust gender pronouns and they weave midrashic stories about Eve and Lilith, Sarah and Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, unearthing the hidden female strength that the Biblical editors censored out – or projecting modern feminist values back into the ancient Middle East.

They want their children to see Sarah and Hagar, for instance, as an example of strong sisterhood across a still troublesome cultural divide, rather than as the oppressed and quarrelling wife and concubine of a desert patriarch.

Although I've argued for gender pronoun changes myself, I'm really not sure about the rest of it. Sure, I wish our textual origins were nice and woman-friendly – but they are not. We can choose our present mode of Jewish life, but we can't rewrite our literary history. I would leave the next generation to continue grappling with the reality of our flawed Biblical and Talmudic past – extract the good 'juice' and spit out the pips in righteous indignation – than hand them an optimistic feminist-ified whitewash. In short, I'd rather apply my feminism to the future of Judaism than to its past.

This raises the question of authenticity. If we change Jewish practice, is it still Jewish? The answer depends on where we locate our sources of authority. Do we define Judaism as what the Jewish people do, or as what the rabbis say we should do? I go for the former, the grassroots approach. If I do it as a Jew in good faith, with sincerity of intention and my own sense of continuity with my ancestors, then it is Jewish, however 'new' or 'alternative' or 'wacky'. Many of the women's rituals I described earlier are done in this spirit. I call it DIY Judaism, or better, Barefoot Judaism. And in such ceremonies there is a sense of 'ownership' never achieved with a rabbi leading.

Now the black-hatted folk, and quite a few others, will cry 'But you can't just pick and choose and make it up as you go along; that's not the real thing!' Yet picking and choosing freely from

among the sources, and adding their own new ideas, was precisely how the rabbis constructed the prayer book and much else.

Change – real, momentous, drastic change – has happened in Judaism before. When the Second Temple was destroyed, Jewish practice was transformed from centralised physical ritual based on pilgrimage and animal sacrifice, into verbal prayer based in thousands of scattered local synagogues. And even as that change was occurring – due to a changing political environment and social reality – there were the fundamentalists in Jerusalem crying 'You can't do this! It will be the end of Judaism! Without temple worship and animal sacrifice it won't be the real thing!'

Well, those fundamentalists vanished, and the wild radical innovators who wanted to move with the times became the founders of rabbinic Judaism. Now, 2,000 years later, we may need, as Rabbi Zalman Schachter of Philadelphia has suggested, to 'say kaddish for Rabbinic Judaism' and to move on again. To move on in directions indicated by feminism and other forces for progressive social change. It will not mean the end of Judaism. It will be a renewal of Judaism but not in the Chief Rabbi's sense; when Jonathan Sacks says 'renewal' he really means 'restoration' a forced and artificial transplanting of our past into our present which is not far removed from fundamentalism. Zalman Schachter calls it 'driving by the rear-view mirror'.

That is why, unlike orthodox feminists, I do not feel bound by Halacha (rabbinic law) and feel free to create women's (and mixed) rituals and practice outside of that framework. I see halacha as law as made by men for men, in another era, and of historical interest. My sense of continuity and legitimacy within the Jewish people does not depend on such observances. In the construction of Jewish feminist rituals that tradition has, as the Reconstructionists say, a vote but not a veto.

But why practice any kind of rituals at all? There's nothing rational about ritual. And there's often a paradox in the mind of the participant, a gap between theology and practice. But most of the women's rituals I've described don't imply or require a belief in a supernatural force or puppet-master in the sky. They simply meet a fairly universal need to share important moments of joy, sadness and transition with one's community of friends and family.

Ritual is not an exclusively religious phenomenon. Secular people do rituals as well, for the same reasons. singing 'Happy Birthday' or 'Auld Lang Syne' is a ritual. To raise a glass of wine and wish somebody success or happiness in their new job/home/relationship is a ritual. Those who clink their glasses as they make this toast do not usually harbour a mystical belief that their actions will affect some higher realm to bring about that success or happiness for their friend. They are just expressing a collective hope, and they're doing it ceremonially.

Such common secular rituals are similar to most traditional Jewish rituals in that they happen on automatic pilot. What's different about most feminist Jewish rituals is that they are planned and structured consciously to allow room for everyone's intention but space for spontaneity as well. And unlike synagogue ritual, there is no rabbi leading, so the experience is direct, not vicarious.

Sometimes they 'work' and sometimes they

don't, like the rest of life. At worst (bad planning and stiff upper lips) ritual can be mechanical and meaningless – what we call 'empty ritual'. But, at best, ritual creates a sense of solidarity and connectedness that's often lacking in every day life; when energies are flagging, it can strengthen and enliven people to go out and get on with changing the world. I think that's what it's for. I'll close with the shortest Jewish ritual I know. *L'Chaim.*

# My generation

## Why are Jews without children ignored? asks Marsha Schultz

I am a heterosexual married United Synagogue feminist – without children. I have all those complicated labels – but without children I am very often invisible in society. At social occasions like weddings and barmitzvahs, I and my husband are misfits. In the inevitable conversations about schools, nannies, pregnancies, au pairs, tantrums... we are not included. I am not sure that our differences are really acknowledged – people are sometimes presumptuous, pitying, mindlessly hurtful, and often excluding – maybe not deliberately, but they are.

As a feminist much of the debate I encounter is around the relationship between mothers and daughters. There is also repeated emphasis on reproduction when exploring issues around women, health and technology. My feeling is that this is because issues in advanced technology fit a certain model of patriarchy and exploitation that feminists enjoy deconstructing, not because of its relevance to all women.

In the secular world the argument is very simple: decay in society is the responsibility of individuals and the breakdown of the nuclear family. So logically the way to stop the rot is to go 'back to basics' and recreate and promote the 'nuclear family'. Where am I in this? I can not buy into it even if I wanted to (not that I do, or would).

In the wider Jewish community divisions between Progressive, Reform, Masorti, and Orthodox concentrate on definitions of 'who is a Jew?' and on religious practices and the interpretation of Jewish law. They all come together on one point however, both explicitly and implicitly – Judaism is a family-centred tradition, and procreation and educating your offspring are essential.

Within the United Synagogue my displacement becomes more acute:

- Where is the need to absolve me from time-bound mitzvot (religious duties)?
- I have no problem with a divorce, I can have one automatically for being childless.
- On Yom Kippur we atone for the sins for which



we incur spiritual excision and childlessness.

● In fact the Torah's first command concerns the imperative of having children. It is a primary religious duty.

My feelings about 'Jewish Continuity' are very personal. I feel the emphasis is on quantity not quality. This is partially a response to the Holocaust and the rise of Zionism – 'replenish the stock and outnumber our enemies'. Jonathan Sacks in his book *Traditional Alternatives* reflects this view: '... intermarriage is not the only problem confronting Jewish survival. Low birthrates are another. The Jewish people has not repopulated itself after the Holocaust.'

My theory is that 'Jewish Continuity' stresses our responsibility to the next generation, not the personal growth and development of the present one. For me there may not be a next generation. I confront my own position in Judaism. That's much more difficult than to pass the buck on to those who follow.

Is the family the only basis for continuity?



# Jewish lesbians – out or outside?

**Jewish lesbians appear in the Chief Rabbi's report on Women in the Community only when they are clearly linked to acceptably heterosexual families, says Amanda Sudic**

**W**e consider it of the utmost importance that our children be educated at an early age into Jewish values on relationships, ethics and the sanctity of marriage in order to attempt to stem the tide of divorce,' says the Preston Report on Women in the Jewish Community published last year. This idealised picture of women in the Jewish community conjures up familiar stereotypes such as those portrayed by Beattie played by Maureen Lipman or Dorian from *Birds of a Feather*.

In this context, to be a Jewish lesbian is made to seem like a contradiction; an embarrassing joke that the Jewish 'community' can't quite fathom. After all, don't most Jewish lesbians come (out) from nice, Jewish, heterosexual families – even if families like mine do not fit that mould? Imagine Beattie/Dorian/the Rabbi's wife sitting down with her daughter who tells her she is a lesbian. Would she wish her daughter *mazeltov* and ask what her lover would like as a Chanuka present? Informed by the Jewish values outlined above, the reality is that the young woman might try to repress her sexuality, attempt to pass as straight, or be forced into marriage. If she does come out, she might be attacked verbally, disbelieved or thrown out.

Jewish lesbians also face homophobia from the Jewish orthodox establishment who wish to keep Jewish identity and lesbian identity firmly separate. They ignore and devalue our relationships, our communities and our often very positive Jewish identities. But over the past three years the Jewish lesbian and gay community in this country has developed and become more visible. We have also found allies in some Jewish progressive and reform organisations. Orthodoxy continues to condemn our sexual practices, focusing the discussion on the origins of our sexual choices. They assert that being lesbian or gay arises from the outside world – either from secular forces or, the more modern variant, from genetic influences.

It was clear that we were not considered to be

part of that Jewish community in 1992 when the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline was banned from participating in a Jewish charity event in Hyde Park entitled, ironically, 'Walk for the Community'. No other Jewish charity in the UK was refused the right to participate in this event. In July 1993, just a couple of months after the highly successful International Conference of Lesbian and Gay Jews had taken place in London, Lord Jakobovitz, the former Chief Rabbi, advocated the potential of genetic engineering to eliminate homosexuality.

