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Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

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Jewish Socialist

'I myself have one illusion left, that England has retained some of her traditional liberties, among them the right, the sacred right, of political asylum for refugees.' These words were spoken by the Jewish anarchist Emma Goldman in 1924. If she were alive today what would she say?

Two Tory ministers — Michael Howard and Peter Lilley — have made sure that no one can seriously entertain such illusions any more. The recent vicious changes to the social security rules threaten to deprive the vast majority of asylum seekers currently in Britain of basic benefits, leaving them destitute and dependent on the goodwill and voluntary action of various charities.

The Immigration and Asylum Bill will reduce rights of appeal and more firmly establish a category of 'immigrants' who have fewer rights than British citizens. The impact of this legislation on attitudes and practices towards all ethnic minorities here, transient and settled, is bound to be negative and we must be prepared to see this take its toll at street level.

So what has the response been? The Labour Party and various immigration welfare lobbying bodies are tied to a concept of 'non-racist immigration controls'. It is a concept that Steve Cohen strongly takes issue with (page 6).

Some liberal writers have hoped that pointing out the current Home Secretary's ethnic identity and his own historical circumstances as a child of refugees, might shame him into rethinking. Mr Howard may be a member of the Jewish community, but this has always taken second place to the more serious business of doing his job as a Tory Home Secretary and continuing with the legislative trends of those ministers before him, whatever their ethnic origins might have been.

The revolutionary left has mobilised active opposition to the proposals, principally by denouncing the Bill as 'racist'. This may cause moral outrage against the proposals among Britain's liberal conscience, but most supporters of harsher treatment of refugees and asylum seekers are not troubled by being called 'racists'.

What is missing from the debate is a clear assertion that all societies benefit from immigration, culturally and economically, and a recognition that freedom of movement on this planet is a fundamental human right.

Today, many people in the world are forced to try and exercise this right out of dire necessity. We must work for a world where no one is forced to uproot themselves but all are free to move across borders out of choice. The capitalists recognise no borders for themselves or their money. Why should we?

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ralph Levinson, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel, Charlie Pottins and David Rosenberg. Design: Clifford Singer.

Cover photo by Simon Lynn.



Emma Goldman: Fighter for 'the sacred rights of refugees'

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YES, MINISTER!

Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli nuclear technician who spoke to the Sunday Times in 1986, has received his first public support from a member of the Israeli government after nine long years in continuous, solitary confinement.

Just before the New Year, Shulamit Aloni, the Minister for Communication and Science declared: 'It is intolerable that a democratic country like Israel kidnapped Vanunu to try him, irrespective of the harm he caused.' She also called for a dramatic improvement in his prison conditions and even went on to say that: 'His imprisonment was no longer necessary'. Aloni is leader of the Meretz party, the junior partner in coalition with the ruling Labour Party.

She may have been stirred to speak out following a number of unexpected but

linked events, starting with the statement in December by Shimon Peres, Israel's Prime Minister: 'Give me peace and I'll give up the atom.' Though he then refused to admit that Israel had nuclear weapons, the fact that he mentioned them at all could begin to take the 'guilt' of their revelation off Vanunu's shoulders.

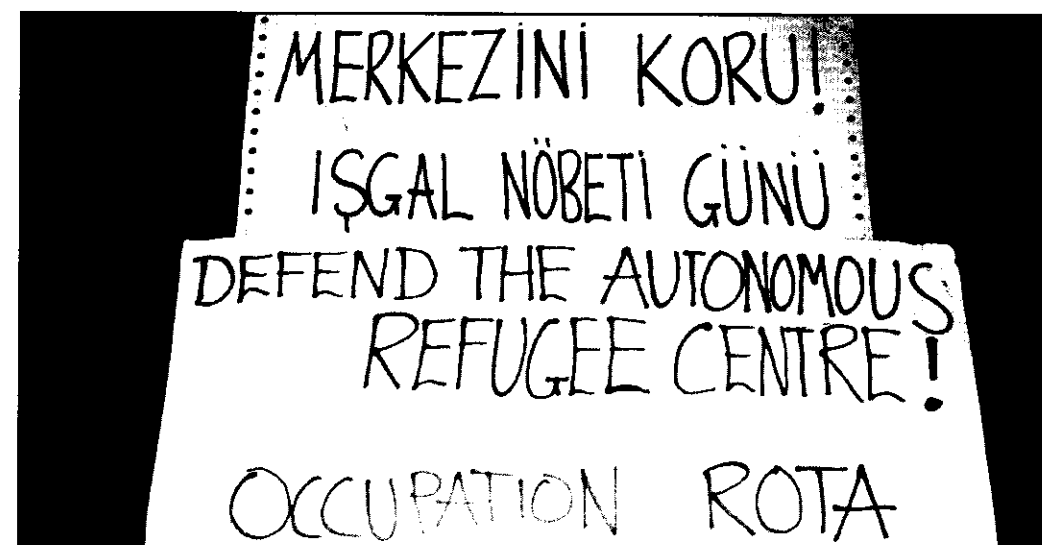
Almost simultaneous with this was the report of the obscene act by the security services in muzzling Vanunu on his way to his most recent Supreme Court hearing, so he couldn't be seen or talk to the press. The incident was widely publicised as Vanunu having been forced to wear a mask like that worn by Anthony Hopkins in *Silence of the Lambs*.

In complete contrast to this violent act, was the impressive speech by Professor Joseph Rotblat when accepting his

Nobel Peace Prize a week earlier, which also received sympathetic coverage. He praised Vanunu for his 'whistle-blowing' initiative in revealing Israel's nuclear weapons and added: 'I believe he has suffered enough.'

Despite all these optimistic and positive statements and the impact they are having on the Israeli public, it is still important that we give Vanunu our active support. He has suffered terribly during that nine years incarceration and it is important for him and what he represents that we get him released before his health deteriorates beyond recall.

● The 'Campaign to Free Vanunu and for a Nuclear-Free Middle East' can be contacted at 89 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL. Tel/Fax: 0171 378 9324.



NEW REFUGEE CENTRE

A network of local groups in Hackney, east London have combined to take direct action in defence of refugees and asylum seekers in the face of the new legislation. They have occupied an old magistrates' court on Stoke Newington High Street to set up an Autonomous Refugee

Centre - Hackney (ARCH). Nextdoor is the Kurdish and Turkish Hakelvi community centre.

Unoccupied for years, the building is being made habitable by a team of local volunteers. On its first night Turkish and Kurdish socialists helping to set up

the centre stopped a gang from raiding the centre and stripping out materials.

ARCH needs volunteers and donations of money, bedding, food and utensils. The occupiers want to stimulate other grassroots direct action initiatives.

● Contact ARCH c/o SQUAH, 0171-226 8938, or the Colin Roach Centre, 56 Clarence Road, London E5, 0181-533 7111.

UTES FOR CHILDREN

More than 40 people attended a forum on circumcision organised jointly by Jewish Socialist and Women Against Fundamentalism.

After showing the documentary 'It's a Boy' a panel comprising the filmmaker Victor Schonfeld, Julia Bard and Ruth Lukom (who both appear in the film) talked about the issues it raised.

The discussion among a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience ranged from the demands of religious leaders to health questions and children's rights.

Many people expressed their ambivalence about the practice and some called for it to be stopped. It was strongly felt that there should at least be regulation of those performing circumcision and that practical ways should be found to support parents facing dilemmas about circumcision.

As we go to press a follow up meeting focusing particularly on building a support network is taking place. If you are interested in this initiative write to Jewish Socialist and we will pass your letters on.

● See readers letters, page 27

ROBIN HOOD GIVES TO JS

Not far from Sherwood Forest, an evening of comedy and Klezmer was organised by Nottingham Jewish Socialist Group. Ivor Dembina supplied the comedy while Royte Klezmores supplied the music and Jewish Socialist received a donation of £120 from the takings, which is greatly appreciated. Thank you Nottingham from the merry men and women on the magazine!

TUDJMAN TOLD: KEEP MEMORIAL

Croatia's President Franjo Tudjman has been told to leave a memorial to Holocaust victims alone.

In an open letter to Tudjman in February, Slavko Goldstein, editor of the dissident journal *Erasmus*, warned that he would file a lawsuit against Tudjman if he proceeded with a plan to turn the memorial centre at Jasenovac into a memorial for Croatian war victims. Croatia's Jewish community strongly opposes the plan.

About 80,000 people, including 17,000 Jews, thousands of Serbs and Gypsies, as well as Croat and Muslim resisters, were killed at Jasenovac, a concentration camp run by the Ustashe Croatia's wartime Nazi puppet regime.

In April 1945 about 600 surviving inmates staged a revolt and attempted a mass break-out, but most were machine-gunned by the Ustashe guards.

● See article on Sarajevo Haggada, p18

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

It is nearly 100 years since the first mass Jewish socialist movement - the Bund - was founded in the Russian Empire. Despite the terrible losses at the hands of Hitler and Stalin the Bund still survives, with its centre now in New York. The bulk of its members are veterans from the struggles of the 1930s but it continues

to support and pass on its experience to new waves of Jewish socialists. The World Coordinating Committee of the Bund recently donated \$500 to Jewish Socialist. We want to say a *groysen dank* - a big thank you - and pass on our best wishes to your organisation and its branches throughout the world.

ANARCHY IN THE EAST END

On Saturday 13 January the Davenant Centre in Whitechapel was packed for an exuberant and chaotic celebration of the life of Emma Goldman and the Jewish East End Anarchist

and radical tradition. The evening ended in wild dancing to the sounds of Royce Klezmores. More than £500 was raised towards a Turkish translation of Goldman's *Living My Life*.

HOWARD'S END

While doing his bit for Fortress Europe policies against immigrants and asylum-seekers, Home Secretary Michael Howard has vetoed European measures that would have made life more difficult for neo-Nazi racists.

Italian fascists who have avoided police questions about certain bombings by settling in London, look safe. So long as they don't upset the Saudi monarch, which is unlikely, they have no fear of being deported.

It's good news too for the Holocaust revisionists in Brighton, who, apart from when one of our lads gave their printshop a holocaust of its own, have kept their friends in Europe supplied with literature. But if they were banned, wouldn't they go underground? That's where they should be. *Gey in der erd*, as we say in Yiddish. And take Michael Howard with you!

DESPERATELY- SEEKING SUZANNE

The Guardian's Suzanne Moore, who thinks Jack Straw's pledge to vanquish beggars and squeegee merchants is the stuff of socialist heroism, also reckons radical journals should try to learn from *Hello!*

dybbuk's diary

magazine. Well, I did once describe a visit to the Chief Rabbi's home, and the pictures on his wall, but JS editors weren't persuaded it would enthrall our readers. They won't even change our name to JS!

Deriding left-wing journoes who work 'for love', Ms Moore says that's all right, 'if your idea of "love" is being touched up by some menopausal male after he's downed 10 pints of real ale.' That's ageism! Anyway, can someone whose sad idea of ultimate pleasure is *fressing* chocolate over a copy of *Hello!* magazine condemn a feller for going down the pub?

I may be breaching a conservation order on clichéd stereotypes, but two magazines Suzanne Moore was nasty about, *Casablanca* and *Red Pepper* are (like *Jewish Socialist*), edited by women.

Neither of them, so far as I know, are heavy ale-drinkers, nor are they given to grabbing the staff — at least, not in my experience. Dear Suzanne, I've tried wearing tighter trousers. Should I wear different shoes? Please advise!

BROWN WINDSOR

Some royalists were upset over that TV programme. No, not *that* TV programme, the other one showing Edward VIII, the late Duke of Windsor, and his spouse as admirers of Nazi Germany. The Duke even urged the Luftwaffe to intensify its bombing of British cities, hoping Hitler would help him back on to his throne. Some of the story had been told, but not all; not on television; and not without efforts to hush it all up.

Charles Bedeaux, the

ruthless factory speed-up king who introduced the Windsors to Hitler, was arrested in Algiers in 1942 after the largely-Jewish armed coup that opened the city to the Allies. But the US authorities who took him back to the States were more intent on suppressing evidence of collaboration than exposing it, and Bedeaux's prison suicide conveniently closed the case. The wartime murder of another of the Duke's business associates, Sir Harry Oakes, remains unsolved. And there has been speculation about spy Anthony Blunt's royal errand to Germany after the war to remove certain documents.

Still, Harrods had a lavish, forty-quid coffee-table book out for Christmas, *The Private Lives of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor* by Hugo Vickers. Not much about Shanghai brothels or Nazi businessmen, but plenty of pictures of the Windsors' glamorous public life and plush Paris apartment (now owned by Mohammed Fayed). Perusing a copy in Waterstones (in their Interior Decorating section), I couldn't even find the name Mosley in the index, though Sir Oswald and Lady Diana regularly dined with the Windsors in Paris. I suppose they talked about old times, and what might have been.

ZYGIELBOJM'S LAST LETTERS

On Sunday 12 May Westminster Council will unveil a plaque to commemorate Szmul 'Artur' Zygielbojm, the Polish-Jewish socialist and anti-fascist. Zygielbojm took his own life at his London flat in May 1943 as a final protest against the passivity with which the world was permitting the Nazis to slaughter the Jews of Europe.

Zygielbojm was a leading member of the Jewish Workers' Bund in Poland. He was smuggled out of Warsaw in 1940, across Nazi occupied lands, to America where he continued his work for Polish Jewry. In 1942 he was invited to Britain to represent the Bund in the Polish Parliament-in-Exile, in recognition that

the Bund was the leading political force in the Poland's Jewish community before the Nazi invasion. Receiving regular underground reports, he spent 14 months lobbying government ministers, ambassadors, the press and trades unions urging exceptional measures to save the remnant of Polish Jewry from complete destruction. In May 1943, after the Bermuda Conference failed to respond to the desperate needs for refuge, and as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was being extinguished, Zygielbojm committed suicide in the hope that by his death he would stir those powers that could do something into action.

Here are some of Zygielbojm's last letters.



Szmul Zygielbojm

TELEGRAM DATED 24TH DECEMBER 1942
Handwritten in pencil to Winston Churchill, 10 Downing Street
(Public Record Office reference C12895)

Dear PM, As the authorised representative of the Jewish workers movement in Poland - the secret organisations of which were still active late in summer 1942, and were at that time the only organised body of Polish Jewry - I address to you and to your government this last appeal of despair which amidst the mass slaughter came out of the ghetto walls. I quote excerpts from their last report from Warsaw I received dated August 31st 1942:

'The fury of the storm unleashed upon the Jewish Community in Poland is devastating and gaining in strength everyday. Blow after blow is falling upon towns no longer thousands or tens of thousands but this time hundreds of thousands are perishing - the whole population is being exterminated - children, women and men. Out of three and a half million Jews, only one million to one million and a quarter are still alive while the slaughter goes on.'