When you look at the report and review on Women in the Community to find the part about lesbians, you find that it forms about half a page of the two documents – together several hundred

pages. One of the women who interviewed the group of six lesbians upon which this was based remarked at the Jewish Socialists' day-school that she was surprised, herself, to see that anything about lesbians was there at all. This is interesting considering various accounts of many of the original research findings being doctored by the Chief Rabbi before they reached the final report stage. There is reference to issues such as difficulties lesbians have in coming out in the often close-knit Jewish community. No real mention is

made of our partners and children, but the fact that lesbians are sometimes carers of their parents is talked of. Is that connection with the heterosexual Jewish family more relevant than the families we have created for ourselves?

All this is contained within the section of the report headed 'Stepping Out'. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it shlepping out. It's as though there is a rather fragile *eruv* (communal boundary) which leaves lesbians on the outside, separated from the supposed core Jewish community. Lesbian issues are excluded elsewhere in the report, such as in discussions about children and families, education and 'single women'.

In fact most of the survey seems to focus on highlighting the so-called problems of Jewish

**'Imagine Beattie/Dorian/the Rabbi's wife sitting down with her daughter who tells her she is a lesbian. Would she wish her daughter *mazeltov* and ask what her lover would like as a Chanuka present?'**



Amanda Sudic protesting at a community-wide charity walk from which lesbians and gays were excluded  
Photo: Gordon Rainsford

singles – whatever that actually means nowadays.

Perhaps this statement from the report summary and recommendations explains the reasoning: 'The social characteristics of the unmarried highlighted two stages in a woman's life cycle – younger persons waiting to be married, and older women who had been married in the past and generally had no particular wish to meet a new partner.' Lesbians are not mentioned anywhere in the summary.

The statistical evidence for the report is based on 1,469 returned questionnaires. Often the questionnaire assumed heterosexuality in questions such as: 'If you have a husband or partner, how often has he attended synagogue?' – though it was encouraging to see one question which asked: 'If you are currently single, was your most recent relationship with a husband, male partner or lesbian partner?' Strangely the lesbian option was omitted from the same question for those who are 'not single'. Four women, two of them members of a synagogue, said that their most recent relationship was with a lesbian. That represents 0.5% of the sample. Using this as a measure, if we assume that there are the same proportion of lesbians among Jewish women as in the general population, lesbians are under-represented in the report. But maybe not, if we accept the belief of the 40% of respondents that homosexuality and HIV/AIDS are more common among non-Jews.

The questionnaires had been distributed primarily to women who were synagogue members – this 'affiliated' group accounts for 70% of the responses. Women who were not members of synagogues were selected through a method described in the report as 'snowballing', whereby women were contacted who were known to the affiliated group. This method would produce a bias in the results. Often lesbians are not members or synagogues and it is not particularly likely that they would be friendly with anyone who was. Several Jewish lesbians I have talked to have not even heard of the Women in the Jewish Community report.

This is not to say that these women are not active in Jewish matters. Many lesbians have been involved in exploring Judaism from within a feminist perspective, such as in the Beit Klal Yisrael congregation which welcomes lesbians and gay men. Long before the Jewish Women's review was conceived, Jewish lesbians were at the forefront of setting up organisations such as the Jewish Feminist Group and the Jewish Women's Centre project of the mid-'80s, and in Jewish women's arts and cultural initiatives since then. It is here, at our events, in our own lives, friendships and relationships, that many Jewish lesbians define their Jewish community, not within the narrow frame of reference drawn by the Women in the Jewish Community report.





# The other half

**Mixed relationships have been portrayed as a threat to modern Jewish identity. Ross Bradshaw disagrees**

Last summer, when Jo Brand played at a Jewish Socialist benefit, she remarked that she was neither Jewish nor a socialist – so what was she doing there? Being neither Jewish nor female, and contributing to a debate on women and the Jewish community, I find myself asking: What am I doing here?

Answering my own question, I'm pleased to have been asked to contribute as I'm one of those who those who marry out marry. In the big debates there have been in the community, this group – which does have an interest in the matter – is seldom asked for its views. (I should say that I use the word 'marry' in the broadest sense; I live with, but am not married to,

a Jewish woman, and some of the points I'll touch on have surfaced through talking to a lesbian friend whose partner is Jewish.)

There are often problems for those of us with Jewish partners. The first one is whether we are accepted or not by the family. Whilst I can understand the reasons, it can nevertheless be painful to be rejected on the basis of race/identity. My partner comes from an orthodox tradition. It was three years before I was spoken to by her parents and I have never set foot in their house. They will not set foot in mine and have met me only once. I do not get invited to simchas (celebrations) – a mixed blessing, perhaps! Others I know have been unable to tell their parents they have a non-Jewish lover at all.

Having a relationship with a Jew (or at least a Jew with a strong Jewish identity) is different from

having a relationship with, say, someone simply from another country. There is a part of the partner that will be forever just out of reach. There is always an awareness of difference. If the partner has a strong Jewish identity, how far down that path do we go? If we do not recognise the difference between gentile and Jew, if we do not get involved, a chasm could open. But if we do get involved, what return on that emotional investment in a community or culture (which may not want us anyway) will we get if the relationship ends? More importantly, if my partner predeceases me and her parents, I can imagine enormous problems over who is to handle the burial and who can attend. I could not sit shiva (the seven days of mourning) with her family. We could not be buried together.

**'If we do get involved in Jewish culture, is that then a denial of our own culture?'**

If we do get involved in Jewish culture, is that then a denial of our own culture? Personally though, coming from a small town where beer and rugby are the culture, I'd do anything to escape! Matters could be alleviated, to a certain extent at least, if I converted.

Indeed, my local progressive shul (synagogue) is almost half full of converts, and was founded by orthodox men who'd married out. Interestingly, it is almost all Jewish-born men and converted wives. I don't think matrilineal descent explains it.

Conversion can only get you so far, though. You do not get a 'Jewish soul', something Clive Lawton of Jewish Continuity believes Jews have. What is this 'Jewish soul' which is presumably shared by Emma Goldman and Michael Howard, by Maisie Mosco and Jenny Diski, by Lou Reed and Barry Manilow, by Jonathan Sacks and Sandra Bernhard?

However, the most forceful criticism of marrying out, and of people like me who've supposedly seduced people away from what they should do, is that we are helping to destroy the Jewish race. That we're doing Hitler's work. My reply is that if you want to oppose what Hitler stood for you don't worry about who's sleeping with whom; you fight with all your might against fascism, against racist immigration laws, and against communalism and fundamentalism. The most forceful critics of intermarriage are seldom at the forefront of these fights. I also remember there was someone who did forbid marriage between Jews and gentiles...

I am not advocating marrying out, just that those who have be not excluded from the community. The first advert for Jewish Continuity had a



procession of Jews heading towards a precipice and a lot falling off. Whilst this was meant to represent the way the community is declining, I could not help wondering who was at the back pushing. Married out? Over you go. Non-Zionist? Over you go.

However, there is an ambivalence in the community. This is reflected most in the Jewish Chronicle where Jews, however merrily married out they may be (or indeed lesbian or gay), will be profiled and celebrated as long as they are MPs, playwrights, business people, gangsters or pop stars. In fact any success is celebrated even if, as recently, it was a self-confessed deracinated American Marxist Jew who'd written a book about cricket. And quite right too.

Unwittingly, the Chronicle is perhaps agreeing with the notion of the 'non-Jewish Jew'. Isaac Deutscher, who started life as a Hassidic child prodigy and later became a world-renowned writer and revolutionary, described these people who 'dwelt on the boundaries of various civilisations, religions and national cultures', as all finding 'Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting. They all looked for ideas and fulfilment beyond it, and they represent the sum and the substance of much that is greatest in modern thought.'

Deutscher thus saw people like Spinoza, Heine, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky and Freud as examples of the 'non-Jewish Jew'. As I understand it, the Jewish Socialists' Group would include these people within the Jewish community, and seek to change the narrowness and the constrictions. A

hard task when in Leicester the orthodox community won't even let the Reform synagogue join the Jewish Representative Council.

So what is the role of those of us who marry those who marry out? We're not going to just go away. At the risk of being a self-righteous gentile, I would suggest that those who are socialists have a duty or two. We should support our partners in their attempts to construct a Jewish community which they feel proud to be part of. If we have children we should give them information they need to make an informed choice so they can be as Jewish as they want to be. Or as non-Jewish as they want to be.

**'What is this 'Jewish soul' which is presumably shared by Emma Goldman and Michael Howard, by Maisie Mosco and Jenny Diski, by Lou Reed and Barry Manilow, by Jonathan Sacks and Sandra Bernhard?'**

Finally, a question for Talmudic scholars and for Clive Lawton. I'm learning Yiddish, I publish Jewish poetry, I subscribe to three Jewish journals and write for a fourth, my challah bread is terrific, I don't have a pine-needle-in-the-carpet problem after the end of December. Now, my father remarried. His second wife is Jewish by halachah (Jewish law) as her mother was Jewish. The only reason my father knew

was because the woman's father felt he had to tell him before the marriage in case he didn't want to go through with it.

My father and his second wife never discussed the matter; he does not know if she knows about her own background. They have a son who is, by Jewish law, a Jew – and apparently (I've never seen him) he would look quite in place eating at Bloom's. He has no idea about his Jewish background and almost certainly never will. So who has the Jewish soul, and do you still have one even if you don't know you're Jewish?