They beg you to find means to save those few Polish Jews who may still have survived. As a man who directly represents the unfortunate Jewish population of Poland I convey to you as well as to President Roosevelt their last appeal for help.

SZMUL ZYGIELBOJM - Member of Polish National Council, London

A LAST LETTER TO HIS BROTHER

Dear Fayvel,
Your letter dated 24 December has only just reached me...

I am tired and almost at the end of my tether as all of my work seems to be ineffective and just leaves me with an unbearable feeling of helplessness. The reports I get from home are getting worse by the day and here people are making beautiful speeches and often use the dreadful facts to promote their own party politics. They delude themselves...and draw attention away from the real issues at stake and the steps that should be taken... According to the latest news that reached me this week, some 300,000 Jews are still alive in Poland but the slaughter continues steadily. The Zionists are using the Jewish martyrdom as part of their fund-raising campaign...for Palestine.

It's been a long time since I had any news from my family. You can imagine what I lived through in November on receiving a detailed account of the slaughter in the Medem Sanatorium, knowing full well that Manya and Artek were amongst the inhabitants there...Some time later news reached me that Manya and Artek had escaped this particular slaughter but where they are now and whether they are still alive I don't know. I don't even dare to imagine about Rifke...I also don't dare enquire about Mother. By the way, there is no one left whom I could ask.

It is a great tragedy and I have a heavy heart. Those who were not there can cheat themselves and their conscience - but not me. My conscience is burdened. I was there with everybody. What right did I have to save myself. Why should I not have shared their fate? I can't even ease my conscience by pretending that the work I am doing...has saved anybody from this merciless extermination...

What do you say to the murder of Erlich and Alter? Job's sufferings have descended on us.

ZYGIELBOJM'S SUICIDE NOTE

I cannot be silent - I cannot live - while remnants of the Jewish people of Poland are dying in their desperate struggle. My comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto died guns in hand in the last heroic battle. It was not my destiny to die as they did, together with them, but I belong to them and in their mass graves.

By my death I wish to make the strongest possible protest against the passivity with which the world is looking on and permitting the extermination of my people.

I know how little human life is worth today, but as I was unable to do anything positive during my life, perhaps by my death I shall contribute to breaking down the indifference of those who may be able now - at the last moment - to rescue the few Polish Jews still alive from certain annihilation. My life belongs to the Jewish people of Poland, and I therefore give it to them gladly. I wish that the remaining handful of several millions of Polish Jews could live to see the liberation of a new world of freedom and justice and socialism. I believe that such a Poland will arise, and that such a world will come!

REMEMBER SZMUL ZYGIELBOJM
Come to the unveiling of his memorial plaque
1pm Sunday 12 May, Corner of Porchester
Road and Porchester Square, London W2
Organised by the Szmul Zygielbojm Memorial
Committee and Westminster Council

A ROTTEN ACT

In November 1995 the Jewish Socialists' Group held a dayschool on the struggles of immigrants and refugees. Steve Cohen of Manchester Immigration Aid Unit opened the day with an overview of the debates about immigration to Britain

For those of us in this room the question is not: are immigration controls racist? The real question is whether immigration controls can be non-racist. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, for example, believes that it is possible to reconstruct immigration controls and make them non-racist. I think it is politically very important to argue against that and to say that controls are intrinsically, inherently, inevitably, and by design racist. In terms of practical politics that has a lot of consequences.

From what we read in the papers every day the racism of immigration controls is quite clear: controls are about black people - control of black people, control of black labour. I know from my own workplace that racism brings misery to black people. It's an unremitting total attack on them. Black families are smashed in the name of defending family values - white family values, nuclear family values. Black children have to give blood tests to get in here - a Dr Mengele approach to immigration controls - to prove their parentage, to prove that they're genuine. The whole notion of 'genuine' and 'bogus' has been politicised in a Kafka-like way. Heterosexual relationships are attacked as marriages of convenience, which means bloody inconvenient if you spend 15 years trying to get into this country. It goes on and on.

Whose welfare?

I don't believe for a moment that the British State cares whether a black individual comes here but what is part of the political agenda is the humiliation of the entire black community in this country through immigration controls. That is why internal controls - the intrusion into the daily life of black people - is so critical.

Look at the relationship of the welfare state to immigration control: black people now have to account for their presence here at each stage of the welfare process. Benefits - what's left of them - are increasingly dependent on immigration status. Income support, housing, health care, housing benefit, educational benefits, and family credit and disability benefits will soon be linked to immigration status. At the point of claiming entitlement to benefit, every black person is made accountable for their presence. Conversely, claiming those benefits can also make your immigration status vulnerable.

The political question is: can this system be made non-racist? Can it be made rational? This is an important question because it reflects the current position of the Labour Party and the TUC.

When the Reform Synagogues invited me to talk about immigration control at a United Nations day on racial justice I told them that I'm fed up with talking in liberal, compassionate terms about why deportations are wrong. Personally, I said, I'm in favour of smashing the system. As a result, among workshops entitled 'Holding hands for racial jus-

tice', 'Spirituality for racial justice' mine is called 'Smashing the system'! I think immigration controls are so much part of the definition of the British State that there is no way they can be rolled back within capitalism. It would require the end of the state to get rid of immigration controls.

Marx defined the state as 'bodies of armed men' - the police, the army and the other adjuncts of terror that the state has. The immigration service has now joined those 'bodies of armed men' - the death of Joy Gardner is a clear illustration of that. But the daily enforcement of immigration control rests on both the ideological acceptance of immigration control by the mass of people and on the brutality of the immigration service. Campsfield detention centre is one part of that brutality. These are the 'armed men' policing the black community.

A century of controls

This century can be divided into three. In the first half of this century came controls against Jews. In the second, controls against black people. The last decade has brought controls against anyone trying to flee mayhem, poverty or wars throughout the world.

The early controls enacted against Jews were critical. We were in there at the beginning. One hundred and twenty years ago the idea of immigration controls would have been seen as absurd, just as now, opposition to all immigration control puts you in the pariah class of British political life.

No one could have argued for immigration controls before the 1870s. There were military fortifications like Hadrian's Wall but there were no immigration controls against masses of people. These controls coincided with imperialism. Immigration controls were imposed at the moment when international migration of labour became technically and economically possible.

The 1860s and 1870s were a period of free trade which completely contradicted any notion of immigration control. It needed the struggle against Jewish immigration to legitimise immigration control. It is an interesting question why it was Jewish and not Irish immigration that provided this legitimisation. I believe it was because of the power of antisemitism whose defining feature is the accusation of an 'international conspiracy'. The idea that Jews were trying to take over the world constituted a pretty powerful argument for immigration controls. And it succeeded. But it needed a 20 year struggle which began in the 1880s - the period of mass Jewish immigration to this country - and took until 1905 to win. In the second half of this century the experience was repeated against black people, but it only took four years from the 1958 Notting Hill riots to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.

Ever since 1905 it has been impossible to challenge the principle of immigration control. It has become part of the structure of the state, partly

because it legitimised nationalism within the Labour movement which was in the forefront of the struggle for immigration control during this period of industrial unionism when the early socialist organisations were just beginning.

In London and Birmingham the British Brothers League operated from 1902-1905 using all the methods later employed by the National Front, the BNP and the Mosleyites and in the same districts. This legitimised terror on the streets by the dispossessed, unemployed English, for the most right wing political reasons.

A reactionary leadership

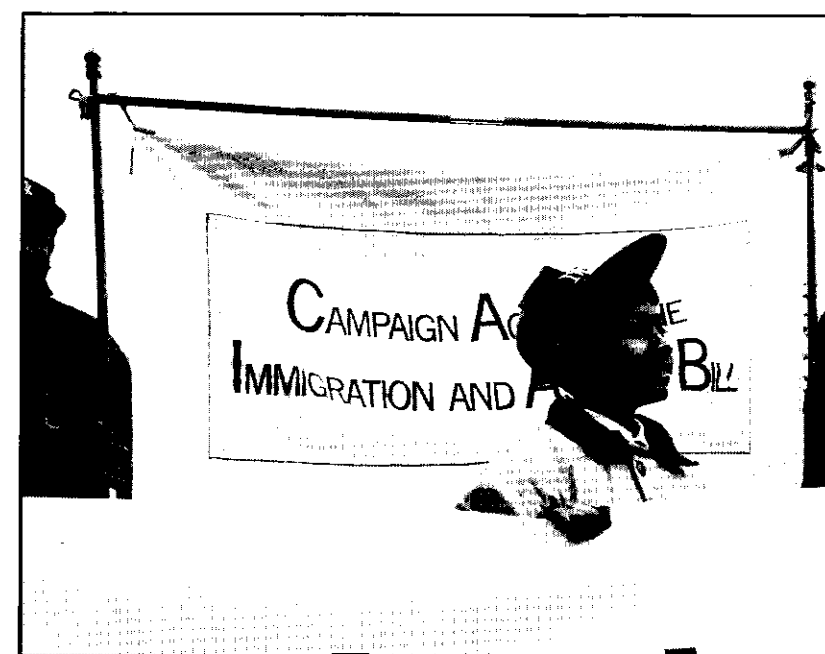
Also legitimised was the role of the Jewish leadership - because the Jewish leadership was split on the Aliens Act. Those who supported it received knighthoods. The Jewish Board of Guardians opposed it on the basis that they could control Jews better than the British State by putting up adverts in Yiddish in Hamburg telling people not to come. One of the lessons for the black community is precisely the character of the Jewish leadership that established itself around this period by siding with the British bourgeoisie.

The Aliens Act helped legitimise anti-communism. One of the strands of the Aliens Act was an image of the Jew as revolutionary. Through the 1920s, at the time of Bolshevism, when immigration controls were again used against Jews, one Jew a week was deported from Britain. The struggle for the Aliens Act is not just of parochial interest to us as Jews; it has had real consequences throughout the ensuing years because it legitimates every rotten 'ism'.

The two most powerful moments of immigration control in this country - 1905, when the Aliens Act became law and the post-war controls against black people - coincided with the two periods of welfare in this country? The early years of this century saw the liberal reforms - pensions and national insurance. The second half of the century began with the generalised welfare state. This juxtaposition of immigration control and welfare provision seems paradoxical but it is not, because welfare here is nationalistically defined - It is not welfare for everyone. Just as black people are excluded from benefit today by immigration status being linked to entitlement, so it was with the Pensions Act and National Insurance for Jews.

All these rotten values were legitimised by the Aliens Act making it easy for post-War controls to be introduced against black people. In the late 1950s fascist groups around Birmingham and London agitated for controls, and like the British Brothers they were successful. The Labour movement helped them: as early as 1957 the TGWU supported controls, and throughout the 1960s the TUC had the most reactionary positions.

The other side to all this is the history of resistance which was also repeated. Jewish resistance to immigration control was class resistance, from the 1880s-1905, often in the teeth of the Jewish establishment. It was resistance on the street, of mass rallies, mainly in London and Manchester, which managed to neutralise parts of the British Labour movement. That was repeated in the second half of the century. Black self-organisation has constantly



raised the question of immigration control - and there is now a culture of resistance to control. It is unique in its individual campaigning against deportation. There was Jewish resistance to implementation of the legislation, but never resistance to deportation of individuals.

No room for compromise

It is important for socialists to say no to immigration controls. You can't stand this thing on its head and get rid of the racism endemic within it. It is illogical, nonsensical to think that we can take the racism out of immigration control.

The consequences of arguing against all immigration controls are that we should make alliances with black people on the streets, not with the self-proclaimed black leadership. Because, like the Jewish leadership, they are *makheres*, part of the tribe of the *makherites*, and their ideology is *makherism*. They also want deals with the British state and they are not going to oppose immigration control as a matter of principle.

It is important to get away from liberal mind-sets about compassion which lead to arguing that one deportation case is more deserving than another. A woman with two children who has been deserted is no more deserving, no more genuine than a fit and healthy young black person who is under threat of deportation. But it is almost impossible to have a campaign for a fit and healthy young black person because the game is played on the terms of 'compassionate circumstances'.

Another reason to oppose all immigration controls concerns the Labour Party which will undoubtedly bring in 'employer sanctions' - the criminalisation of bosses for hiring so called 'illegal labour'.

The final reason for demanding an end to controls is to do with the Jewish community. The biggest problem for us as Jews is how to involve any section of our community in these debates at all. This is the question I will leave you with: if we are taking a principled position against all immigration controls, how do we involve the community in that?

THE TEMPTATION OF TRIBALISM

Following the assassination of Rabin, Israel's turbulence has become visible for all to see. Michael Warschawski explores ways forwards

It may sound paradoxical, and even blasphemous, but the assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, was an expression of the process of normalisation of Israeli society. 'The state will no longer be what it was,' was the sad lamentation of politicians and opinion-makers in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. It would have been more accurate to say: 'The state is no longer what it was, as the assassination so harshly but conclusively demonstrates'. In other words, to Yigal Amir belongs the distinction not of having broken the first taboo, but one of the last: a Jew killed the elected leader of the nation. The violation of this taboo brings with it the demise of a number of sacred cows, including the unity of the nation and the sanctity of the Shabak (the Israeli security services).

The fact is that the unity of the people long ago ceased to be a reality; all that remains of it is nostalgia, distorted vision and myth. Not only the Bar-Lev Line fell on the Jewish Day of Atonement, 1973: so too did the uncritical attitude towards the Zionist project, its myths and taboos, its rules and norms of behaviour. Very few Israelis understood this at that time, although they spoke about the 'negligence' of army, intelligence and governmental leaders. A mere three-and-a-half years later, the Labour movement's fifty-year hegemony came to an abrupt end with the inauguration of a Likud-led governmental coalition. Yet it took another six years and the invasion of Lebanon for the depth of the split to be manifested in profound fissures in the Israeli national consensus.

Our journal has always emphasised the challenge to the consensus that emanated from the more progressive end of the political spectrum: the refusal to serve in Lebanon and the occupied territories, the recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian people and of the PLO as their representative, the decreasing desire to serve in elite combat units and even in the army, the new historians who challenged the accepted narrative of Zionist history, etc.. All these phenomena were signs of the cracking of the old Zionist consensus, evidence of the weakening of the national unity that had been a reality for years and was one of the main characteristics of Israeli society.