# Take it from



**David Rosenberg looks at splits opened up by the debate about women in the community**

I went out on a Sunday to give out leaflets advertising the Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) dayschool on women in the community, and stood outside Carmelli's bagel shop in Golders Green. Most people happily took the leaflet, apart from one abusive young man who had obviously been brought up to believe that you can catch socialism just by handling the wrong leaflet.

But what I particularly noticed when family groups went past was that if the man came nearest to me and took the leaflet, after one glance, he would immediately hand it to his wife as if to say: 'This is nothing to do with me. It's your issue.' It is precisely because we believe that this is an issue for men as much as for women that the JSG included women and men as equal participants in this dayschool.

As well as being a mixed group, we are a secular organisation which does not feel bound in any way by Jewish religious law – halachah. Yet it's because we know that there is a substantial and often understated secular agenda around women's equality in the community, that we believe it is important for secular Jews to engage with this issue. We know that many of the battles that are apparently being fought out purely in a religious arena are rooted in thoroughly secular disputes about power, authority and control.

For the JSG the argument about women in the community is not a single issue campaign – nor is it separate from other matters. It is a major facet of a struggle that is constantly being waged on many fronts for democracy and equality in Jewish life. We need democracy so that decisions affecting our community reflect the needs and demands of people across the community. We need democracy so that ordinary people can take part in decisions affecting their lives as Jews. We need equality so

# here

that all voices in the community will be heard and valued. We need equality to break down the system that favours some voices and certain sectors of the community over others.

The JSG is not ashamed to admit that it has very little experience in doing battle within the United Synagogue but we do have many years experience of fighting against power and privilege. We have an analysis of how power works and how it can be undermined.

We know that it is not just a matter of individuals. If a new Chief Rabbi was appointed tomorrow – one who was less shallow, less cynical and more genuinely open than Jonathan Sacks – it would not make much difference. There is a direct conflict of interest between our religious and political establishment and those fighting for equality in our community. There is a lot at stake here. Put bluntly, the Chief Rabbi needs the community more than the community needs the Chief Rabbi. We know from experience that people do not give up power and privilege voluntarily: it must be taken from them. We need to isolate the powerful and narrow their base in the community. We must find ways to show to the widest number of people how their interests conflict with those who claim to speak for our community. We must seek to build a majority in the community from the grass roots that is committed to democracy and equality.

The Jewish Women's Network is a vital autonomous forum for women to articulate their demands and campaign for change but, in itself, it cannot constitute this majority. It needs to make alliances. How we understand the politics of the Jewish community will affect our estimation of where alliances can be made. Some who are active in the Women in the Community initiative see the only possible or worthwhile alliances as being among other women; they see all Jewish women, whatever their politics or position, as potential supporters. Others see the key to success as winning over sections of the establishment. If you accept that the fight for women's equality in Jewish life is part of the wider struggle for democracy and equality, then it follows that the best place to look for allies is among other sectors fighting their own battles for these goals.

In the religious sector – while it is important to win as much support from orthodox and ultra-orthodox women – there is likely to be a stronger base of support on wider issues from the reform and liberal sectors, which are themselves seeking equality and an end to discrimination in many spheres. But look also to secular Jews who are

## 'What really scares them is independent organisation'

doing battle against repeated attempts by the religious establishment to decide who is in and who is out of the Jewish community and what comprises 'real' Judaism. Look to minorities who are marginalised – lesbian and gay Jews fighting for sexual equality; Jews with disabilities striving for access in every sense to organised Jewish life. And look for independent organisations.

The religious and political establishments of our community are not the same. Yet one thing for which they can be solidly relied on is to back each other up in times of crisis. They have a long and inglorious history of stifling dissent, often through co-option. They are capable of accommodating some reform as long as they hold firm on fundamentals. They can cope with demands being made and contested through the institutions they control but what really scares them is independent organisation: People defining their own goals and methods of achieving them, and crossing conventional boundaries in the alliances they make. So look also beyond the Jewish community to other communities who are engaging in similar struggles – Asian people, for example – in order to learn and draw strength from each other.

We face a long battle but we have reasons to be optimistic. The debates around women in the community have revealed at least one more crack in the so-called consensus. In the last few years many of the certainties treasured by our communal establishment have started to crumble.

Today there are more people questioning more and more aspects of contemporary Jewish life and refusing to be satisfied with tired old orthodoxies – whether on religious practices, Zionism, Jewish culture or the intriguing question of who receives Jewish communal funds.

It is a very good time to press our agenda for equality and democracy for women – and for socialists. We hope that people will choose to take these struggles further in a collective way through the JSG. But however you choose to do it, we need to commit ourselves to working together for our common benefit in those areas on which we agree.

**Left: David Rosenberg addressing a rally. Opposite: Jewish feminists demonstrating alongside other communities**  
Photo: Paul Mattsson





# COSMOPOLITAN CHARTIST

**Charlie Pottins looks at the life of Major Bartłomiej Beniowski, the Polish-Jewish revolutionary who called himself 'The Cosmopolitan Chartist'**

In November 1839, the colliers and iron workers of South Wales marched on Newport to free political prisoners and seize the town. They were defeated, and three of their leaders were transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). For a time the authorities sought a mysterious Pole behind the rising, Major Bartłomiej Beniowski. David Urquhart, a Tory ex-diplomat who had suborned some radicals, and whose diplomatic writings later impressed Marx, claimed Beniowski was a Russian agent. Beniowski nearly throttled him outside the Carlton Club.

A Jew, and a Polish revolutionary, Bartłomiej Beniowski would have been a most unlikely agent for the Tsar. He was born near Grodno in 1800 and studied at the University of Wilno, where he met followers of the Polish patriot Adam Mickiewicz. He joined the Russian Army's Lithuanian Corps as a medical officer.

In 1830, the July Revolution in Paris spread to Belgium.

In November, hearing that Tsar Nicholas I intended to send Polish troops to suppress the Belgians, cadets at the Warsaw infantry school mutinied and the Polish insurrection began. At the battle of Kufrow on 25 April 1831, Beniowski rode over to the Polish side. He became a captain, then a major in the Polish lancers.

Polish landowners feared the revolt might awaken the peasantry. Polish capitalists, linked by business to the nobility and by the 1822 customs agreement to Russia, were against it. A modest agrarian reform bill was blocked in the Sejm (parliament). Impoverished Polish peasants saw no reason to die for their landlords, and some attacked the manors instead.

Jews made up one tenth of Poland's population. Orthodox rabbis said Jews should not be soldiers; others feared that a distinct Jewish unit might perpetuate segregation. But in December 1830, Sinai Hemisz, student at the Warsaw rabbinical college, appealed to the Polish commander, General Chłopicki, for permission to form a Jewish regiment. Chłopicki replied that Jews had no civil rights, and could not be in the army. He had already sent an emissary to St Petersburg to offer a negotiated surrender.

Kosciuszko, leader of Polish patriots in 1794, recorded: 'When Warsaw fought a bloody battle, the Jewish inhabitants rushed to arms, came bravely to grips with the enemy and proved to the world that whenever the cause of humanity can be

advanced, they do not know how to spare their lives...' Jozef Berkowitz, whose father Berek Yoselowitz had led Jewish troops with Kosciuszko, urged Jews to enlist again.

'We cannot allow Jewish blood to mingle with the noble blood of Poles,' insisted General Franciszek Morawski. 'What will Europe say when she learns that in fighting for our liberty we have not been able to get along without Jewish help?'

'The national army must be animated by a single emotion, by a single enthusiasm and, if possible, it must confess the same religion ... in the present life-or-death struggle what we need is a people of the same blood, of the same breed.'

The Sejm decided Jews should not be called up, but could pay four times more tax. However thousands of Jews did enlist. There were two battalions in the Warsaw city guard, at first confined to craftsmen and property-owners. In September, with the Russians at the gate, the poor, including Jews, were armed with pikes and sent to the trenches.

## 'Wherever there is oppression...'

After their defeat, Polish patriots regrouped abroad. Aristocrats remained preoccupied with 'breeding' and estates. But Adam Mickiewicz declared: 'Our homeland is wherever there is suffering, for wherever in Europe there is oppression of freedom and people are fighting to become free, they are fighting for our homeland, and therefore we must all join in the battle.'

Beniowski went to Paris, and studied military science. He persuaded Joachim Lelewel's Polish committee to adopt Jewish emancipation. On 3 November, 1832, appealing 'to the Israelitish people' to support Poland's freedom struggle, it promised full equality, adding: 'Should they insist on their right to return to Palestine, Poles will help them to realise their desire.'

In 1836 Beniowski came to Britain. A Literary Association of the Friends of Poland had been founded by the poet Thomas Campbell and Lord Dudley Stuart. There was also a Polish Democratic Society. Stanislaw Worcell had launched *Lud Polski*, Polish People, among exiled Polish soldiers at Portsmouth, advocating a socialism of rural communes.

The 1832 Reform Act, passed after huge agitation, had enfranchised the middle class, but given nothing to the workers. The London Working Men's Association (LWMA), formed in 1836, called



Chartist demonstrators in south London, 1848

for universal suffrage, secret ballot, abolition of property qualifications for MPs, equal constituencies and annual parliaments – what became known as the People's Charter. It advocated peaceful, legal petitioning.