However, the right wing of the Israeli political

spectrum was also infected by the spirit of revolt against fundamental elements of the consensus. Specifically, a new hierarchy of loyalties crystallised among broad circles of the far right: one which placed the 'Land of Israel' and/or the religion of Israel above unconditional loyalty to the state.

In religious-Zionist circles, especially amongst *Gush Emunim*, a kind of reactionary post-Zionism has arisen in recent years, contesting some of the old taboos of Zionism, especially the primacy of the state and its (intra-Jewish 'democratic') norms, which had facilitated the political stability so essential to the state in its formative period. The existence of an alternative system of values - something which never existed on the

Zionist Left - brought with it a new possibility, however small, of the outbreak of a 'civil war'; of the classification of the prime minister as a traitor, and of his assassination. One can learn a lot from a brief examination of the term 'traitor'.

From the point of view of the old Zionist consensus, the combination of the words 'prime minister' and 'traitor' were a contradiction in terms, for the government was seen as the ultimate guardian of the nation's interest and well-being, indeed of its very existence. A traitor was someone who challenged this view. Only the birth of a competing value system allows one to call the prime minister a traitor.

This polarisation of left and right is a cause of Rabin's assassination, and

not, as some would have it, an effect. In the face of such polarization one would hope that the left would define its own hierarchy of universal, democratic values, of the sanctity of human life and of the equality of all peoples - and wage a struggle not only against the messianic, fundamentalist terrorists, but also against the more 'respectable' right-wing forces, which spawn and legitimise fundamentalism. What happened was exactly the opposite: since Rabin's assassination, the entire Zionist camp is attempting to reunite, to recreate a consensual discourse and a feeling of tribal national unity, despite or perhaps precisely because of the death of the leader.

The politicians, and the media, especially the electronic media, are hastening to reproduce a consensus bolstering the ruling establishment and

grounded in 'legitimate' political discourse. They are scurrying to distance themselves from the weeds that grow on the dark side of the garden and to demonstrate a renewed almost monolithic political discourse.

In fact, the wild rhetoric of the right shows that the national consensus is shaky, and that there are deep divisions on substantive issues. The erosion of the national consensus began during the war in Lebanon and intensified during the Intifada. But as deep as the divisions may be, they are only partial, and are perceived by most Israelis as an undesirable, temporary phenomenon which in no way negates the underlying national consensus. Hence, their constant search for events that can be used to paper over the fissures, restore national unity and return to the warm embrace of the consensus. The Gulf War was used in this way; and after every attack accompanied by heavy casualties, a similar attempt is made.

One can therefore understand the efforts of the government, especially its more 'dovish' wing, to include the religious parties and the secular right-wing party, Tsomet, in the governing coalition. These parties contributed quite a bit to the recent delegitimation of the government. But even after the assassination the government did not take the opportunity presented by the deep public shock and the crises of the right to combat the discourse of fundamentalism, the attack on democratic values and the lenient attitude towards anti-Arab terrorism. Instead it has chosen to woo the right in the name of the 'unity of the people' and 'preventing a civil war'.

In a grand effort to walk this wayward path, leaders of Peace Now recently held a dialogue meeting with the head of the Yesha settlers' Council, the Settlers' only major organisation in the country which refused even to pay lip service to contemplating its past sins in the wake of Rabin's assassination. Given the policy of forbearance adopted by the left, it is not surprising that the settler leaders managed to put the Peace Now representatives on the defensive. As Ha'aretz reported: 'Nissan Slomiansky of the Yesha Council noted that Amos Oz, Yossi Sarid and Yair Tsaban wrote, when they were in the opposition, adamant articles in which they asserted that if it was ever decided to transfer the Arabs, the Left would refuse to carry out the orders. 'You have red lines you will not cross, and so do we, with regard to the evacuation of settlements. It is important that each side recognise the other side's red lines', he emphasised.

It is doubtful that such a conciliatory peace camp will be able to counter fundamentalist terrorism, which is likely to become more prominent within the hard-core right in the next decade. More likely, the political centre, composed of traditional Zionist parties representing Zionism's past and not Israel's future in the 21st century of

the New World Order, will face the fundamentalist Right alone. If Israel wishes to avoid a future in which Jewish fundamentalism leads inevitably to a total confrontation with the Arab world, an alternate system of values which rejects the spirit of tribalism must become the basis for a new consensus. The proponents of such an alternative must not shrink before the spectre of 'civil war', for such a 'war' would be one between light and darkness, life and death. The current leaders of the peace camp, imbued with racism, cannot generate such an alternative. Perhaps, however, a new spirit will arise among the remarkable young people who have mobilised in recent weeks, spurred out of their silence by the shock of Rabin's assassination. These youth have already demonstrated more than once that they are no longer enchained by the myths that paralyse their elders.

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Ben-Gurion declares Israel's independence in 1948. Today its national consensus seems irretrievably broken

AN AGUNA AUNTIE WRITES...♦♦♦

Campaigners opposing discrimination in Jewish religious divorce must beware of reform which parts company with equality, says Dena Attar



Jewish women demonstrate outside the Chief Rabbi's office

Pleas have gone out to various sections of the Jewish community lately asking men and women to rally round in support of the aguna campaign. According to halacha, Jewish religious law, the aguna is a woman who remains chained or anchored to her husband although there is no longer any real marriage, because she cannot obtain a *get* (Jewish bill of divorce). Her husband may have disappeared or died or may be unreasonably refusing her a *get*, or using his refusal as a way of extorting money.

At first sight it may seem that there are unequivocal grounds for supporting this campaign. Divorce is after all one of the most obvious examples of discrimination against women in Jewish law. Only a man can give a *get*, an inequality which is bound to lead to abuses of power. Women researching the situation of *get* and agunot have uncovered cases around the world, some resulting in women staying trapped for decades unable to remarry.

One immediate problem is that it is unclear what the campaigners want. Different solutions have been proposed over the years in various communities. One is the pre-nuptial agreement, which makes Jewish marriage in some sense conditional on the husband agreeing to give his ex-wife a *get* in the event of a civil divorce. There are two ways

of making this stick, and both are problematic. One is to allow the rabbinate to annul a marriage retrospectively, if the husband breaks the agreement. The other is to resort to the civil courts to pursue him for breach of contract, although of course in the last resort if he was vindictive or stubborn enough, a husband could still refuse to comply and opt instead for a fine or prison sentence.

The alternative demand that religious authorities should themselves apply sanctions to recalcitrant husbands - meaning some form of public disapproval, such as not calling them up to the Reading of the Law - is even weaker and vaguer. None of these solutions does anything to change the fundamental inequality. The one solution which would do so is for women themselves to have an equal right to give their husbands a *get*. But it is not at all clear that the current campaign is calling for this.

The campaign appears even stranger when those involved speak of their painful dilemmas. Women victimised by Jewish divorce law have been left unable to rebuild their lives, denied the chance to remarry and have children. Everyone agrees these cases are tragedies. The rabbis agonise, because according to them the law does not allow them to do much more than wring their hands and apply personal pressure in individual

cases. But this is in a civil society, where the partners have almost certainly already divorced in civil law. So what exactly is going on?

I shall take the rabbis seriously and assume they mean what they say, and that they are well-intentioned. Their problem is that if they get it wrong and allow a woman to remarry without a halachically valid divorce, she would be entering a forbidden union. Children of a forbidden union are called *mamzerim* in Jewish law, and are unable to marry Jews. It is desperately important to avoid creating such outcasts. For women in orthodox communities, theoretically free to remarry in civil law, this threat against their unborn children is enough to keep them in line. Orthodox Judaism would not recognise the validity of a remarriage and any future children would be stigmatised throughout their lives, and denied the prospect of a legal Jewish marriage themselves.

The aguna campaign hardly begins to address this issue. This is not any great surprise, since those involved are virtually by definition women within traditional orthodoxy and to examine wider questions would mean making a more fundamental challenge.

Inequality in Jewish marriage goes much further than the question of which partner is allowed to give a *get*. The best analysis is the one provided by Judith Romney Wegner in *Chattel or Person?* (1988), an exhaustive discussion of the status of women in the *Mishna*. Wegner argues that women are not treated consistently either as people or as property, but that there is nevertheless a consistent rule: women are always treated as property in relation to their biological function, and as she puts it, or reproductive capacity. There is a mass of law whose purpose is to determine exactly which man owns a woman's biological function, when.

The *get* itself tells the divorced woman explicit-

ly that from now on she is permitted to all other men. Previously, she was permitted to no other man. But for the husband, quite different rules applied. He was previously forbidden to enter certain sexual unions (according to the degree of relationship to himself or his wife), but did not come under any general prohibition. So as a contract, Jewish marriage covers the ownership of a woman's biological function, and not a man's. The point of the *get* is then to establish who now owns it or can own it in future. Backing up the law on marriage and divorce is the ultimate sanction, that children of a forbidden union will be permanent outcasts from the community.

It is of course much easier for the discussion on aguna to revolve round questions of whether there is a legal precedent for a woman to instruct a scribe, or whether an additional clause would alter the unconditionality of marriage, than it is to ask why anyone should tolerate for a moment longer a law which discriminates so savagely against a whole class of people.

If there were no sanctions against women who opted for the civil route to freedom, and against their children, rabbinic authority might be undermined. It seems unlikely that the rabbis will act to alter the consequences of ignoring halacha in favour of women, without altering the law itself. On the other hand, it would be possible in theory to give women an equal right to divorce, without addressing the question of *mamzerim* and their status.

If sticking to the surface issues means accepting the underlying principles, what is the best way to respond to the aguna campaign? I think it has to be said aloud that support comes with reservations and that opposition to one kind of discrimination should not be based on acceptance of another kind.

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The great misleader

With his 'million man march' on Washington Louis Farrakhan has recently emerged as the most prominent Black leader in the United States. Dave Landau and Charlie Pottins analyse the real nature of his movement

Though Farrakhan's march was not as large as it was claimed this was the biggest demonstration of any kind in the United States within living memory, bigger than the civil rights marches of the 1960s.

Farrakhan's political opponents, such as Reverend Jesse Jackson, felt obliged to speak on his platform, and the US President devoted a speech to the occasion. More recently, President Nelson Mandela found it appropriate to shake hands with Farrakhan, even though the latter's notorious utterances against 'race-mixing' should have made him more at home with apartheid's supporters. At this rate, when the next uprising takes place in America's ghettos it will be Farrakhan to whom Clinton turns for a summit conference.

Most socialists and anti-racists, Jewish as well as non-Jewish, have underestimated the danger represented by this development. Some have attempted to see something progressive in the movement behind Farrakhan. Even if they find his politics, and his Nation of Islam movement, problematic, they appear frightened to be left behind. In the United States, Angela Davis stood out as a Black radical unafraid to oppose this tide. In Britain, Labour MP Bernie Grant defended his right to speak on a Nation of Islam platform.

Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam are unremittably homophobic. Farrakhan's attitude to women was illustrated by it being a 'Million Man March'. Yet some on the left seem as ready to excuse these as they are to tolerate Farrakhan's antisemitism.

Black people in the United States have grounds for despair and anger. Their jobless rate is more than double that of whites, the median income of black households little more than half. The infant mortality rate is twice that of the white population, and compares with that of Third World countries. One third of black men between 18 and 29 are either in jail, on probation, or awaiting trial. The average life expectancy of a black man in Harlem is 49. When one adds to this the voice of rich politicians and pundits proclaiming that it is the failure of the black family, or the black man, that's to blame, one can understand how many men who don't go along with Farrakhan's ideas felt they should be on that march.

But understanding this does not excuse the way people who should know better have claimed the march as a great 'step forward', and buried their misgivings about Farrakhan. In the early days of Russian Populism some naïve intellectuals hoped in vain that anti-Jewish pogroms were a first stirring of peasant discontent with oppression. They eventually learned that popular antisemitism was a weapon in the hands of the autocracy. If comparisons seem far-fetched, consider the following statements:

'The Jews talk about "Never Again" . . . You cannot say "Never Again" to God because when

he puts you in the oven you're in one indeed. "Never Again" don't mean a damn thing when God gets ready for you.'

'Since the Jews are in control of the mass media, newspapers, television, radio, we knew that we could begin to look for a concentrated attack . . .'

'So they call me Hitler. Well, that's a good name. Hitler was a very great man . . . He rose Germany up from nothing.'

'I say this. I'm not backing down from the Jews because I know their wickedness. I'm not separating just Zionists out because the Zionists are the outgrowth of the Jewish transgression.'

You might expect such remarks from a neo-Nazi, from one of the worst enemies not only of Jews, but of black people. But the speaker in each case was Louis Farrakhan. Whether or not all those responding to his appeal agree with him (only 5 per cent of those taking part in the 'Million Man March' said they agreed with the Nation of Islam), we cannot ignore Farrakhan's ideology.

Farrakhan's remark about not separating out 'Zionists' was useful honesty, lest anyone on the left sought to put an 'anti-Zionist' gloss on Farrakhan's hate-filled demagoguery. Farrakhan's views do not stem from Zionist misdeeds against Palestinians, or Muslims.

Nor do they owe anything to Muslim theology. The Nation of Islam's total hostility to 'race mixing', its agitators' denunciations of those 'sleeping with the enemy', the racist stereotyping of Asian people in NOI's paper *The Final Call*, are as alien to Islamic belief and tradition as the clip-on bowties bows worn by Farrakhan's suited adherents would look on a keffiyeh. Nor does this movement relate to African culture. Farrakhan's racism, like NOI's emphasis on 'self-help' and business, are 'as American as apple-pie'.

When Malcolm X returned from Mecca he said that seeing people of different colours praying together had made him think of the possibility of the oppressed being able to unite against oppression. Such thoughts are dangerous for American society, just as they were when Martin Luther-King started backing low-paid workers' union struggles. In December 1964, Louis Farrakhan wrote: 'Malcolm shall not escape . . . Malcolm is worthy of death.' Malcolm -El Haji Malik el Shabbazz - was killed just two months later, on 21 February 1965.

Malcolm's widow, Betty Shabbazz had little doubt of Farrakhan's role in the assassination. 'Nobody kept it a secret,' she told a television interviewer in 1994. In January last year, Qubilah Shabbazz, Malcolm's daughter, was accused of plotting to kill Farrakhan, in what looks like an FBI set-up. Oddly, the government's informer, Michael Fitzpatrick, operated at one time with Rabbi Meir Kahane's Jewish Defence League. Both Farrakhan and Kahane began their careers on the FBI payroll. Divide and rule is the name of the game.



Adolf Hitler's horrified refusal to shake hands with the triumphant Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics is a piece of history everyone knows; but Louis Farrakhan's favourable comparison of himself to the Nazi fuhrer was no isolated piece of stupidity. A delegation of six American Nazis were welcome guests at a 1962 Nation of Islam rally. Farrakhan and his predecessor Elijah Muhammed had contacts with leaders of the Ku Klux Klan. Farrakhan is friendly with Tom Metzger, leader of the white supremacist Aryan Nations.

Farrakhan finds a niche in the Nazi framework, believing he can rule the black ghettos while Nazis ethnically cleanse the rest of the United States. He already has a mass following, which they do not. Of course, it's a dream. Theodore Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, thought he could make a deal with antisemites like the Czar's Minister of the Interior Von Plehve; but when Nazism triumphed in Germany all Jews were targeted for death camps regardless of their beliefs. In a Nazi America there would be not much for whites, and nothing for blacks, certainly no black nation left for Farrakhan to rule over.

In the meantime, however, Farrakhan and Nation of Islam can fulfil a role for white racism and reaction. Precisely because they feed on the desperation of the most oppressed, yet lead people up the blind alley of black capitalism and segregation, and away from potential allies, these false prophets serve as a fifth column for black people's

biggest enemies, enabling racism and fascism to penetrate the black community.

However, black people can read their history. Whatever Farrakhan's apparent success at this moment, neither he nor the Nation of Islam will be able to fool people for long, once the relationship with white racism, the Klan and Nazism stands exposed, as it must be.

The exclusion of women is bound to be a weakness for any movement, and a source of instability. There is a long history of women's self-organisation in the Afro-American community, and women have led many revolts in black history. The opposition mobilised by Angela Davis is a sign of more to come.

Malcolm X became convinced that capitalism was doomed, and violent struggles would shake America. Nation of Islam will be pushed back to the margins and defeated if a really strong, determined movement is built, uniting Black people, Jews, Asians, women's movements and the poor, trade unionists and the unemployed; committed to vanquishing all forms of racism and corruption (including those within our communities and the Labour movement); and seriously tackling the exploitation and poverty that Afro-Americans in particular have suffered.

Calling things by their proper name is part of that; and that means exposing Farrakhan as an antisemite, an ally of Nazis and white supremacists, doing the US rulers' dirty work.

Farrakhan supporters join an anti-racist march in London.

PHOTO: SIMON LYNN

CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO?

Julia Bard questions the value and values of Jewish schools in Britain today

The number of Jewish schools has grown over the last 25 years with the result that 'non-Jewish' schools, particularly at primary level, have lost many of their Jewish pupils. This is leaving a cultural and educational gap in the lives of many schools as well as depriving thousands of Jewish children of the experience of working, playing and learning to live as members of one community among others.

At the same time, those Jewish children who remain in the mainstream state education system have decreasing opportunities outside school to learn about Jewish history, culture and religion. Synagogue Hebrew classes are closing down, no longer viable because so many children are now in Jewish schools. The passing of the 'teaching methods' of the traditional *kheder* is no great loss to those who, like me, wasted dreary and resentful years translating bits of the Bible and the Singers Prayer Book by rote, but Jewish schools are neither an equivalent, nor an alternative. Unlike out-of-school classes, Jewish children and their families now face an all-or-nothing choice which is splitting the community, perhaps irrevocably, into insiders and outsiders. A self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating system sets children on (or off) the path to a place in the community: to be an acceptable Jew you must have been to a Jewish school; to get into a Jewish school you must be an acceptable Jew.

Jewish schools are promoted by the rabbinic and communal establishment as the way to guarantee the continuity of Jewish life. A teacher at a Jewish school argued at a Jewish Women's Network conference in Manchester last year that this was the best way of 'immunising our children against assimilation'. This idea that mixing with non-Jews is like exposure to a disease is an alarming shadow of Nazi ideology. The assumption is that Jewish children need protection from the poisonous influence of the outside world and that the only way of protecting them is to segregate them. Like apartheid, for those who live or work within the mainstream of the community, this segregation is made to seem inevitable and unquestionable as well as desirable.

I have friends who have spent all their adult lives arguing that the central lesson of the Nazi period is that we must not discriminate for or against anyone on the basis of their ethnic origins, cultural practices or religious beliefs. Nevertheless, they send their children to a school founded on just such discrimination. The application form for a place at this sought-after, state-funded institution has to be

returned with the parents' *ketuba* (Jewish marriage contract) to prove not only that they are, indeed, married, but that they were married by the right rabbi in the right synagogue. They also have to supply the child's birth certificate. And in case anyone is tempted to sneak in a child of less-than-impeccable racial origins, the school also demands the mother's birth certificate and the maternal grandparents' *ketuba*. (For some people who lost grandparents under the Nazis, this is an impossible demand.)

No wonder progressive parents who send their children to Jewish schools feel uncomfortable about that choice. They would like their children to mix with those of different ethnic origins and religious persuasions, to learn about other peoples, cultures and religions, but they are opting for the opposite. What do they think is the pay-off in picking schools that accept only a narrowly defined group of Jewish children and dictate how they and their parents must express their Jewishness?

Some parents are concerned about antisemitism in mainstream schools, but perhaps more significant are the fear of assimilation and a lack of confidence in their own ability to transmit Jewish traditions to their children. The fear of assimilation is fanned by a Chief Rabbinate desperate to attract members to its own fold, the United Synagogue, whose numbers are falling fast. For the rabbis to accept that Jewish life consists of many different beliefs, customs, languages and traditions, would be to relinquish their right to define who is a Jew and where the Jewish community begins and ends. Instead they prefer to set up schools where, as well as the government funding received by any state school, parents have to pay hundreds of pounds a year for the 'Jewish' part of the curriculum.

You don't have to be particularly cynical to suspect that the entrance criteria of these schools are designed to pressurise families into becoming members of the synagogue in charge of the school — at a cost of even more hundreds of pounds. At which point it becomes clear that there is a class issue at work, too. Few working class Jewish families can afford these 'extras', so the circle closes. Educated, well-off parents can ensure that their children go to school with those of families in the same income bracket, who share their ambition to push their offspring ahead of the crowd, without ever having to make explicit that elitism is their motivation. In any case, children who are poor, black or have special educational needs are filtered out by the entrance criteria which religious schools are allowed to use. (This applies equally to Church



Cabinet making class, Jews' Free School 1908

schools which, in areas like the East End of London, are often white ghettos in a predominantly black community.)

One justification for Jewish schools was presented to me by the same teacher who advocated 'immunisation against assimilation'. She said that they are a good thing because they 'make Jewish children feel normal'. By 'normal', she meant that they feel more comfortable being in the majority. But what is normal for Jews is to be a minority. That is what we have been for at least 2000 years. 'Minority-ness' is the warp and weft of Jewish culture and religion, custom and tradition. The diversity and adaptability of our entire way of life has enabled us to survive as a non-territorial people living amongst and alongside others. There have always been some people who have assimilated and others who have become Jews, sometimes in large numbers. We have always moved to and fro across the boundary between our community and the surrounding society (even from the Nazi ghettos, as survivors testify).

There have always been many different ways of being Jewish depending on where we live, our relationship with the people we live amongst and our particular beliefs. And since Biblical times, Jews and their neighbours and enemies have pondered the conundrum of our identity, survival and recognition of each other. But now, all of a sudden, it's 'normal' for us to bring up our children in isolation from our neighbours' children. And in order for them to be entitled to this 'normality' we need a letter from our rabbi certifying that we go to synagogue regularly and keep a kosher home.

The growth of religious schools has been encouraged by the 1988 Education Reform Act which established that in all supposedly secular state schools there must be a daily act of 'mainly Christian' worship and that religious education must be 'in the main' Christian. The rabbis might

have been expected to oppose this law on the grounds that for schools to prioritise Christianity would inevitably mean that they discriminated against members of minority religions or no religion at all. But instead they conceded to the Church establishment and simply argued that they should have a slice of the cake too, either by coming into schools to represent 'their' children, or by setting up separate schools.

In this atmosphere, even many progressive, anti-racist Jews have been drawn into arguing on the terms defined by those religious leaders. Most people seem to have accepted the extraordinary claim that imposing religious worship on children is necessary to their education. For them, the only question is what religion to impose. Drawing on anti-racist rhetoric, priests of all religious groups, particularly those tinged with fundamentalism, argue that the only way to challenge discrimination is for children to be educated 'with their own kind'. Pushed further, 'their own kind' comes to mean different schooling for girls and boys as well as for Catholics, Protestants, Jews and, soon, no doubt, Muslims. The language of equal opportunities is using children to boost the power and privilege of a religious elite which is entirely male.

Jewish schools founded on inequality and discrimination cannot possibly offer children the chance to fulfil their potential in an atmosphere of openness, discovery and freedom of ideas. And it is nothing short of *chutzpa* for the religious authorities that run them to claim the unique right to administer moral education to the next generation. If there is to be any chance of equal opportunities for children of all faiths and none, and for discrimination to be outlawed, state institutions like schools must be secular spaces where religious faith and worship are recognised as personal matters to be respected, not unquestionable dogmas to be imposed on other impressionable minds.

● The Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) and Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) promote pluralism, defend the rights of expression of all, including those of no religion, and oppose any kind of worship in schools. For further information, contact them at the following addresses: JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX; WAF, Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.



NAME GAMES

There was no 'unique' Jewish or Gypsy holocaust, says Donald Kenrick, who takes issue with those who assert a hierarchy of genocide

Jewish writers are tending to use the word Shoah rather than Holocaust to describe the Nazi massacre of the Jews. A few Romany writers have started using the word Porraimos to describe the Nazi massacre of the Gypsies. It is not my intention here to discuss the etymology of these words or the reasons for dropping the term 'Holocaust'. I do, however, wish to look at the way some writers are trying to create a distinction - or rather a hierarchy - in genocide. In this hierarchy other victims, such as homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and political prisoners - not to mention Soviet prisoners of war and handicapped Germans - get largely ignored.

Let us look first at what some Jewish writers are saying about the difference between the murder of the Jews and that of the Romany Gypsies.

Yehuda Bauer has what has been called a twin-track position in which the destruction of the Jews was unique and Nazi policies towards Gypsies and others have to be viewed in a different way. For him 'the whole Gypsy problem was for Himmler and most other Nazis only a minor irritant. Since the Nazis often solved minor social irritants by murder, this is apparently what happened to many Gypsies.' Bauer again: 'Not to realise that the

Jewish situation was unique is to mystify history.' Eli Wiesel agrees: 'The Holocaust was essentially a Jewish event.'

Bauer and Steven Katz both indulge in games with words. Bauer, in his incredibly short (under four pages from 2000) article devoted to Gypsies in the Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust, writes: 'The difference between the fate of the Gypsies and that of the Jews is clear. The Jews were slated for total annihilation, whereas the Gypsies were sentenced to selective mass murder on a vast scale.'

Katz, writing about Native Americans, summarises his theoretical position: 'We want to maintain our distinction between physical genocide and demographic reduction.' Elsewhere he says the Jewish victims of the Nazis were the result of 'ruthless, monolithic, metapolitical, genocidal design,' while the Romany victims died through 'enacted obliterative malevolence'.

One Romany writer, Ian Hancock, has reacted to this by putting forward a case that the genocide of the Gypsies was worse in many ways than that of the Jews. First he looks at the chronology and correctly says Gypsies were put in internment and forced labour camps before Jews. He then discusses statistics and cites from various sources figures

such as the 'genocide of more than a million Gypsies in Nazi concentration camps.' On this basis he less rightly calculates: 'We lost 75 per cent of all the Romanies in the world' and that was a higher level than for Jews.

Jewish and non-Jewish writers, such as John Fox, Henry Friedlander and Simon Wiesenthal, have argued an alternative theory - that Gypsies and Jews were equally dangerous for the Third Reich and both races were to perish. Wiesenthal wrote: 'I was for over four years in different camps with people from 15 nations - Jews, gentiles, Gypsies, communists. For me the Holocaust was not only a Jewish tragedy, but also a human tragedy.'

The debate has mainly been carried out in the United States - rather surprisingly in view of the fact that Nazi Germany did not extend its empire to America. It surfaced in Britain at a conference eight years ago sponsored by the late Robert Maxwell. At this Oxford conference Katz launched his claim that the fate of the Jews in the Nazi period was fundamentally distinguished from any other case of human abuse. He cited the medieval killing of witches, the near extermination of the Native Americans, Black slavery and the deaths of homosexuals, Gypsies, Poles and Ukrainians during the Second World War. Since then he has begun what is likely to be a three-volume work on genocide where, again, every case is not just quantitatively but also qualitatively different from Hitler's Final Solution for the Jews.

Wiesel's participation in the debate on the side of the uniqueness of the fate of the Jews brought him into conflict with Gypsies and Wiesenthal. It is widely believed Gypsy organisations wished to go to Oslo to stage a demonstration against Wiesel's 1986 Nobel Peace Prize. Wiesenthal pleaded with Romany Rose, president of the German Council for German Sinti Gypsies, to call off the protest. Alan Levy wrote that he saw 'Wiesenthal and Wiesel stalk a stately minuet of snubbing each other around the gefilte fish at a kosher buffet in the Grand Ballroom in Vienna' and attributed this to their dispute over the relative suffering of the Jews and Gypsies.

In the United States a debate has also ranged on how books about the Holocaust are indexed in the Library of Congress. It reached its height - or depth - when a book of paintings by a Romany artist (The Story of Karl Stojka: A childhood in Birkenau) was given as one of its subject headings 'Holocaust-Jewish (1939-45) in Art - Exhibitions.'

This is not the place for a discussion of that debate, a detailed refutation of the argument that the genocide of the Jews was different to that of the Romanies, that the suffering of either group was worse than that of the other, or indeed of socialist lawyers or Catholic antifascists - if suffering can be measured.

It is true - according to people who say 'the fate of the Jews was unique' - more Jews were killed and that in most countries the percentage of deaths was higher. But that is because the population was larger and in general orders were given to concentrate on Jews. However, this was not because they were the greater enemy, but that often everywhere they had houses which could be used for ethnic Germans returning from the east or Gypsies who had been pulled out of their caravan homes and

deported to the east. The *Einsatzgruppen* in the occupied Soviet Union indiscriminately killed Jews and Gypsies - not to mention 'commissars'. Their monthly reports of killings do not always distinguish between one group or the other.