Like Worcell, Beniowski joined the LWMA. But he was soon attracted to the more radical London Democratic Association (LDA). Its membership card pledged: 'Our rights – peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must,' adding: 'He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one.' To the six points of the People's Charter, the LDA added a free press, repeal of the Poor Law, an eight-hour day, public education, support for workers in struggle against capitalists; social equality and 'general happiness'.

'No man is too poor to unite with us,' the Democrats declared, 'on the contrary, the poorer, the more oppressed, the more welcome.' Their allies were the 'physical force' Chartists of the industrial north and Wales. LDA branches spread from the East End around London. Elizabeth Neesom formed a Female Democratic Association. A police report named two Poles who had joined the LDA, Martha Schellvietinghoff and Major Beniowski, described as 'tall, well-looking, slim'.

On 13 April 1839, the London Democrat published the first of three articles by Beniowski analysing the Polish revolution. He wrote:

*Sixteen millions of labourers of this fertile and once free and democratic land have been, for centuries, deprived of the most undoubted rights on account of their constituting the 'unattachable bone and flesh property of a few thousand swindling or military aristocrats, called nobles.'*

*Another portion of the Polish people, numbering four millions of highly intelligent, industrious and peaceable human beings have been continually despised, insulted,*

*and trampled upon for the specious reason either of their adhering to the religion of their forefathers, or of their being foreigners of ten centuries 'only' standing in Poland.*

*I mean the unhappy sons of Jacob...*

In the next issue Beniowski continued:

*Polish 'representatives' may pronounce it shameful and disgusting to accept millions of Israelite brains, arms and pockets, even as a material against Muscovite aggression, but surely one need not be a Marat or a Robespierre to understand that four million people exasperated by all kinds of extortion and oppression, and brought up to the highest pitch of despair by a Nicolaien press-recruiting, is as fine a revolutionisable material as ever existed.*

(*London Democrat*, 20 April 1839)

And in the issue after that:

*The peasantry did not join them ... Some of the peasants and soldiers joined Muraviev because the word liberty was pronounced, but the bulk of the people did not take any part in the proceeding, because he did not employ the means calculated not to be misunderstood by slaves. Liberal speeches, republican catechisms, and Bible performances may create an excitement, and even stir up a few men to join you in the hope there will be something more substantial. But as long as you do not convince slaves, to the touch, that you really mean their liberty in this life, you will carry with you but small numbers.*

(*London Democrat*, 27 April 1839)

Beniowski also wrote a series *On Military Science*.

*The military science is simply that which teaches you how to maim and kill as many of your enemies as possible, and also how to protect yourselves against a similar propensity of your opponents. If those who first reduced this 'glorious' wholesale murder to rules had no end in view but to gratify the beastly passions of the few, they were abominable monsters, whom it would have been the*

duty of every honest man to smother at their birth.

*But if their intention was the defence of the enslaved, oppressed and starving millions, to curb ambition or to oppose the claims of incomprehensible rights, mankind ought to erect altars to their memory. In this last case, the science of killing and destruction is the most useful and necessary of all the sciences, it is in fact, the only one which, if universally known to the people at large, could prevent homicide at all. Unhappily this terribly sublime knowledge is not to be attained without difficulty...*

(London Democrat, 27 April 1839)

The Friends of Poland were friends of the aristocrats led by Prince Adam Czartoryski (sic). Lord Dudley Stuart advised Poles 'not to look to the establishment at once of that sort of government which they most wish, but to set about the establishment of that sort of government which appears most practicable, and ... will enlist the support of the other governments of Europe. Let them not care at first if the government should be less liberal than they could desire.'

The British government consulted the Friends on which exiles to deny relief fund payments. In June 1839, Home Secretary Lord Russell stopped Beniowski's £40 allowance.

## The spirit of revolution

The Chartists' 'monster' petition, with a million signatures, was rejected by Parliament. 'The spirit of revolution is strong and increasing,' General Sir Charles Napier warned Russell on 16 July 1839.

Chartists in the Newcastle area clashed with police and troops. There was incendiarism in Birmingham. On 12 August miners from the north east began what they hoped would become a general strike. There were three days of fighting in Bolton. But the movement around the country was neither uniform nor united. Order was restored after 10 days.

On 14 September the Chartists' national convention broke up after reversing its support for a 'national holiday' (ie general strike). The Chartist left was torn between disillusion and determination on insurrection. A police spy reported a conspiracy headed by three LDA members: Joseph Goulding, the Brick Lane baker Joseph Williams, and the Pole, Major Beniowski.

According to Mark Hovell, Beniowski was sent to South Wales to drill men and survey the terrain. On 3 November 1839, goaded by the imprisonment of Henry Vincent, 1,000 Chartists marched overnight on Newport. Arriving late, tired and wet, they confronted well-armed government troops who killed 24 and wounded 40, driving them out of the town. Chartists who had gathered in Newcastle dispersed, when they heard the news.

In Wales, more troops were drafted in to hunt down Chartist leaders. The London Chartist William Cardo, who was under Urquhart's influence, was captured on 15 November. He claimed there was a Russian plot, and that a Polish emigrant would 'have the command in the mountains in Wales'.

An anonymous letter claimed Beniowski had been sent with 138 lb of ball cartridge from London

via Bristol. The Newport magistrates appealed to the government to send someone who could recognise the Pole. Meanwhile the Home Office received information about 'a deep and dangerous conspiracy' being hatched in London.

On 16 January 1840, the Welsh Chartists John Frost, William Jones and Zephaniah Williams were sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered. That night, acting on information, police raided a meeting at Bethnal Green Trades Hall seizing several armed Chartists. Some LDA leaders were arrested, but Beniowski was among those who escaped.

Risings broke out in Bradford and Sheffield. Extra troops were alerted in London, and fireboats were made ready on the Thames after rumours that shipping would be fired. Chartists themselves spread rumours to tie up troops before the risings in the north. On 27 January the sentences on the Welsh leaders were commuted to transportation. Nothing came of talk about rescuing them. Rumours had Beniowski at various places in the north. By March, most of the Chartist leaders were in prison.

## Unshaken fidelity to the cause

As the economy improved, working-class energies shifted into trade unionism, and the Chartists learned patience and organisation. In 1842, industrial and political militancy merged in a general strike and Plug Riots in the north-west. Trades union delegates meeting in Manchester adopted the People's Charter.

In September 1844 George Julian Harney brought Polish, German and English radicals together in the Society of Fraternal Democrats; 'National prejudices have been, in all ages, taken advantage of by the people's oppressors to set them tearing the throats of each other, when they should have been working together for their common good. This society repudiates the term "foreigner", no matter by, or to whom, applied.'

At a public meeting in August 1845 Harney introduced 'a man who had been infamously calumniated' and 'suffered terrible persecution even from some of the Chartists themselves,' but had shown 'unshaken fidelity to the good cause'. Bartłomiej Beniowski said he had been 'cruelly slandered,' but his accusers had 'never offered to prove their accusations'.

Beniowski taught languages at his home in Bow Street, using new methods, and published two books on phonetics which advocated spelling reform. His tempestuous life thus entered a quiet chapter. He died on 29 March 1867. That year, industrial working men were given the vote under the Second Reform Act, introduced by Disraeli.

Peter Brock found it 'fitting that the name of a Polish democrat be coupled with the military side of the only English (sic) armed insurrection of the nineteenth century'. Reuben Ainsztein observed: 'It is typical of Jewish historiography that one searches in vain for his name in the standard Jewish encyclopedias.'

Our rights did not come with the Magna Carta, but from the struggles of people like Beniowski, the 'Cosmopolitan Chartist'. We owe it to future generations to remember them.

# SCOTCH MIST

**A**lthough there had been a small Jewish community in Glasgow since the end of the 18th century, the community as we know it now was really formed at around the turn of this century, following the mass exodus of eastern European Jews to the west. A significant proportion of these people settled in Glasgow, then known as the 'Second City of the British Empire'. It had thriving industries, factories and businesses; it was major shipbuilding centre and Britain's third-busiest port; and it was also an embarkation point for America. Glasgow was appealing because of its already established Jewish community, thriving economic life and good job prospects. For these reasons many Jews came to Glasgow after living elsewhere in Britain, but for a significant number it was intended as a staging post on the way to America. However, a lot of America-bound Jews had a prolonged and sometimes permanent stay in Glasgow because they were forced to stop there until they could fulfil the stringent American health regulations.

Poor Jewish immigrants settled in the Gorbals/Tradeston area of Glasgow, and a large and lively Yiddish-speaking community quickly developed there. Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid described the Gorbals as 'lovably and delightfully and hideously un-Scottish. It is not even a Scottish slum. Stout men in beards and ringlets and unseemly attire lounge and strut with pointed shoes. Ruth and Naomi go by with downcast eastern faces...In the air the stench is of a different quality to Govan's or Camlachie's - a better quality...It is the most saving slum in Glasgow, and the most abandoned.'

Living conditions in the Gorbals varied considerably. Some apartments, particularly to the south of the area, were relatively spacious; but the majority of dwellings were significantly overcrowded. The 1891 census returns showed that the majority of Gorbals residents lived in two- or three- room dwellings, an average of roughly 2.5 people per room. This figure may not sound much, but consider that if 2.5 people per room were living in an average four-bedroomed house, there would be 20 inhabitants!

Ralph Glasser comments on housing in the Gorbals: 'A spare room was a luxury, possessed by a few better off families, better off by Gorbals standards - clergymen, skilled artisans...In most of the houses we knew every foot of space was taken up by beds, mattresses on the floor, a few bare wooden chairs, a battered kitchen table. One or even two of the children commonly shared the parental

bed - usually a mattress on planks resting on trestles in a curtained alcove in the kitchen.'

Many estate agents refused to let property to Jews. In 1901 a survey was carried out in the Gorbals Cross area. It stated: 'Unfortunately the properties are largely occupied by Jews who make very bad tenants, especially in neglecting needed repairs.'

Various counterclaims were made by Jews and their supporters, such as: 'The houses of the foreign Jews compare favourably as regards cleanliness, with those of the class among which they reside...'

I have come to the conclusion that the claims of estate agents that Jews were the epitome of insanitary habits, and also the claims by Jews and their supporters of the superiority of Jewish sanitary habits, should both be regarded objectively. The estate agents were voicing their prejudices against a new immigrant group who had suffered persecution like this throughout the history of their race.

But equally, the claims of inhuman cleanliness made by some Jews must be treated as stemming from the same source. For a new and therefore vulnerable immigrant group, appearance is very important. They will be judged on this, so it is vital that images of cleanliness and respectability are promoted. The majority of Gorbals Jewry did live in overcrowded conditions; a stringent level of hygiene was maintained in a large number of households, but standards of living can still by no means be called high.

Despite high levels of poverty, Jewish uptake of Parish poor relief was well below their relative proportion in the city. In 1902, of 5,656 applicants for poor relief, 28 were Jewish. Philanthropy was held in very high regard in Victorian Britain, so by supporting its less fortunate members, the Glasgow Jewish community hoped to gain the respect of the establishment. Another reason for inter-community welfare was that it was felt that too much reliance on the parish would incite antisemitism and provide easy access for Christian missionary organisations to 'vulnerable' members of the community. There is evidence to suggest that much of the welfare provided was not entirely relevant or of long term benefit. It was thought essential by the Jewish community that it should support its own, but the charity provided often avoided the real issues of poverty - for instance a 'fresh air fortnight' as a cure for chronically unhealthy living conditions. This denial of deprivation was driven by a desire for acceptance of the community by the establishment, and a very real fear of the more established Jews living north of the river (in richer areas such as Garnethill) that the plight of poor Gorbals Jewry would bring the

**Clara Barnes-Gutteridge explores the origins of the Glasgow Jewish community**



● This article is part of a larger investigation carried out as a school project called *Eastern European Jewish immigration to Glasgow c1900*. The author would like to thank Glasgow Jewish Archives for all their help.

whole community into disrepute. Short term relief was used to quell the lower classes' discontent and keep the problem of poverty internal.

The majority of Gorbals Jews were employed in peddling, tailoring, cobbling and cigarette manufacture. Many slightly later immigrants were entrepreneurial, and set up successful businesses — for example Bernard Prutin. He developed an interest in entertainment and set up a small business in 1908. Within 20 years he owned the Metropole Theatre, Bedford Picture Theatre and the Oaklands Hippodrome. In 1908, Miss Meiklejohn (an inspector for Glasgow Sanitary Department) did a study of alien Jews working in factories and workshops. She visited Jewish homes and over 100 premises of Jewish employment, and found that Jews were substantially employed in only a few occupations: tailoring was the major employer of Jews in Glasgow. It was also the only trade that many Jewish women were employed in. There was a network of small cobblers shops in the Gorbals — this employed mainly male workers. About 500 men and women worked in small workshops.

Religion was an important part of the culture, but many immigrants found themselves unable to

participate in religious activity — political activism seemed more apt when applied to their personal experiences, particularly those of antisemitic persecution. The romantic ideal of 'Fiddler on the Roof' type pious orthodoxy resulting from deep racial oppression would seem to be discounted. Many immigrant Jews were not religious, and a significant number of those who were, were drifting towards liberalism. There was nothing romantic about the often-squalid conditions that many Gorbals Jews lived in. Ralph Glasser wrote in *Growing up in the Gorbals*: 'The streets were slippery with refuse and often with drunken vomit. It was a place of grime and poverty and, in retrospect, an incongruous clinging to gentility, Dickensian social attitudes and prejudices.'

There was strong community pressure for the Gorbals to be seen by its Jewish residents to be strictly temporary. They did not regard themselves as real members of the Scottish working classes or as typical slum dwellers. For the upwardly-mobile majority, the Gorbals was a halfway house to middle-classdom — a home in a respectable neighbourhood like Newton Mearns or Garnethill, and children with a career in a profession.

Through Clara I contact Jayme Brener, a journalist who has worked on *Shalom*, a quarterly glossy left wing magazine. He is very interested in the Jewish Socialists Group' and in *Jewish Socialist*. He tells me more about the Casa do Povo, which seems to have originated as a Jewish friendly society close to the Communist Party. But, he adds, the organisation has withered on the vine and does not involve younger people.

Intrigued, I walk around Bom Retiro until I find the Casa do Povo. A substantial 3 storey building, it houses union offices, a theatre and meeting rooms. The president of the association Senhor Francisco shows me around proudly and confirms that the organisation had a 'progressive orientation'.

There are regular meetings as well as a Yiddish choir which meets and performs regularly. There is a rehearsal tonight. 'Just mention my name and you will be welcome to join in,' says Senhor Francisco.

Which is how, on my last night in São Paulo I find myself gatecrashing a Yiddish choir practice. The members of the choir are particularly glad that I know socialist songs like *Kling Klang*, which feature in their repertoire. The conductor, Hugueta Sendaiz, tells me the choir started off 10 years ago with five people. Now they number around 50 with an age range from 30 to 70.

As I leave on the overnight bus back to Rio I feel I have found, in some sense, the progressive Jewish community.

## São Paulo scrapbook

**In Brazil for a short holiday, Mike Heiser sought out the Jewish left**

São Paulo is a city of 17 million people and when you arrive by bus, the landscape is skyscrapers as far as the eye can see. What you can't see are the favelas, impromptu shanty towns sheltering on waste ground all over the city. When the land becomes the site of yet another apartment block, the favela moves further out of town.

Brazilian politics are in a state of flux. The left had pinned its hopes on Lula, the leader of the Workers' Party (PT), whose base is in the industrial suburbs of São Paulo. In the event the winner, by a landslide, was Cardoso, a social democrat and ex-marxist sociologist. The programmes of the two candidates read rather like a manifesto of the Blair Labour Party side by side with the manifesto of a 1980s Greater London Council.

Over half of the Brazilian Jewish population of 200,000 live in São Paulo. There is a traditional Jewish district, Bom Retiro, which has striking parallels with the East End of London. There are small clothing workshops everywhere and you see more signs in Korean than in Yiddish. But there are still indications of a substantial Jewish presence:

synagogues, restaurants and streets named Talmud Torah and Lubavitch (yes they do get everywhere). You can pick up copies on the news-stands of the worst Jewish newspaper I have ever seen: the front page contains recycled stories about Israel. Most of the rest consists of speeches made at barmitz-vahs.

But the most visible sign of the Jewish presence in São Paulo is a private club in the exclusive district of Pinheiros. Called 'A Hebraica' it has tens of thousands of members. Attracted by a bookfair, I wandered round the extensive perimeter looking for the entrance as limousines disgorged families in smart Sunday casuals. The bookfair proves to be like the club: pretentious and overpriced.

So where is the progressive Jewish community? Is there anything like the Jewish Socialists' Group here? I get a hint when I meet Clara Ant who was previously a PT state deputy in São Paulo. She tells me that at the start of the election campaign there was a meeting of Jews in the PT to deal with the canard that the Party was antisemitic. The majority felt there was little point in organising as Jews, so there had not been any follow up. She also remembered a two day conference a few years ago at the 'Casa do Povo' (House of the People) on themes to do with being Jews and on the Left.

## K U R D I S H P O E M S

### THE SEEDS

We were millions  
we were old trees  
newly growing plants  
and seeds

From the helmet of Ankara  
they came at dawn  
they uprooted us  
they took us away  
far away

On the way the heads of  
many old trees drooped  
many new plants died in the cold  
many seeds were trampled underfoot  
lost and forgotten

We grew like the summer river  
we diminished like flocks of birds  
towards the time of autumn  
we diminished to mere thousands

We had seeds  
carried back by the wind  
they reached the thirsty mountains again  
they hid inside rock clefts  
the first rain  
the second rain  
the third rain  
they grew again  
Now again we are a forest  
we are millions  
we are seeds

plants  
and old trees  
the old helmet died!  
and now you the new helmet  
why have you put the head of the spear  
under your chin?  
Can you finish us off?

But I know  
and you know  
as long as there is a seed  
for the rain and the wind  
this forest will never end?

**Sherko Bekas**

● These poems are taken from the *Anthology of Contemporary Kurdish Poetry*, price £3.50, published by the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee and Yashar Ismail, 44 Ainger Road, London NW3 3AT. The anthology includes the work of thirteen Kurdish poets and has a foreword by Harold Pinter.