The discussions continue. Who was killed first, as part of a mass murder rather than as an individual? Who was first sent to a concentration camp? Was Dachau a forced labour or concentration camp when the first Jew or Gypsy was sent there? These facts - perhaps relevant to historians - have little use in looking at the overall attitude of the Nazi leaders to certain groups.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the so-called Nuremberg Laws as well as the 50th anniversary of European liberation. I write 'so-called' because, although they were announced at Nuremberg in a party rally, they were decisions by Hitler and his entourage, not laws presented to Parliament, discussed and subjected to a vote. These laws established the principle of first-class and second-class citizens. Germany had become decadent and needed to be purified. From then measures against the second-class citizens became gradually stronger until they were to be physically eliminated. In a few cases, able-bodied men and women could be used to help the war effort. They were, however, to be sterilised or the sexes divided so there would be no new generation.

The second-class citizens included the Slavs of whom Hitler was no friend. He wrote in *Mein Kampf*: 'I was repelled (in Vienna) by this whole mixture of Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Serbs and Croats. To me the giant city seems to be the embodiment of racial desecration.'

The leaders of the Catholic Polish community in Germany were sent to concentration camps at an early stage. During the period from the 1939 Nazi-Soviet treaty until the onslaught on the Soviet Union, the campaign against the Slavs was limited to attacks on the Poles. Hitler again: 'The Poles are not Europeans, but Asiatics who can be handled only with a knout [whip].' The Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal recognised this and declared 'the accused have conducted deliberate and systematic genocide against particularly Jews, Poles and Gypsies.'

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, it became clear who was next after the Jews and Gypsies. Orders came from Berlin: 'The Slavs are to work for us. In so far as we don't need them, they may die.' Kuznetsov remembered that on the marquee of the Kiev Ballet Theatre hung the sign 'No Ukrainians or dogs admitted.' The Nazi juggernaut required a continual supply of victims to feed the need for slave labour and frighten any member of the 'pure German' class of *Reichsbürger* who might think about stepping out of line.

Holocaust, genocide, Shoah, Porraimos. As we come to the end of this anniversary year, we need reminding (if, despite Rwanda and Bosnia, this is necessary) that anyone can become a persecutor or victim. The crime begins when someone believes he or she is superior and others are lesser beings. That is why it is important to recognise there was no unique Jewish holocaust or unique Gypsy holocaust. Similar mass genocide happened before. It is happening now and can occur in the future if we do not learn from history.

Opposite: Suspicion and harassment of travellers was present in pre-Hitler Germany: police check on a gypsy camp at Oberschwaben, 1925.

● Donald Kenrick was joint author of *Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, which remains the only overall study in any language of the fate of the Gypsies under the Nazis. University of Hertfordshire Press has published a revised and updated edition, *Gypsies under the Swastika*.

PASSED OVER

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה
מכל הלילות שבכל
הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ
ומצה. הלילה הזה כל
מצה: שבכל הלילות
אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות.
הלילה הזה מרור: שבכל

**Charlie
Pottins tells
a story of
exodus,
resistance
and survival**

'Did you paint your eggs yet for Easter?'

'No. Have you baked your baklavas for Bayram?'

They laughed. There was a war on. Eggs and other good things were scarce, but not good neighbourliness. Hearing Tihomir had visitors, the Muslim lady next door had brought some tasty bureks, savoury pastries, for our breakfast.

April 1994. I'd almost forgotten Pesach. I'd miss the JSJ seder. But on the way back to the Tuzla miners' club, passing old people collecting food parcels from the big Serb Orthodox church, we came upon some people selling bits and bobs outside a block of flats. Among the old fishing tackle, portable radios and paperbacks, a brightly-

coloured art-book was propped up, a facsimile: Sarajevske Haggadah.

In 1894, a child from the Cohen family came to infant school in Sarajevo carrying an old Hebrew book under his arm. His father had died, and the family needed to sell its prized possessions to buy food. The teacher who purchased the manuscript book recognised its value, and it was taken into the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This Sarajevo Haggadah attracted scholars. Its 84 white parchment leaves were beautifully illuminated. It had no less than 34 pages of Biblical scenes depicted in brilliant blues, reds and golds. Abandoning the notion that Judaism frowned on

representational art, scholars awoke to the extent of illuminated Jewish manuscripts.

On the fly leaf of the Haggadah was a note of sale, dated 1510, written in a Hebrew that experts recognised as a north Italian hand. But further clues indicated a more distant origin. A passage "pesach misraim mibet aven, 'from the house of iniquity ...' was known to have last been in use in Provençal seders. Some of the pictures showed people wearing hooded garments once fashionable in Barcelona.

The experts concluded that this Haggadah had most likely been produced in the kingdom of Aragon, some time in the late 14th century. It must have begun its journey to Sarajevo with the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. But the Haggadah's adventures were not over. . .

In April 1941, the Nazis reached Sarajevo. The book was menaced with its people. A German officer came to the museum, demanding to see the famous Haggadah. But the museum's director had had the foresight to spirit the Haggadah away.

Just as Moses was hidden in the bulrushes, and later took refuge with Midianite miners, the book of liberation of the Hebrew slaves spent the war years concealed beneath the floor of a peasant's cottage in a remote Bosnian mountain village.

In 1941 the Nazis' Croat allies, the Ustashe, set up a state swallowing most of Bosnia. They also set up concentration camps like Jasenovac. With the blessing and participation of Catholic priests, they butchered thousands of Gypsies, Serbs and Jews, as well as many Croats and Muslims who opposed their regime. Serbian fascists also rounded up Jews, and massacred Muslims in Bosnia.

Ustashe state propaganda provided the International Red Cross with photographs depicting Jasenovac as some kind of holiday recreation centre. But truth came out. In November 1942, Tito's partisans entered Bihac, north-west Bosnia, recruiting Muslim youth, establishing a resistance government, the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council, and setting up their own press. On Tuesday, 8 December 1942, Vladimir Dedijer noted in his diary:

"We are working on a brochure about Jasenovac, one of the most frightful documents of recent times. Several Jewish comrades escaped from the camp after first killing some guards. They swam across the Sava and reached Kozara.

. . . In the brochure are mentioned the names of hundreds of our comrades who have been killed in this camp. I dropped in on the printshop and explained how this brochure would have reverberations among the people. Solomon Romano, a quiet, calm worker, one of the best in the entire print shop, is silent today, not lifting his head from the type. I thought he was ill, but he quietly says: "I have been unable to sleep since I began to typeset this."

I did not immediately understand what he meant, but then I watched him. Solomon continues: "They took my father, mother, three sisters and two brothers there. I was at home with them in 1941, but jumped through the window and then went right to the partisans. . ."

Solomon's father was a poor tinsmith. When I talked about this over lunch, little Albert bowed his head. Afterwards some comrades explained

that the Ustashe took his father, mother and two sisters to Jasenovac.'

(Vladimir Dedijer, Dnevnik, V.II).

Solomon Romano, a Jewish printer from Sarajevo, had joined the communist youth in 1936. He fought as a partisan in the Romanija mountains east of Sarajevo, as well as working on the underground press. Albert Altaras, 20 at the time Dedijer met him, had also worked in the print trade before taking to the hills.

Dedijer adds a note on the escapers:

"These comrades were Moric Danon, Moric Romano and Solomon Katan. They were forced to work on the right bank of the Sava at Gradiska. They attacked with axes the Ustashe who had taken them to a mill. Later they headed for Kozara, lost their way, and emerged somewhere near Kotor Varos. They first fell into Chetnik hands, but were soon freed by the First Proletarian Brigade. The three then joined our army. Solomon Katan died after the Fifth Offensive, and Moric Danon and Moric Romano remained in our army until the end of the war.

The Ustashe shot comrade Solomon Romano's father Isak, and brother Leon, an apprentice, at the end of 1942. The Germans took his mother, Hana, brother Jahica and sisters Rifka and Nina to Loborgrad, where they died in the gas chambers.'

April 1992; war and barbarism returned to Yugoslavia. Fascists returned from Australia, California, and the Argentine. Croat forces trashed the museum commemorating the victims of Jasenovac; hadn't their President Franjo Tudjman vandalized its history? In Bijelina, Serb Chetniks slaughtered Muslims in the mosque, with grenade and machine-gun fire, then went in and pissed on the bodies. Dr. Karadzic's artillery bombarded Sarajevo's national library with high-incendiary shells, book-burning on a spectacular scale.

April 1993: in Warsaw, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the ghetto revolt, Dr. Marek Edelman reminds people that it is happening again: "In Bosnia we are witnessing mass slaughter, and Europe is behaving the way it did toward the resistance in the Ghetto'.

What had happened to the Haggadah? When children and old people are targeted by snipers, thousands of women raped, and mortar bombs hit bread queues, who will care for an old Hebrew book? Rumour had it the Haggadah had been burnt, or it was ruined by fire hoses; or the government had secretly sold it abroad to buy arms.

Pesach 1995. In the third year of siege, the remaining Jews of Sarajevo, the remnant of a remnant, gathered for a seder. Not Elijah the prophet, but President Alija Izetbegovic, his ministers, and the Muslim imam, Spahic, arrive. Praising the Jewish aid organisation La Benovelencia, for helping all Sarajevans, they handed over a present for the community. An old book. . .

The Sarajevo Haggadah has survived. Like many Bosnians it may go abroad. Hopefully, it will return to Bosnia with the tradition of civilised tolerance which first brought it to that land, and sheltered it. Hopefully, despite the pharaohs of imperialism, ethnic hatred and partition, the vision of freedom and humanity for which so many Bosnians fought and died, in the Second World War and in the past few years, will live on.

LAST RITES FOR JEWISH RITUALS

After the screening of a critical documentary about circumcision, debate is developing about a whole range of previously unquestioned practices and customs. Paul Collins and David Rosenberg take issue with tradition

Jewish leaders seem to have a death wish over handling life-cycle events. But the only unpredictable element about outdated hatched-to-despatched traditions is to forecast when, not whether, their ultimate demise will take place. Growing numbers of Jews now challenge received values ranging from traumatic circumcision to aloof funerals. At a relative's send-off, after his sudden and brutal death through illness, the ultra-orthodox minister banned a fulsome eulogy because it was so close to Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur. The problem with fundamentalists is their certainty that God's pre-eminence cannot stand competition.

Still, their irony knows no bounds. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' frequent lament for the family — a male-led hierarchy by his definition — obscures the fact that female partners, siblings and children do not join men shovelling earth over the grave of the deceased.

The mindless conservatism maintained by Sacks and his ilk betrays the same contradictions as the misnamed cultural rearguard, 'Jewish Continuity'. The pluralism they claim for their project of saving Jews from mass assimilation founders on the reality that only those who follow acceptable doctrine qualify for club membership. Mind you, consistency is not a plentiful commodity among Jewish customs. Witness the sniggers which greet the prayer for the divorce-strewn Royal Family which is included at weddings that also feature the national anthem for the equally-split Israeli state.

Life is a big enough gamble without marking its key moments with rituals which resemble casino games. Take the barmitzvah of my wealthy older brother's son held near Chancellor Kenneth Clarke's rural home. Before the band arrived from Monte Carlo at vast expense, guests sheltered for the service under a giant marquee.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain, who cultivates a caring image, devoted his sermon to Noah's Ark in the Torah portion and managed to omit any topical connection to new laws curbing asylum seekers.

His decision to mention, with admiration, the coming-of-age boy's preference for golfers over footballers on the grounds that they are 'nicer people' demonstrated an appropriate hypocrisy. Not much different from Gerald 'Crap' Ratner, a guest at the event who asked rhetorically why he was attending the reception when watching the video later would offer a comfortable alternative.

Our community might claim ironic supremacy across the whole cultural spectrum, but a people which celebrates life with each toast of *lekhyaim*, all

too often fails to give proper acknowledgment when its citizens take their final breath. The *shiva* is supposed to be the way Jews grieve for their loved ones for a sustained period. The only trouble is that the tradition of meeting relatives and friends, with scarcely any reference to the deceased, lasts a week — but seems to last a lifetime.

Irish wakes at least offer comfort from warm tales which recall whoever has passed on before anyone passes out from excessive Guinness and whisky. The Emerald Isle folk are the one white lot who even approach the true emotional release found at other ethnic minorities' funerals.

The recent WASP-dominated ecumenical service which I joined at the Royal Marsden hospital in London where my mother died is likely to have appeared subdued for the few black participants present. The odd quiet sob contrasted with the wails and weeping familiar at many African and Caribbean farewells. The Marsden deserves praise for a remembrance event which drew atheists and believers alike. The lights in glasses for all those now gone, somewhat resembled *yortsayt* candles.

The eulogy which I wrote for my mother's send-off at Rainham cemetery tried to puncture the formal stuffiness with her own humour. Once — in hospital with pneumonia to compound her cancer — she defied a medical ban on fluids in her raging thirst and removed flowers from a vase before gulping its contents. Even in pain she would respond to and then surpass visitors' jokes by rolling her eyes and exclaiming, poker-faced: 'Look! This is serious!'

Convention brought a mixed reaction to my eulogy and brought telling reactions from the small gathering in frozen Essex. My plea that the minister 'put a lid on any long *spiel* before anyone catches their death' produced expressions to match the weather from detached relatives and tonic laughter from her most sensitive mourners. Ending the reading with a verse from her favourite Stevie Wonder song drew similar reserve from the former group and a *hey mishe* glow for the rest.

There appears a bizarre paradox that, with his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler rejoiced in a life which almost secured genocide, while most Jews fail to mark key points in their existence. It will be left to a growing progressive minority to establish new customs. These will include coming out as lesbian or gay, reaching political maturity through opposing Zionism, and becoming vegetarian and succumbing to all temptation except carnivorous dishes like chicken soup.

Paul Collins

NEW CUSTOMS FOR OLD

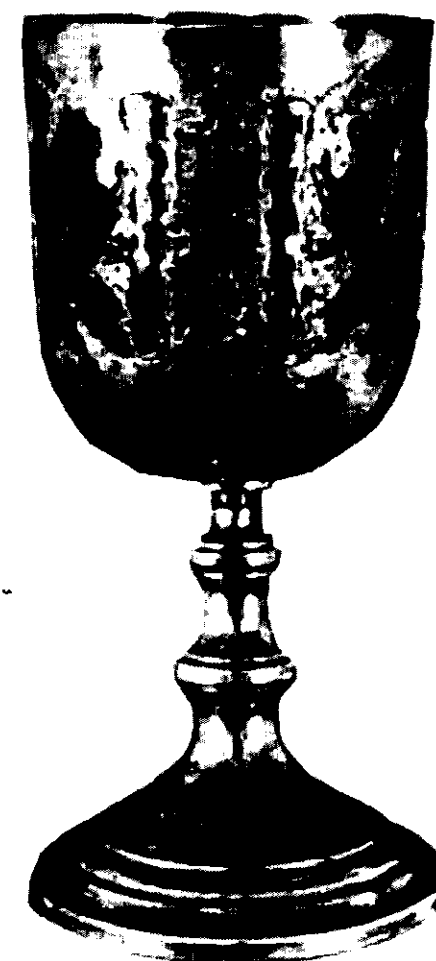
There was a time when people claimed that if Jews abandoned the dietary laws - *kashrut* - it would herald the end of Jewish life. The prophets of doom were wrong. For many Jews today, *kashrut* is something that their superstitious, *shtetl*-raised grandparents practised but which is of no relevance to them with their modern outlook. In the Reform and Liberal religious sectors it has pretty much been abandoned altogether. Even in the orthodox United Synagogue community, there are many Jews who maintain a kosher home but are happy to eat all manner of food when they are out. Jewish life goes on.

Some of the reaction to Victor Schonfeld's film about circumcision, screened on Channel 4 last September, has led to equally apocalyptic conclusions. If Jews abandon this, the oldest of traditions, then what would be left of Jewishness? I believe that Judaism and Jewishness would be all the better for abandoning it. Jewish life, culture, history has so many humane and positive values that jettisoning an irrational and potentially harmful practice can only strengthen it.

And I wouldn't stop there. What about turning Rosh Hashona into a celebration rather than a day when Jews with little connection with synagogues the rest of the year turn up in solemn assembly to mumble repetitive prayers to a God few believe in? What about creating an alternative to barmitzvah - an occasion which seems more to do with impressing friends and neighbours and providing an occasion when ever more distant relatives have a reason to come together - than about any meaningful transition in the life of a child who has reached the age of 13. 'Don't mess with barmitzvah,' I hear a voice calling out. 'It will be the end of Jewish life'. I don't believe it.

Doom-laden fears about the impending demise of Jewish life are based upon a myth - that the core of Jewish life has remained unchanged over the centuries. The prayers may be very ancient, certain practices may survive in an aged form, but the way Jewish life is lived has changed considerably from generation to generation. It is impacted on by all manner of social, economic and political circumstances. Jewish life evolves. At its most stark, there is the symbolic replacement of a sacrificed animal with a bone on the Seder plate at Pesach. There have been other symbolic replacements as Judaism has adjusted to the norms of the societies in which Jews have lived. I am not a religious Jew - quite the opposite - but I am sure there are enough positive aspects of Jewish life and culture that we can afford to jettison the irrational, harmful and meaningless aspects.

The Yiddish language, Jewish food, humour, literature, art, identification with the oppressed, anti-fascism, festivals marking our history of struggles and the cycles of nature - these I am more than happy to keep, not as museum pieces but as living resources. Whether my children will



need them in the same way or to the same extent - who knows? The Chief Rabbi, and not a few Jewish parents, angst about whether Jewish life will continue. 'Will we have Jewish grandchildren?' asks Jonathan Sacks. 'Will my grandchildren live in a world free from hunger, starvation, war and exploitation?' I ask. To my way of thinking, whether they wear a *tallis* is less important than whether they are forced to wear a yellow star. In the meantime, as far as I can see, Jewish life goes on and, in a world where ethnic, cultural and historical identity is constantly renewing and reinvigorating itself in both a positive and negative fashion, I think its time for secular, progressive, forward looking Jews to stake our claim to shaping the Jewish future.

I don't think we can rely on backward-looking rabbis, land obsessed Zionists, and conservative communal 'leaders' to take Jewish life forward to the challenges of the 21st century. It has taken a good few thousand years to start the debate on circumcision; I think we could afford to move more quickly on other issues. Any takers?

David Rosenberg

CLUB CLASS

From a disused vicarage in Whitechapel the Brady Club grew to become the University of the Jewish East End. Mike Gerber tells its story

It was the early sixties, we had 'never had it so good', and working class families began taking package holidays abroad. Purists may lament the coming of the Costa Del Boy, but I yearned to join this annual migration to the Med. Trouble was, my folks couldn't afford it. All I could look forward to was the occasional day-trip to the south coast. Then along came Mrs Pollard, the solicitor's wife from the nearby shul. She arranged, through the Jewish Welfare Board, for me to tag along with the kids from the Brady club, then still situated in London's East End.

I didn't get to join the Bradians abroad, but for several years I went on their English holidays which meant a proper 10-day break in resorts like Seaford and Littlehampton in Sussex, then graduating after my barmitzvah to the club camps at Charmouth, Dorset.

Brady, which is 100 this year, was the highlight not only of my school holidays, but of my whole year. Dad would temporarily raise my pocket money while Mrs Pollard donated a package of her son's cast-offs. On the eagerly-awaited day she would arrive at my house in Kilburn in her lovely Humber limousine - all plush leather seating and french-polished dash - and we would glide eastwards across the sprawl towards Whitechapel.

It was always thrilling to see the charabancs idling outside the grimy club building as we turned into Hanbury Street, soon to transport me with coachloads of streetwise east London Jewish kids, the real Bradians, beyond the brickscape for another year.

Without the philanthropy of Mrs Pollard and those behind her there would have been no holiday for me. And without the efforts of 19th century philanthropists, there would have been no Brady club to write about.

It was founded in 1896 by three eminent Anglo-Jewish families, initially for boys only. A disused vicarage in Durward Street, Whitechapel, was the original premises, next door to a tenement where dwelt hundreds of the Jewish immigrants from central and eastern Europe who had populated east London. Whatever the higher motives, a club movement was flourishing as part of the Jewish establishment's drive to anglicise the newcomers as a hedge against anti-semitism. The Jewish Working Men's club, launched in 1872, was followed by the Jewish Girls' club (1886), the West Central Jewish Girls' club (1887), the West Central Jewish club (1895), Brady, the West Central Lads' club (1898) and the Stepney Jewish Lads' club (1900).

'They were erected by wealthy, highly cultured Anglo-Jewish families, many with important functions in British society,' explains Loveday Herridge, assistant curator at the London Museum of Jewish Life. 'The stream of immigrants, without jobs, were a problem for them, potentially inflammatory.

Brady's founders wanted to provide a sort of welfare system to help the boys settle, show them the ways of British youth and encourage them to understand British culture and speak English rather than Yiddish.'

Ms Herridge sent me a snippet from a book on the new Anglo-Jewry which illustrates how pervasive was Brady's influence in those early days. By 1903, 'three-quarters of the boys were children of foreign parents. Most of them were apprentices, through the Board of Guardians, which advanced their apprenticeship premiums and was paid back in easy instalments. Conversation at the club was in English and the games arranged, as at the other clubs, were the normal English sports'.

Though with the addition of a girls' club in 1921 children remained pivotal to Brady, it gradually expanded its activities till, to quote a 1956 promotional leaflet, members were cared for 'ranging from kindergarten to old age pensioners'.

'Elderly people come into the museum who say 'Brady was my life. It was there I met my wife, my husband, took my holidays', says Ms Herridge.

Funding came from various sources, including the old Ministry of Education and London County Council, communal and local organisations, individual donations and legacies. There were minimal paid staff, guest experts in a variety of fields were occasionally hired, but managers - the adults who put on activities for and supervised the kids - were all volunteers, as were the Brady settlement trustees and executive.

One who paid handsome tribute was Charles Spencer, a Brady boy before the last war who afterwards served as club leader, manager and executive member. In the September 1970 edition of Zymot, the club magazine, he wrote: 'I don't think I could begin to list the benefits I got out of Brady; in the fullest sense it was my university. I was always bad at school, largely through nerves I think; Brady - notably the leaders of my day Sam Ansell and Sydney Drage - recognised that (they did the same for others). They encouraged me to learn and develop - whether it was taking a course in French at Berlitz, for which one of the Jacobs' family paid, or becoming proficient at typing and shorthand.' Spencer, who in 1944 worked for the Jewish Relief Unit in refugee camps in Europe and the Middle East, went on to become a world-ranking art critic and journalist, writing for such publications as the New York Times. He said: 'Nothing I have done in later life is without some degree of foundation in Brady.'

Accountant Alan Wells was another who moved up through the Brady ranks. Now 60, Alan grew up in Whitechapel and began as Brady boy scout just after the war. When he turned 11 he was old enough to become a member. The grown Alan served as a manager, treasurer and executive member.



Brady's founders wanted to understand British culture

He was also editor of Zymot when an article appeared on 'VD - the facts' - a sign of the times. Ten years earlier, at the outset of the swinging sixties, the club had finally gone unisex. The merged Brady was based at Hanbury street, in a modified version of the building which had served the girls since 1936. 'Before the merger, when the boys were still in Durward street, it was only at the Sunday socials that the senior boys and girls actually came into contact,' recalls Alan.

Young children however had been allowed to breach the defences. Alan used to go to *heder* (Hebrew) classes, in Deal Street school almost opposite the girls' club where there were afternoon sessions for young children. 'Miss Moses and Miss Benjamin oversaw us and we used to buy tea and bread and jam rather than go home. Then we would go back to *heder*. For younger children there were mixed activities like the percussion band.'

Miriam Moses he remembers reverently as a Brady legend. 'She was very strict, very forbidding but she had a heart of gold. During the war there was a hostel for young girls in the girls' club and she was warden. No girl, perhaps made homeless by the bombing, would be turned away. I don't think Brady ever got the credit it deserved for this type of work. When tenements in Vallance road were hit by one of the last V2s, hundreds of people were killed. Miss Moses was one of the first on the scene. Only recently there was a memorial service for those who died there. She was honoured for that and for her communal work generally. That's why she got her OBE.'

Before Alan could become a fully-fledged member of the boys' club, he was a provisional member

for a month. 'During that time you were compelled to do two activities a week, one a sport. If you didn't you weren't elected to membership. When I first went there the club leader was Freddy Friedman followed by Charles Spencer.

'Then came Yogi Mayer. He was a high-class athlete who had been banned from the German olympic team because he was Jewish.' During the war Mayer served as a British intelligence agent. Mayer was to reminisce in Zymot: 'When I came to Brady I was still in uniform.' In 1948 Mayer founded the Primrose club for boys and girls rescued from the concentration camps. By 1950 Mayer felt he had completed his job there and returned to Brady, this time as club leader rather than instructor.

Mayer initiated the Brady holidays abroad. Alan Wells was one of the pioneering kids on the first overseas holiday in Schwellbrunn, Switzerland, in 1952. 'Before that there were holidays in Britain only - the Isle of Wight, Norfolk...although these annual camps were the highlight of the year as it was the only holiday people had. I'd been to the Brady scout camp and the last thing I can say was that I'd enjoyed it under canvas. But when I went to the Isle of Wight it was marvellous. It was under canvas but the food was better, they had a cook.

'Then Yogi Mayer said he wanted to take a holiday abroad. If you can imagine people whose parents had never left the country - it's very difficult to compare with what happens now when most people don't want to go to Brighton or Southend. After that there were regular holidays abroad. It wasn't a seaside holiday, it was an activity holiday, walking up mountains. There was football,

volleyball, a keen sense of rivalry between the tents. There were shows, entertainments laid on, managers would act the fool for us. The kids were poor but not necessarily the managers. If you went on a Brady holiday as a manager you paid. There were about 200 children, eight to each bell-tent. These camps were so well organised they ran like clockwork. A Brady holiday wasn't complete without the last night supper, we were really well fed. By 1960 they were having two holidays abroad at the same time, possibly Italy and Switzerland, and switching groups half-way. This was unheard of even for package tours.'

I ask Alan what happened when a child's parents were too poor to send them. 'Occasionally, with particularly hard up parents, there was a subvention - there was no committee, it was all done very quietly.'

The first overseas sorties were for boys only but mixed holidays began even before the club unified.

'On one holiday the managers went and hid all the pyjamas. The girls went out and blamed the boys, the boys blamed the girls, and if you can imagine all this at lights out, there was chaos.'

During the year there were weekend escapes to the club country house in Skeet, Kent. Alan smiles: 'It had no mod cons, no electricity - it was part of the experience which for a lot of working class families wasn't normally possible.'

Alan mentions that his sister, Rhona, was a Brady girl for only a short while, but for those who wanted it there were activities most days of the week. 'At the boys' club there were such things as art, gymnastics, a discussion group. There was a library. The social centre was the canteen. At weekends there were football matches outside. Lots of boys were encouraged to take up trades which stood them in good stead for the future, such as furniture making. If any of the managers were in the professions, they would probably help out in that way. They would help with homework, teach people to speak correctly. Other activities that might have led to careers were photography, drama, metalwork. There were also instructors paid by London county council. You could almost certainly come out with some sort of skill. Lots of people went into the professions from working class backgrounds.

'We had guests from time to time. I can remember the Bedser twins - the cricketers. Claire Rayner, the agony aunt, came to talk to us when she was still a nurse.'

'There was also a broad range of activities in the girls' club. There would be cookery, needlework, their discussion group seemed to take place everywhere, you couldn't stop them talking. Girls wouldn't get involved in football, boys wouldn't do netball. When the clubs merged some of the activities became a little more genteel.'

Managers would give up even more spare time to take their group on a special excursion, such as when Alan was in the photography group. 'One year volunteers took us to see dry skiing on Hampstead Heath - I'd never taken photographs of ski jumpers before.'

Some Brady members went on to become famous personalities, such as Lee Montague, the actor, and Georgia Brown, the torch singer whose real name, Alan reveals, was Lily Klatt. Bud

Flanagan of the music-hall partnership Flanagan and Allen had been a Brady boy. Another ex is Mickey Duff, the former boxer and now manager of fighters including Gary Jacobs.

Two star names Alan reels off are intriguing as they are not Jews. 'There was Clifton Jones, the well-known black actor. There was also John Bristow who swam for England. There were other non-Jewish members. They were friends of Jewish members or they probably wouldn't have heard of us.'