### VIGILANCE

Two thirds of the night have passed  
Sleep my baby  
Put your head on my palm  
Lie in my arms  
Don't wait for me  
tonight I will be wakeful  
I won't sleep

You are an easy sleeper  
nature is stern-faced and its breath is hard  
I am afraid that the sound of the wind  
the glimmer of the trees  
the roar of the clouds  
and the pouring of the rain  
will, god forbid, awaken you  
or untie the little links of your dream chain

Sleep my baby  
put your head on my palm  
Lie in my arms  
Don't wait for me to sleep  
I will be vigilant over you  
I will not sleep

**Abdullah Pashew**

# Reason not to act

**The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History**  
Tony Kushner  
Blackwell, £14.99 paperback

My maternal Grandma had a war narrative. It was about how Hitler had bombed to rubble her home in Fieldgate street, in London's East End. I always used to find her emphasis on this somewhat churlish. She had come to Britain before the First World War as an immigrant from Wloclawek, in western Poland. Didn't she know that this was the first Polish Jewish community to suffer the full impact of Nazi terror, in the Second World War? Wasn't she aware that her kith and kin would have all been killed in the gas chambers? How could she go on about her much lesser suffering compared with that? An apparent Anglo-Jewish narrowness, even petty-mindedness has come in for some critical scrutiny recently, both in Richard Bolchover's *British Jewry and the Holocaust* and Geoffrey Alderman's *Modern British Jewry*.

Tony Kushner also has some problematic case histories to recount. German and Austrian young Jewish women who had managed to escape Nazism in the late 1930s by getting green card entry into Britain as domestic servants invariably seem to have received the most unkind treatment in marginally middle class Jewish homes. Kushner surmises that there was an element here of paying back the slights and snobbery which poor, east European Jews had traditionally received from their wealthier central European cousins. Now the tables were turned and former *Ostjuden* could revel in reminding German Jews of how low they had fallen. Here Kushner establishes an interesting theme in its own right, showing how inter-Jewish relations could and can become confused and complicated through ties of ethnicity and divisions of class. His aim, however, is not to make accusations. If my grandmother's wartime struggle for economic and family survival is one parochial expression of a more general preoccupation of Anglo-Jews with their own affairs rather than those of their European counterparts in their greatest hour of need, Kushner seeks to explain (though

not condone) this within a much broader context and chronological framework.

There is a large and ever growing bibliography on the Western response – or lack of response – to the Holocaust. Kushner is the first, however, to really to get to grips with its day-to-day reality, unravelling the interplay between British and American state leaders, bureaucrats, interest groups and ordinary people, he is also the first to show convincingly how issues of time and space were crucial in preventing a full popular mobilisation on behalf of European Jewry. There was certainly information about the mass murder of Polish Jews in newspaper reports and then on the BBC in the summer and again through into the winter of 1942. But not only did this involve a time lag from when the killings had begun, more importantly the news was in a crucial respect misunderstood. The

**'Comparisons with Rwanda and Bosnia are striking, which is why this book is not only a first-rate history but also very timely'**

public, including Anglo-Jewry, already knew about concentration camp 'atrocities' in Germany. A government White Paper to this effect published in October 1939. And it was in the light of this pre-war knowledge, argues Kushner, that they interpreted what was in happening in Nazi Europe in late 1942. It was perceived at the time that the Jews were victims of a series of further awful 'atrocities', a situation confirmed when newsreels at the end of the war served up mounds of bodies at concentration camps such as Belsen. Death camps, such as Auschwitz, liberated by the Red Army, remained hidden. It was decades before the British public got to grips with the idea of systematic mass murder and, moreover, one in which the Jews were specifically singled out as victims.

## 'Rational' explanations

There was, Kushner argues, 'no mainstream model of diversity' in British

society before the war and hence no basis upon which the Nazi's particular victimisation of Jews could be properly understood or responded to. Instead of confronting Nazi racism for what it was, liberal ideology instead attempted to explain it in its own terms. This amounted in effect to a 'no smoke without fire' rationalisation, seeing Nazis behaviour as admittedly 'bestial' but perhaps understandable because German Jews were, a 'nuisance' who had brought this on themselves. The leap of imagination required to understand Nazism as an exterminatory creed was thus defeated at the outset by the very tenacity of liberal 'rationalism'. Thus Kushner dismisses any easy explanation for Allied failure as simply due to 'antisemitism' or 'indifference'. Their response was altogether more 'ambivalent'. The western state's very reputation as 'liberal' demanded that it do something. On the other hand, its universalism rejected any particular wartime emergency request to go to the head of the queue. Jews in Britain were required to be Jews only in a private capacity and British citizens in all other respects. It was fundamental to the terms of the liberal contract. To the British Foreign Office, or the US State Department, the Jews of Europe remained, similarly, even in extremis, citizens of their respective states. They could not be and were not to be singled out as some other, special category. Add to this the geo-strategic interests of the Western Allies and you have a recipe for what the Americans would today call a humanitarian disaster.

Comparisons with Rwanda and Bosnia are striking, which is why this book is not only a first-rate history but also very timely. Kushner, however, does not believe that liberal democracies can do nothing in response to these sort of crises, or that public opinion cannot sway state leaders to act. The potential is well illustrated in this book by the actions of the tireless and visionary, Eleanor Rathbone MP, the non-Jewish dedicatee and hero of *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*. Rathbone campaigned ceaselessly throughout the 1930s and early 1940s for something to be done. She challenged all the objections about special pleading and looked forward – decades ahead of her time – to a pluralist multicultural society. Eventually, in late 1942, she teamed up with the left-wing publisher, Victor



John Heartfield's photomontage 'German natural history'

Gollancz. They mobilised so much public support for the rescue of Jews, rather than just promises that the Nazis would pay for their crimes at the end of the war, that she seems to have had the British government on the run.

Delaying tactics, including the promise of a high-level conference with the Americans in the spring of 1943, slowed down the momentum in the Rathbone/Gollancz campaign. Its lack of synchronisation with a growing US grass-roots mobilisation was another important problem. Needless to say, the Bermuda Conference achieved nothing. Later, fears that US public arousal would undermine President Roosevelt's support in Congress, led to his speedy implementation of the War Refugees

Board. Despite its non-specific title this was primarily aimed at assisting Jews. If cynical political calculations ultimately galvanised the US to act, the earlier Rathbone campaign gives a tantalising glimpse of how things might have been at the British end.

## The failure of campaigns

What is not perhaps so clear is how far down the road British public mobilisation would have gone if it had had more information. Maintaining the momentum of grass-roots campaigns is notoriously difficult so, while in our own time the public outcry that followed the January 1994 mortar bomb attack on Sarajevo did force the UN's hand, I'm not sure that same public could be mobilised a year

later. In mid-1944, during the key period when the fate of Hungarian Jewry hung in the balance, British and American government prevarication was not countered by any significant public response, nor were the critical campaigners in any state to lead them. Rathbone and others were burnt out, disappointed and on the way to nervous breakdowns or, in her case, an early death.

Moreover, against the largely unsung fighters for justice and rescue, one has to weigh up all those people and organisations who were avowedly antisemitic, (the leadership of the Medical Practitioners Union stands out as particularly nasty), were impelled by other agendas (*Peace News*, for instance, monotonously argued that mass killings were government atrocity propaganda) or were, simply, purveyors of plain British small-mindedness. Rathbone believed 'the great British public' would have responded; it simply required the government to give a lead. I think Kushner would like to agree. But his evidence, from Mass Observation records, trade union and labour history and from his brilliant foray into the gender-related field of domestic service, confirms his own contradictory verdict. The war should have led to change.

This was, after all, Britain's biggest shake-up in recent history. The country was awash with all manner of foreign soldiers and war refugees. They were seen, entertained, fraternised with. There was no longer any excuse for parochialism. Labour's landslide victory in the spring of 1945 should by rights have delivered a new era of inter-ethnic relations. It did not. Antisemitism actually increased after the war. Central European Jewish refugees feared deportation, while the universalist British state went out of its way to discriminate in the labour market against the entry of Jewish displaced persons and in favour of people who had been auxiliaries and sympathisers of the Nazi state.

There are some gaps in this history. The interaction between Zionism and Holocaust politics is rather marginalised. So too, bar one single reference, is the word Gypsy. It is a great pity given Kushner's committed multicultural perspective, that Gypsies do not figure more here. Kushner suggests that the advent of a more multicultural Britain is the reason why awareness and recognition of the Holocaust has finally come of age in British society. I am not sure. But I am sure that his book is indispensable background reading for anybody who wants to share in creating a multicultural society. It is not simple history: it is about people. But it is committed history written by a master-historian.

Mark Levene



# Harry was a Bolshie

*Reluctant revolutionary*  
Harry Ratner  
Socialist Platform, £5.95

In 1959 a national newspaper carried a front-page story about Trotskyists plotting to ruin Britain with strikes and bring about a revolution. It said they had infiltrated the unions and the Labour Party, and had a newspaper called the Newsletter.

I'd heard of Trotsky as a leader of the Russian Revolution. But a Trotskyist movement in Britain? That weekend, outside a CND rally, I saw a bloke in a cloth cap and mac selling The Newsletter. Naturally, I bought a copy. That was my introduction to revolutionary Marxism and to Harry Ratner.

Soon I was involved in Young Socialist activity, demonstrations, selling papers at the docks, classes on Marx's Capital illustrated from Harry's industrial experience. Once, chatting over a coffee, Harry asked me about my background and what had brought me to Trotskyism. It never occurred to me, at 17, to ask about his.