Was the club ever a target for anti-semites? I wonder. 'Certainly not on the premises or in the immediate area. There was occasional friction but it was suprisingly rare. Don't forget it was a heavily Jewish area.'

Alan was Brady's treasurer throughout most of the 1970s. 'During those seven years there was always a crisis. There was never enough money.' Among the others involved in Brady's management in those years was Lady Janner, a well known figure of the centre-left. She died last year.

In 1978 Brady finally severed its links with the East End as most of the Jewish populace had moved elsewhere. Taking the new name Brady-Maccabi, the club relocated to Edgware where it remains to this day. But the elderly Jews who stayed put were not neglected, says Alan. 'We made sure those who had used the Brady luncheon club were taken care of.' Terry Cutler, vice-president of Brady-Maccabi, informs me that the luncheon-friendship club still runs every Wednesday at the old premises. 'The luncheon club is still looked after by the Brady foundation,' says Ms Cutler, organiser of this year's centenary events. 'We will continue for as long as the luncheon club remains viable.' She adds, wistfully, that time is gradually taking its toll of the pensioners who use it.

For the rest of the week, the old Hanbury street building functions as a Bengali cultural centre to cater for the Jews' ethnic successors. One day Alan Wells could not resist a return visit. 'I explained who I was and asked if I could look around. After such a long gap, I was suprised how little the building had changed. It was still very busy, there were still people there during the day. I was given the freedom of the place. From what I could gather they were doing the same sort of things which we at Brady used to do. This was in the middle of last year. It still felt like the same old place except the notices on the wall were in Bengali. At Brady the notices were in English and Hebrew.'

From its 19th century beginnings Brady's trustees have always courted the British establishment. It was the Queen Mother, when she was Duchess of York, who opened the girls' Hanbury street premises in 1936. And the Duke of Edinburgh pressed flesh at the club in 1956 to mark its 60th anniversary. For radical East End Jewish history we have to look elsewhere.

Except that Brady unwittingly played a catalytic role in the emergence of the thriving cockney Jewish left between the wars. Two ex-Bradians I know, Marie Glass and Rita Canavan, were club members in the early 1930s. Marie, like Rita still socialist and proud, chuckles: 'Many who met in Brady in those years went on to form the Young Communists and Unemployed Workers' group.'

● For those who want to read more about Brady, there is a centenary book *A Club Called Brady* by Mike Lazarus (New Cavendish Books) £20

Keneyne horror stories

You don't expect an enquiry into your ethnic identity when you go to the doctor for contraception, but that's what happened one Sunday morning in Stamford Hill

One Saturday morning my boyfriend and I had an accident with a condom and had to arrange for emergency contraception. I had once before received a morning-after pill from my GP surgery, so I decided to go and see a doctor there the following day. All the doctors are Jewish and orthodox so the surgery is open for emergencies on Sundays, not Saturdays.

I arrived on Sunday morning, 24 hours after the accident. The doctor winced as I described what had happened, then said: 'You're Jewish, aren't you?' I replied that I was. 'Well I'm not giving you the morning-after pill then.' As I lifted my jaw from the floor, I reminded him that I'd received it once before from another doctor at the surgery, to which he replied: 'Dr L— doesn't realise you're Jewish. If he did, he wouldn't have given it to you either. You can't run away from being Jewish,' he added. 'In fact you're missing out on a lot — but I'm not here to lecture you on religion.'

I tried to argue that contraception wasn't forbidden in Jewish law. He agreed. 'Women can use the pill or the coil, but that's if they need it,' he said. 'You just want it.' 'And who needs it, according to you?' I asked. 'Well, a mother with three or four children who is very tired and can't cope...'

By this stage I knew I would be leaving the surgery empty-handed but wanted to know more about his position on related issues. 'What if I needed an abortion?' I asked. 'God forbid,' he replied. 'Or if I wanted to go back on the pill? Would you prescribe it for me?' 'No,' he answered. 'But someone else at the surgery would.'

At last he grudgingly told me I could come back the next day and get

the morning-after pill from the non-Jewish doctor who would be on duty. 'And how do you know he or she won't be Jewish and refuse me too?' I asked. 'Because its Yom Tov (a Jewish festival),' he answered. 'Well I didn't even know - that's how Jewish I am,' I said.

Finally I asked: 'If I wasn't Jewish, would you have given me the prescription for the morning-after pill today?' 'Yes.'

The next day I saw the non-Jewish locum (a medical shabbos goy?), who prescribed the morning-after pill for me, by this time 48 hours after the accident. (The pill is effective for up to 72 hours after unprotected sex, so I was still within the 'safe' period.) However I had developed a throat infection. The locum diagnosed tonsillitis but said I should wait 48 hours before taking antibiotics because they could interfere with the effectiveness of the morning-after pill. As a result I had to have four days off work. On the Wednesday I saw another doctor at the practice. He prescribed me antibiotics and I described the events of the weekend. I asked him what the practice's policy was on administering emergency contraception to Jewish patients. He was

new to the practice and was reassuringly shocked by what I had told him. He said that he would have prescribed me the morning-after pill and would discuss the matter with the third, and senior, partner at the surgery.

The following Tuesday I saw this third doctor who was as shocked by his colleague's behaviour as I had been. He told me he was very pleased to know I was Jewish but said it was irrelevant to any decision about my contraceptive needs. Both he and the second doctor were evidence of the humanitarianism embedded in the Judaism that I'm familiar with. He said he had argued with the original GP: 'I told him I thought he was wrong. As a matter of fact, I've told him I think he's wrong in Jewish law. I said he should go back and look at his books — but that's something for us to discuss!'

I pressed him on the practice's policy on administering contraception, emergency or otherwise, to Jewish patients like myself. He assured me they would discuss it further, but said the situation had never arisen before. It seems their female patients either wear sheytlis or are so assimilated that their potential babies are as good as gentile anyway!

So beware. Fundamentalism is alive and kicking in Stamford Hill. But thanks to the more humane element within the orthodox Jewish community, my unwanted child isn't.

* The emergency pill becomes progressively less effective as more time elapses after unprotected sex, even during the 72-hour 'safe period'. So if you need emergency contraception, get it as quickly as possible. Your GP's out-of-hours service should tell you where to go if they can't provide it themselves.

● This is the first in a regular slot featuring personal stories that lift the lid on life on the left and in the Jewish community. If you have had an experience that you think Jewish Socialist readers would want to know about, we'd like to hear from you. You can write it yourself (no more than 800 words, please) or give us the outline and we'll arrange to interview you. We can't guarantee publication, but we'll try to cover a wide range of stories. Confidentiality will be respected.

SONG BY LEON ROSSELSON

THE SONG OF MARTIN FONTASCH

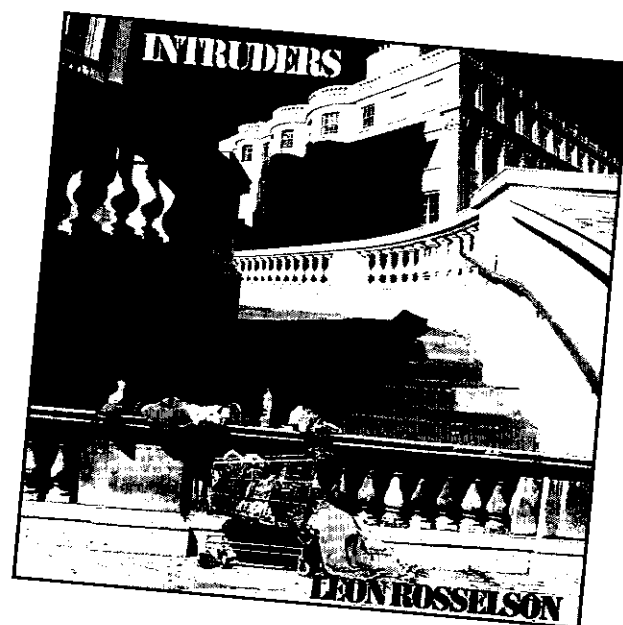
The Story's told of how in 1942
Martin Fontasch, poet, carpenter and Jew
With a band of Partisans threw in his lot
Till he was taken by the Germans to be shot.
He was a peaceful man, quick to laugh and cry
At every village celebration he would be there
With his songs that told of sadness and of joy
And the guitar he carried with him everywhere
But when the Nazis came and killed his wife and son
Martin traded in his guitar for a gun

*This song is for those who are cast out by history
The banned and abandoned, the spurned and ignored
Whose homes have been taken, whose dreams have been broken
Who huddled on hillsides, demand to be heard.*

The German soldier assigned to kill the Jew
As it happened was a music-lover, too
And this bond, it seems, is what made him decide
To offer Martin one last wish before he died
Soon my soul, Martin said, will dance on air.
Now all I ask is time to write my farewell song.
The German soldier checked his watch and said: One hour.
One hour? Martin remarked...that long?
And so he wrote and sang full voiced to raise the dead
And then the German put a bullet to his head

*This song is for those who are cast out by history
The banned and abandoned, the spurned and ignored
Whose homes have been taken, whose dreams have been broken
Who huddled on hillsides, demand to be heard.*

The German kept the song and bragged of what he'd done
And showed it proudly - when in drink - to everyone.
He couldn't read the words and didn't seem to see
That a song cannot take root unless it's free.
And then one night two partisans set out -
The song must be released, the man must die -
They slipped into his quarters; slit his throat
Took back the song and gave it wings to fly.
And so it soared upon the wind and came to rest
And found a home among the damned and dispossessed.



*This song is for those who are cast out by history
The banned and abandoned, the spurned and ignored
Whose homes have been taken, whose dreams have been broken
Who huddled on hillsides, demand to be heard.*

Though we resist oppression, still our dream is peace,
Theirs is the mask of hatred, ours the human face.
Then let not our sufferings turn our souls to ice
So that we do to strangers what was done to us.
It is not with conquering armies I belong
Their bloody retribution I disown
Their songs of triumph I will never sing
For the God they worship turns them to stone
If any teach their children how to hate and hurt,
Though they are Jews they do not live inside my heart.

*This song is for those who are cast out by history
The banned and abandoned, the spurned and ignored
Whose homes have been taken, whose dreams have been broken
Who huddled on hillsides, demand to be heard.*

Let his song be a spark
Let it fly through the dark like a bird

● This song is taken from Leon Rosselson's new CD, *Intruders*, available from good record shops or by mail order from Fuse Records, 28 Park Chase, Wembley Park, Middlesex HA9 8EH. The CD costs £11, the cassette £7 (both prices include p&p). The song is inspired by Primo Levi's book about Jewish partisans in the Second World War *If Not Now, When?* and David Grossman's book about Palestinians in Israel, *Sleeping on a Wire*.

P O E M S

THE TABLECLOTH

A tablecloth,
A white, coarse linen weave,
A dead thing, so it seems
Its threads are gentle rent
In places, as in dreams,
When falling into pits
We wake in unbelief.

So frays this weft.
My father's mother made
The cloth in quiet days.
What patient thoughts she wove
Around this loom, narrow
Village ways, important
Hours underlined her shade

Now, when I touch
This fragile web and spread
It with our wine and bread,
And watch it slowly die,
I grieve not for its breach
But for the broken peace
The rootlessness, our dread

Lotte Kramer

JEWISH CEMETERY, MERTHYR

They grow from the mountain,
tall, stubborn, the Hebrew
lacing them.

Sunk long ago
With love and weeping
Left in this groove of the hills.

They mark where prayers
fell like rain:
stand in eroding winds,
listen for young voices.

Joyce Herbert

● Poems from *The Dybbuk of Delight*, a new anthology of Jewish Women's Poetry, edited by Sonja Lyndon and Sylvia Paskin. Available from Five Leaves Publications, PO Box 81, Nottingham NG5 4ER. £9.99.

CONTEXTS OF CIRCUMCISION

JS I believe the anti-circumcision message of Victor Schonfeld's powerful film shown on Channel 4 is very important. I am a Jewish mother who gave reluctantly her permission for her son to be circumcised under pressure to do it for reasons of 'identity' and 'culture' as well as social conformity.

However, the film also left me feeling uneasy. Firstly, I believe it included a factual error. The wine which is given to the babies is always given, as far as I remember, before the circumcision and the common assumption has always been that the wine has an anaesthetic effect. If this fact would have been incorporated into the film, one would not be left with such a strong impression of the incomprehensible indifference of the parents to

their babies' suffering, however inaccurate such an assumption might be.

Secondly, I believe that the film would have been much more effective if it were less sensationalist. To present a supposedly 'typical' circumcision with a baby who almost dies as a result, is scaremongering.

Moreover, the father in the film who is not Jewish or Muslim and is not constructed as having any particular ethnicity or religion.

His distress in the circumstances is perfectly understandable, but to let him voice in the film his rage against 'the arrogant people' who have done this barbaric thing to his baby, as the voice with whom we all should identify, echoes with constructions of the demonisation of the Jewish and Muslim 'others' as barbaric, cruel, dirty and

with pathological sexuality.

No wonder it was reported that Channel 4 received phone calls which saw in the programme 'proof that Hitler was right'.

I have always objected to the silencing of internal dissent within communities for fear of external repercussions, as this silencing usually serves very specific interests and covers up real gender, class, sexuality, age etc based internal conflicts of interest. However, such a critique has to be contextualised.

Professor Nira Yuval-Davis
University of Greenwich

According to the *Singers Prayer Book*, used by mainstream traditional and orthodox Jews, wine is given to the infant after the operation, not before — Ed.

● SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:
Jewish Socialist, BM 3725,
London WC1N 3XX

IMMIGRATION QUERY

JS As the question of immigration control is one of which Jewish Socialist often makes mention, I should be grateful if you would spell out in detail the magazine's policy in relation to this difficult problem.

My own view is that immigration controls are necessary but I am willing to be persuaded otherwise. Perhaps other readers would like to contribute to this debate.

Michael Lazarus
Hadley Wood, Hertfordshire

Jewish Socialist's brief is to provide a forum for just such debates, though the Jewish Socialists' Group is in the process of formulating policy on this issue. Two contributions to the debate can be found in the editorial on page 2 and the feature by Steve Cohen on page 6 — Ed.