Not till Reluctant Revolutionary arrived did I learn that, like me, Harry had been a member of the Zionist youth movement Habonim, but in the 1930s, in north-west London. After school, compulsory religion and his dad's desperate efforts as a businessman, the idea of 'the new Jew' building a free, secular life on kibbutz was appealing.

I did not realise at the time that there could be another aspect to this idyllic picture: that Jewish settlements eventually meant dispossession of the Arabs, and that the new Jewish state, founded to free the Jews from oppression, would become the oppressor of the Arab people. He joined Poale Zion, socialist Zionists, sure that Arab nationalism was purely reactionary; and looking forward to a democratic, socialist Palestine.

Members of Habonim 'stood shoulder to shoulder' with the Young Communist League and the Labour League of Youth at Cable Street, Harry says. Eventually he drifted away from Zionism, 'not because I saw its reactionary implications, but because I was primarily a socialist and not a Jewish nationalist. Why go to Palestine when it was possible to fight for socialism here...'

At 16 he joined the Labour League of Youth in Willesden. Labour's youth

movement was a battleground between Stalinists led by Ted (later Lord) Willis and Trotskyists. Harry joined the latter. They held street corner meetings in Whitechapel. 'One evening we would be attacked by the fascists as "dirty reds" and told "to get back to Russia", the next evening we would be attacked by Communist Party members as "bloody fascists".'

At Cable Street, and a year later at Long Lane, Bermondsey, the left beat back the fascists. Battling for the truth within the left was harder. Many believed Russia was a 'workers' paradise' under Stalin's benevolent regime. Even those who didn't hoped that the International Brigade could halt fascism in Spain. In 1938, selling papers saying that Stalin's GPU had murdered left wingers and anarchists in Spain, Harry had them torn



Harry Ratner

from his hands and thrown in the gutter. That year he left school and met a character who would have an important bearing on his life (and on mine): Gerry Healy.

In 1960, praising 'Cde Ratner's intellect' (before supporting his expulsion from the Labour Party) a councillor in our ward said, 'He can speak French like a native.' Harry's mother was French and had returned to France while he was young. In 1938 she asked him to join her. Harry witnessed the last days of the Popular Front and Third Republic. He heard poet André Breton and hitched through France making contacts in factories and youth hostels. When the Trotskyists were driven underground, he helped two leaders, Raymond Mollinier and Pierre Frank, escape.

At the start of the war, Britain's cities were woefully exposed to Hitler's bombers. Some ultra-leftists argued against calls for deep shelters, saying this

meant supporting the war! Other left wingers took a more practical view and Londoners occupied the tube stations. Harry was on a shelterers' committee along with a young Communist Party member, Alfie Bass.

Called up in 1941, Harry was drafted to the Pioneer Corps, a veritable international brigade (including Spanish Republicans). Serving in Sicily, Italy, France and Belgium, he met all sorts, soldiers and civilians. Riding to Paris with a Free French unit he surprised his mother by arriving in British uniform, and reported the city's liberation for Socialist Appeal.

On leave in 1942, Harry went rambling with a friend in Derbyshire, and met Olive, who became his lifelong companion. She was bringing up a child and working in a laundry, where she led a strike. Harry married into the working class, and Olive initiated him into such cultural matters as the best china for visitors. He credits her with anchoring him in real life and in human relations.

Before the war had ended, British forces were employed against the left in Belgium and Greece. In 1946 there were strikes and mutinies in the forces. In London, just as they had occupied the underground, people squatted luxury blocks to jog the new Labour Government's housing policy. Harry was demobbed and went to work in a Manchester engineering works, pushing a broom. He became shop steward, works convenor, AEU branch president.

He was involved in the factional disputes which rent the Trotskyist movement, over eastern Europe, Korea and the Labour party, as well as leading industrial struggles. He worked full time for the movement in 1957, when disillusioned Communist Party members were won like Peter Fryer, who'd been the Daily Worker's reporter in Budapest when Russian tanks invaded. Fryer has written the introduction to this book.

Little incidents mean a lot for those with eyes to see. Seeing Gerry Healy bawl at a waitress made Harry wonder what this revolutionary leader would be like with power! Sensitive to the way would-be-leaders treated others, their lack of humour, humanity, respect for ordinary working people, he began to put this together with his doubts about the movement's unreal, apocalyptic tone and hyperactivity.

It took some of us much longer to see the problems Harry and Olive had recognised on the left. Others still won't see

them. Those who know exactly who were 'goodies' and 'baddies' won't like Harry's objectivity, his willingness to give credit where it's due, nor his admission, at 76, to not knowing all the answers.

I remember some things differently, and don't share all Harry Ratner's conclusions; but if you want to understand the socialist movement, Reluctant Revolutionary is essential reading. Balancing personal and political, narrative insight and unaffected humour, it's also an enjoyable read.

Charlie Pottins



# Ochenvay!

*Are You Looking At Me, Jimmy?*  
Arnold Brown.  
Methuen, £7.95

The title of Arnold Brown's book is disappointingly predictable, "Are you Looking at Me Jimmy?" is perhaps one of the better known Glaswegian addresses from one stag at bay to another. The subtitle 'Mysteries of a Great City' was, however, more promising and leads gently into an entertaining and surprisingly touching read.

Glasgow holds few mysteries for me. Like Arnold Brown, I too, am a product of the delicious cultural mix of 'Oy' and 'Och' or loch and lockshen, bagel and bagpipe...but thankfully Brown has a more sophisticated approach to Scotjewish humour than my own.

On first impression it's a rather sweet wee book, not dissimilar to those I am trying to encourage my son to read by himself. It has large bold text and short chapters and is nicely illustrated with moody drawings by Ken Cox.

The text seems to be a hybrid of what I imagine to be some of Arnold's best stage material woven into two storylines. One deals with some affectionately observed and highly embroidered details of a dying first generation in Glasgow while the other takes the form of a slightly absurd detective thriller. The former works best with its portrayal of the main character, Uncle Harry, whose death and funeral become the central plot as Brown retraces some of the great moments in his life. Uncle Harry, it seems, was a socialist, idealist and dreamer whose passions were never crushed by the process of assimilation. Indeed, he became a devo-

tee of all things Scottish. But most of all, he loved the world of 'show business'. Brown has written some very funny and touching scenes in Uncle Harry's life which I want to believe could be true, like the day he went to join huge crowds at Central Station to welcome Laurel and Hardy to Glasgow;

'I happened to know a ticket collector called Billy Moir and he let me stand inside the barrier. The Royal Scot finally arrived at platform five. Photographers' bulbs flashed everywhere. The crowd surged forward and pandemonium broke out. Suddenly a short man in a dark suit and a homburg emerged from the melée. For some reason he approached me and said in broken English: "My name is Albert Einstein. Can you direct me to the Central Hotel? I'm here to receive a honorary doctorate from Glasgow University and I must say, in all my years as a scientist, no other city in the world has turned out in their thousands to pay homage to me. I am deeply touched."

'Of course, I got Einstein to sign my autograph book, but I didn't have the heart to tell him they'd all come to see Laurel and Hardy.'

Judaic jokes are sprinkled throughout the book. Uncle Harry advises Arnold: 'Never eat in a restaurant where the waiters have cloven feet,' while the Rabbi who takes the funeral service on stilts, goes on the run for plagiarising Rabbi Lionel Blue' on Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day'.

Less successful are the early chapters dealing with the exodus from the shtetl. There's a comic device which is used to explain why the Jews left Russia, but I found it rather clumsy. Nevertheless it is worth reading on as the fun begins with the real and surreal life in Glasgow. The

storylines are playful with a clever reworking of real events. What is consistent is Arnold Brown's sense of love and respect for an old man from the old country who we will all recognise and mourn.

I most enjoyed Brown's personal anecdotes - his appearance as the warm-up act for Frank Sinatra to a crowd in Ibrox Park football stadium, and his attempt to fill Frank in on the political scene in Glasgow with a description of the Poll Tax. Artistic licence or not, it was very funny but I can't help thinking that the humour appeals to me because I recognise all the people and places.

Nevertheless, some of the observations do have universal appeal: post 'Year of Culture' Glasgow clearly mirrors many a British metropolis. In the 'Merchant City', the Clyde's equivalent to Docklands, he encounters a butchers describing themselves as 'meat stylists' and a wine bar called 'The Riveters', while the account of Uncle Harry's encounter with God takes place in Princes Square, a recently erected monument to the post-modern shopping experience and housing the likes of Katherine Hamnett and Vidal Sassoon. No BHS here.

But again, for me, it's the familiar that breeds the giggles. I'm sure I've been on that Euston to Glasgow train when a Scottish guard takes over in Carlisle and announces as the border is crossed: "I would now like to recite a poem about one of Scotland's natural assets.

*It's Scottish Water  
Do not forget it,  
It's our water,  
From Scottish Lochs and rivers,  
Don't dare touch it,  
Privatise it over my dead body,  
ENGLISH BASTARDS!  
Thank you."*

All along the train there was the sound of whooping and cheering.' As indeed there should be!

Arnold Brown has a great talent for comic detail but beware the mysteries of a great city.

Sue Davidson

# Taliswoman

**Hear Our Voice**  
**Women rabbis tell their stories**  
 Edited by Sybil Sheridan  
 SCM Press Ltd, £9.95

As witnessed by scores of jokes, songs, even sackings and splits, Jews have a strong history of ambivalence towards the rabbinate. We have never taken our often self-appointed leaders entirely on their own terms. *Hear Our Voice*, as a title, takes its place alongside many similar ones featuring women articulating new understandings for the first time, but when used by a group of rabbis it's more a familiar injunction than a pioneering appeal. Haven't we always had to hear their voices? It goes with the job, however you define it – and current definitions seem to include counsellor/therapist and political activist alongside the older ones of ritual expert, legal interpreter, internal or external community leader, teacher, scholar and theologian.

The contributors to this anthology tend to stick with the more traditional roles. Four loose and overlapping sections of the anthology, perhaps deliberately challenging the *Mishnaic* obsession with clear categorisation, cover 'who we are', Biblical references and role models, interpretation and scholarship, and some current issues in Jewish feminist theology. There are flashes of clear and compelling writing: Julia Neuberger's is almost the only contribution to reflect on

working as a rabbi, interesting particularly for the down-to-earth context she gives which locates her ordination as a particular stage on a public service career path, and for her challenge to here-and-now sexism as opposed to indignation with the remote past. Hadassah Davis in 'I don't like converts' describes with impressive tolerance the condescension and arrogance she has had to face, and how she gradually developed strategies for dealing with such prejudices. Sheila Shulman, writing about the book of Judith, is fairly scrupulous in separating history from speculation.

Some of the other contributors appear to be writing more for themselves than to inform or enlighten their readers. Aviva Kipen treats the *question* of why she wants to be a rabbi as if it is simply not legitimate, as if being a rabbi was purely a private state of mind rather than a public role. Her account of her own spiritual journey towards ordination makes the point by seeming deliberately written in order not to be meaningful to anyone else. And no one addresses the really big question: not why women rabbis, but why rabbis?

It's ironic that the two sections of biblical and talmudic studies are much the weakest, given the emphasis in this book on the rabbinic role of scholar. The limitations of these articles, in which speculation runs rife, stem from the difficulties of attempting serious scholarship when firstly you are already committed to a position of belief and secondly you are

determined to furnish yourself with role models, regardless of your evidence. In other areas feminism has outgrown the role-model phase – after all the case against slavery is absolute and does not rest on the behaviour or achievements of slaves in the past.

The last section, 'Speaking for a new world', concentrates on Jewish feminist theology. The material is broadly familiar but it does provide a clear and useful summary of the important debate between the American writers Cynthia Ozick and Judith Plaskow. The 'sociological' side (Ozick) wants to see more

**'No one addresses  
 the really big  
 question: not why  
 women rabbis, but  
 why rabbis?'**

women getting involved in Judaism, and an end to the discriminatory practices at all levels which prevent this. Plaskow argues instead that Judaism itself has to change quite fundamentally.

The whole anthology, without saying so, reflects this debate rather than any kind of consensus, but it's an argument between groups of reformers, not between reformers and revolutionaries. Both groups are acutely aware of hostile denials that what they advocate or practice is truly Judaism at all, and they have a consequent need to establish safe credentials. Perhaps that is why we meet with the claim that really nothing need be said about women becoming rabbis, why there is such an emphasis on the outward forms of rabbinic scholarship, on language and the symbolic. It's easy to imagine a different and less frustrating book which provided more analysis of women's interest in the rabbinate rather than accounts of spiritual journeys, probed more into ethics than into sensibilities, and explored new models of community organisation. Some sections of the community are ready for such a book now. But here we have women rabbis telling stories rather than answering questions.

Dena Attar

- SCRAP THE INCAPACITY FOR WORK ACT
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## the shelf

One of the necessary rules of reviewing is that you never reveal the ending of murder mysteries. In this case I have to, so those who wish to read the final outcome of P D James's latest novel, *Original Sin* (Faber, £14.99) please close your eyes now.

For those still reading... the book is based round murder at an old established publishing house by the Thames. The murderer turns out to be a Jew who joined the firm 30 years ago in order to learn the truth about one of the firm's partners, a Resistance hero who betrayed the Jew's wife and two children to the Nazis in France during the Occupation. In revenge, the Jewish character murders the Frenchman's two children who are now running the firm (plus one or two people who get in the way).

One of the detectives investigating the case is also Jewish, if ambivalent about being so. He finds out why the murders were done, and realises he has a loyalty to his fellow Jew and tries to protect him. The denouement is that the murdered children were adopted and no blood relation of the Frenchman. The murderer kills himself, and the Jewish policeman will no doubt have to start scanning the sits vac columns.

I rather feel we have a deeply reactionary, if not antisemitic, ending. The murdering Jew is accused of acting like God, patently a Jewish God, 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children', but with precious little forgiveness unto the thousandth generation. The detective Jew puts tribal loyalties ahead of justice and quotes the eye for an eye business to justify the revenge on the innocent. The rest of the book is crap too.

Stephen Benatar writes different kinds of novels each time, his latest – and indeed the only one in print now – is *Father of the Man* (Eagle Press, £7.50) a novel about family breakdown, which has one of the dullest covers I've seen in years. The main character is Ephraim Mild, an assimilated Jew in middle age, whose marriage is collapsing out of boredom, who is up to his neck in debt and whose job as an insurance salesman (on commission only) is more than he can handle.

Benatar could have used a better editor (too many long sentences) but he succeeds well in describing Mild's descent into hopelessness. Running parallel with the main story is an account of Mild's pompous but engaging son battling with British Rail by trying to travel free because though his season ticket had expired, he is 'owed' six days

due to strikes and he can't afford the fare. If there is a metaphor in the subtext I missed it, but it was fun.

In the last issue of *Jewish Socialist* this column mentioned the vast number of anarchist writers who were Jewish. Freedom Press have brought out a pack of 36 picture cards by Clifford Harper called *Anarchists*. The pack has portraits of the men and women, with brief introductions to their lives on the reverse. At least six of them are Jewish (Noam Chomsky, Paul Goodman, Rose Pesotta, Alexander Berkman, Gustav Landauer and Emma Goldman) and there is one antisemite (Proudhon). It's an easy way to spend a fiver, and the cards are nice, but what do I do now? Are they for swapping like old cigarette cards?

One of the joys of bookselling is finding odd books in publishers' catalogues. Still available for a mere £2.95 is *Say it in Yiddish* from Dover's phrase books for travellers series. Cynics might say the only travelling you'd find this useful for would be for time-travelling into the past. In fact the book would be useful for just that, as it has not been updated since 1958. Thus I now know how to say 'Do not starch the collars' (*toot nit ah-rin krawk-mahl in dee kawl-nehrs*) which will come in handy at the laundry; and 'Please play a foxtrot' (*Shpeelt, zit ah-zoy goot, a fawks-trawft*), a phrase I've often needed. There are nine lines for sport, but 20 pages for eating and 14 pages for health. Uriel and Beatrice Weinreich know their subject.

Nigel Todd is well known as an anti-fascist and Labour activist in north east England. His latest book, *In Excited Times: The People Against the Blackshirts* (Bewick Press, £5.95) is a fine example of local history, describing the campaigns against Mosley's fascists in the north east. The Mosleyites were the usual crew of local businessmen and aristocrats and the main opposition came from the Labour movement. The numbers involved were very large – 6,000 on one South Shields demonstration – and physical force was regularly needed and used.

The Labour movement was very

aware of the international growth of fascism, organising public rallies in defence of Austrian socialists, opposing antisemitism and at home defending the local Arab community against the British Union of Fascists. Prominent among the anti-fascists was Albert Gompertz, a Jewish socialist, arrested once for speaking at an open air meeting, and chucked out of the council chamber several times. He ended up mayor of South Shields after wresting control of the council from the business elite.

Todd does, however, credit a Geordie, Jimmy Evans, with catching William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw) in Germany just after the war, but in *Hitler's Englishman* (Penguin, £5.99) Francis Selwyn gives a Captain Licorish (odd name) and a (Jewish) Lieutenant Perry that honour. Who is right?

I confess that I had difficulty with Larry O'Hara's *Turning Up the Heat* (Phoenix press, £5) which is about MI5's involvement in politics, left, right, nationalist, human and animal. I have no doubt MI5 are involved, but O'Hara sees spies everywhere, hidden meanings in everything and ulterior motives in every action. Thus, even when the magazine *Searchlight*, which he believes is nothing other than an MI5 front, gets something right 'there has to be a devious reason: most probably to make believable the other disinformation passed by themselves'. Tyne and Wear Anti-Fascist Association act 'in the interests of *Searchlight*/MI5, for whom they are a nice little training ground'. The leadership of Leeds Anti-Fascist Action are similarly inclined, and the journal *CARF* 'provides virtually no hard analysis about current fascist strategy, for reasons best known to themselves'.

Now I have my differences with *Searchlight* and do not agree with them that Larry O'Hara is in the hands of the far-right (though he has some strange connections – but when O'Hara remarks that 'Certain views, like my own, are just too sharp to be printed and thereby legitimised' by the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, I suspect that sharpness may not be the reason his material gets spiked. Especially in the wake of Seumas Milne's book about MI5 and the miners' union, we could do with a good book on MI5 in politics. *Turning Up the Heat* is not it.

R Buch Soicher

● Books reviewed in 'On the Shelf' and elsewhere in *Jewish Socialist* can be ordered from Mushroom Bookshop, 10-12 Heathcote Street, Nottingham NG1 3AA. Please add 10% for postage and packing.