Letters continue on page 28

LACK OF CLARITY

JS Following the Jewish Socialist meeting on circumcision last December (reported on page 3), I am writing to express my fears about the consequences of such ill-advised campaigning. There was a lack of clarity about what was actually being espoused. On the one hand Victor Schonfeld was saying that under conditions of hygiene and proper medical supervision and pain control he would not oppose the practical continuance of circumcision. There was a small consensus around that, with the

additional allowance that if the mohels were properly trained and responsible, there would be less opposition. The espoused aim was to induce Parliament to introduce legislation to this effect.

On the other hand there was manifest the 'total opposition' camp to circumcision within the Jewish tradition, and thereafter, another faction who would abolish it in any form, even going to the extremes of sewing a foreskin back on.

The point which you are missing is the involuntary membership in the Tribe (yes, unashamedly, Tribe).

You've got no choice to being Jewish. You can only choose whether you wish to follow any or all of its precepts and imperatives.

That, I fear, is why certain Jewish Socialists balk at the very idea of circumcision. They are ambivalent to their own Jewishness and therefore reject the imprimatur of the irreversible 'brand' of circumcision. Yet precisely that identification, and reminder, is the prime reason for the continuance of the practice. Such members are depriving their children of the cultural defence mechanism of 'no escape' from being Jewish.

The position taken, therefore, by some Jewish Socialists during the meeting must be

seen in the context of fellow travelling and support for the (non-Jewish) sew-it-back-on contingent who are basically voicing racist and antisemitic sentiments of not wanting to be mistaken for a Jew or Muslim. That is the can of worms you are opening.

The argument by Victor Schonfeld of fighting the fight outside the Jewish community is a luxury we cannot afford. We are not outsiders by choice, only by exclusion. That is a mark of our success, and our strength! If you/we try to defend the totality of the 'freedom' of the above expressions then we are sacrificing validity to pride.

Chaim Neslen
Ilford, Essex

Burying the past

The Hackney Crucible
Morris Beckman
Vallentine Mitchell, £16.50

In his foreword to this book, David Cesarani says that 'The Hackney Crucible' has an epic quality. It documents the saga of one family and, through it, a community. And so it does, on the whole.

Morris Beckman describes in riveting detail the daily rituals of life for a young boy growing into an adult in Hackney during the '30s and '40s. The book is full of charming anecdotes about good humoured, tough women doing the laundry and fine spirited young men having jolly fun in smelly tents at summer camp. These stories are interwoven with descriptions of schoolboys becoming politicised and anti-fascist. This is taking place alongside their often frightened parents also reaching new understandings of their position in a Nazi-riven Europe. Beckman has the edge on the familiar terrain of living history writings in that not only was he fired by the injustices he witnessed, he really did physically resist them.

This truly is Beckman's own story and he retells it with a strong sense of vision, rather like a film. It feels intimate, like settling down to a long conversation with a favourite uncle (warts an' all). The prob-

lem with the book is partly to do with its structure and partly to do with the way in which Beckman's commentary affects his own narrative. He wanders into anecdotes about cousins, in-laws, neighbours, teachers and friends and often seems to forget to finish them. It leaves a strange sense of tales being there because they featured in his diaries rather than for their own merit. These are made even more anchorless by his interspersing long descriptive passages about the socio-political events of the day (in a different time frame) in italics. However, he doesn't quite keep to his own framework and these contextual pieces usually become anecdotal too. Beckman has lots of opinions and focuses quite hard on issues such as discipline. For example, he believes the boys were so successful at his old school, Hackney Downs (formerly The Grocers), because the regime was so competitive and tough: 'The school imbued into us the spirit that while losing was no disgrace, lacking the will and effort to try to win certainly was.'

He peppers the book with tales of popular heroism, some of which have a 'Boy's Own' flavour which can be irritating. Mostly, though, this is forgivable because he *was* engaged in direct action against the fascists in his neighbourhood: 'Free expression in schools did not then exist. Masters gave orders, pupils jumped to obey. The game was played over Hackney Downs on a gravel pitch. Their players were much taller than we were. They wore blue stockings, blue

shorts and white jerseys. On their left breasts were their school badges. Lower, to the right, each jersey sported a small red swastika nestling inside a black circle. Sheinman sidled over to me and said "See those swastikas. I'm glad I'm playing, now. Let's get stuck into the sods." We did. We bloodied many German knees and we won by ten goals to nil.'

He hints occasionally at the tensions felt between the first and second generations in families, usually around issues of integration and assimilation. There are suggestions that he had an uneasy relationship with his devout father, especially where he defied some of his observances: 'Contrary to our parents' views, all that was Jewish was not always good and all that was not Jewish was not necessarily hostile.'

The major feeling the book engenders is one of nostalgia. He describes his local 'leafy streets' being empty enough for boys to play cricket in the road, an extraordinary vision for anyone who knows the bustle of Hackney today. He often becomes wistful when remembering his family with its gargantuan meals and ritualistic card games.

But this book is not filled only with a 'boiled beef and carrots' nostalgia. The wonderful close and closed community he recalls is, of course, no more. He never says explicitly what he feels about his own Jewish identity now, and whether he feels like an insider or an outsider. However, he does hint that he is a questioner and still, in some ways, a dissenter. In the end, the book seems to be rather melancholy, as though his past were being buried instead of recalled. Maybe, that's no bad thing.

Karen Merkel

Ecos from the past

**Redemption and Utopia,
Jewish Libertarian Thought
in Central Europe:
A Study in Elective Affinity**
Michael Löwy
The Athlone press, £40

What do Martin Buber, Zionist devotee of Hasidic tales, and Gustav Landauer, libertarian socialist and co-leader of the Munich commune of 1919 have in common? According to Michael Löwy, Landauer's utopian anarchism was more than tinged with messianic religious longings, while Buber's Kabbalah studies were fired by a belief that the imminent advent of the kingdom of God on earth would lead to a communitarian paradise founded on liberty and social justice. But if this identifies Buber and Landauer as a couple of dreaming utopian rebels, they were not alone. A generation of Central European intellectuals shared these traits. They were in no sense a group or a circle, though many were friends. But they were linked by an elective affinity, by which Löwy means that their cultural influences — both Germanic and romantic, and Jewish and messianic — fused with their social and political environment to produce 'a very special kind of dialectical relationship'.

The book throws together individuals who seem to be going in different directions: Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, Ernst Toller, Hans Kohn, Erich Fromm, Franz Kafka, George Lukacz, Gershom Scholem. Some of these were clearly attempting to combine the Judaic with the Germanic; others vehemently denied their Jewish or German or even both elements. Löwy's great accomplishment lies in the persuasiveness of his case that these thinkers were linked, despite an initial impression that the author began with the big idea and then had to rewrite his characters to fit their required parts.

One striking aspect about this constel-

lation of brilliant minds is that they were all from a generation of acculturated, Germanically educated Jewry (this includes "Hungarian" Lukacs and "Czech" Kafka). Growing up in the period before the First World War, they became increasingly disillusioned with the way society was going and were profoundly shaken by the trauma of 1914-18. But in no case did this express itself simply in negative terms: integral to Löwy's argument is the fact that the rupture of war and revolution led all of them, in varying degrees, to seek the

**'Many of these Jews
whose revolt was
shot through with
the spirit of the
German romantic,
pursued a restless
quest through
politics, culture and
religiosity to find
their true home'**

answer in an almost cosmic vision of redemption and Tikkun — the potential of a new beginning and the rediscovery of a lost harmony. Perhaps this explains why none of them could have been straightforward Marxists. Despite a gut hatred of capitalism, the anchor of a rational materialism failed to satisfy their personal need. Many of these Jews whose revolt was shot through with the spirit of the German romantic, pursued a restless quest through politics, culture and religiosity to find their true home. Leo Lowenthal, paradoxically, suffocated in an atheist household, briefly tried orthodoxy, Zionism, anarchism and the radical socialism of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) before

settling down to become a distinguished academic at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research.

Nor was mainstream Zionism the answer for those who veered more towards nationalism. In Israel, Scholem and Buber are best remembered in political terms as flies in the ointment associated with bi-national ideals. And Scholem's academic work on the apparent revolutionary potential of Hasidism was distinctly suspect. As for Buber, his interest and interpretation of the historic figure of the 'Jewish' Jesus as a libertarian anarchist and prophet of universal utopia sat uneasily with Zionism's more down-to-earth and immediately 'tribalist' project.

Here, then, were a constellation of thinkers whose visionary, romantic — even daft — ideas were bound to be a challenge to the mundane and conventional. Some of those ideas have a rather alarming resonance. Kohn, a critical figure in the Prague Zionist Bar Kochba group before the First World War (which also marginally involved Kafka), contrasts the cold, lifeless sterility of 'specialised and mechanised science' with the *Volksurträume*, the ancestral folk dreams of those seeking 'a return to the obscure and primordial sources of Being'. If there is something Jungian (or, indeed, Nazi) here, Löwy chooses not to explore any common roots in the intellectual soil of German romanticism.

Viewed more positively, however, this romanticism enabled individuals whose links with traditional religion were very slight to find in Judaism or the Judaic both personal sustenance and the basis for a more general transformation, and even transcendence, in human relations. Löwy suggests that Bundists and other East European Jewish revolutionaries would, in contrast have run a mile from Kabbalah and mysticism. Whether this was because these ideas were too close to Hasidism or because they conflicted with a secular, atheist rationalism would be interesting to explore.

If Löwy fails to make this distinction, his overall case remains compelling. His constellation of thinkers fused profound and original ideas with (albeit defeated) attempts to change the world, and their thought was far ahead of its time. After reading this book, I have no doubt that if Benjamin and Buber, Landauer and Rosenzweig were alive today, they would be chief spokespersons and gurus for both a Jewish and a more universal eco-socialism. This book is not easy reading and, at £40, it is expensive, but it pays dividends if you can stay with it, and its contents for Jewish socialists make it worth ordering from the library.

Mark Levene

Were they pushed or did they fall?

Lost Jews: The Struggle for Identity Today
Emma Klein
Macmillan, £12.99

At a recent Chanukah party, I overheard two Jewish men - both 'married out' - discussing how they encourage (or do not) their children to see themselves as Jewish. One said he tells his children the British National Party think they are Jewish, but the Chief Rabbi doesn't. So it is up to them to decide who is telling the truth. This dilemma is at the heart of Emma Klein's book.

Through interviews with 130 'Jews', largely of patrilineal descent, she explores the feelings of these people, their affiliation to Judaism and their future connection with the formal community within the context of serious decline. Or, at least, in serious decline according to those who are counting. The statistics on which Klein bases her work show the community dropping from a high point of 430,000 in the 1950s to 300,000 and falling. The biggest loss came in the last decade. To lose 130,000 Jews seems rather careless. Nonetheless, the figures are extrapolated from synagogue-based statistics of marriage, birth and death. This may not sufficiently consider Jews outside the formal community who happily define themselves as Jewish. Those Jews, unfortunately, are barely covered in the book. It has only the occasional reference to secular Jews and a chapter devoted to those identifying Jews who follow religions such as Christianity, including Helen Shapiro, or Paganism. I think in some of these cases the people are not so much lost as missing, presumed *meshugge*.

Most of the lost Jews in whom Klein is interested are *mischlings* of various sorts. The community she would have them lost from is religious. This clearly limits her book, but allows greater criticism of the religious leadership in their treatment of lost Jews who seek to be found again. And much of the discus-



Jewish socialists: lost property of left luggage?

sion is oriented to the Orthodox community, which does not come out too well. Dayan Isaac Berger refers to patrilineal Jews as not Jewish at all 'and those who are not of the Jewish line are none of our concern.' Anyone born to a matrilineal line, however long lost and little Jewishly identified, is, well, kosher. Another gem is the suggestion that patrilineal Jews are best kept outside the fold so that Israel and the Jewish people have sympathisers in the general community.

Klein, in an understated way - and all the more powerful - would say these kind of views do not hold much hope for the future, where intermarriage will happen, whatever its opponents might want. Klein proposes using Israel's Law of Return, which permits anyone with a minimum of one Jewish grandparent to immigrate, as a basis for Jewish identity. In her opinion, religious bodies should find ways to admit such people without difficulty. The community would grow again and gain from new blood. It appears she looks for models to the American non-orthodox communities and indeed East European Jews who have adopted easier rules to survive. She

does not advocate or encourage outmarriage, but recognises it as a reality.

The strength of this book is not in its statistics, but the telling of the stories of many lost Jews who struggle with their inheritance. They seem to be punished for the 'sins of their fathers'.

The book is mostly well written, though it could have been shorter and cheaper without losing much force. The internal layout can be confusing on whether she or her interviewees are talking. In addition, Klein has an annoying habit of describing the latter's physicality. Telling readers a certain Sophia is 'petite and blonde' adds nothing to her account. I also wish the writer was less concerned about the ancestry of 'distinguished' families and hangers-on to royalty. And the cover is dreadful. But I imagine the book is not targeted at the average *Jewish Socialist* reader - even less a lost *goy* like myself. I hope it does have some effect on those at whom it is aimed, since a more open Jewish community would benefit this journal's readers and all of us in mixed relationships.

Ross Bradshaw

Some books inform and a few also leave you feeling empowered. Norman Finkelstein's *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (Verso, £12.95 pbk) is one of the few. Finkelstein takes a number of phases in Israel-Palestine history and picks for each one a particular Zionist myth, which he then demolishes. His most devastating scorn is directed against Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial*, the best-selling book which argued that most of the Palestinians in pre-1948 Palestine were recent immigrants from neighbouring countries, attracted there by the booming economy - which, the story goes, was largely created by the Jewish settlers. Finkelstein lays bare a catalogue of misquotations, falsified evidence and conclusions that bear no relation to the facts, deciding that Peters' book was a 'spectacular fraud'.

Finkelstein turns next to the Palestinian exodus in 1948, arguing that the population transfer was planned in advance by people like Ben Gurion, who made various statements to this effect to Yishuv leaders while continuing in public to advocate socialist-humanist ideals. As for the 1967 war, Finkelstein argues that the main factor which led to the Israeli air attack on 5 June was a desire to humiliate Nasser and prevent radical nationalism from spreading in - and unifying - the Arab world: Israel was certainly not in 'mortal danger', as Jews round the world were encouraged to think at the time.

Finkelstein's most disturbing chapter looks at parallels between Zionism and other nationalist and colonialist ideologies, notably Nazism. He cites many examples of soul-searching by Israelis: Ben Gurion condemning 'unjustified torture of Arabs' ('justified' torture was OK, of course), or liberals worrying more recently about the moral effect on Israelis of the military occupation. He then gives similar examples of leading Nazis who regarded the slaughter of Jews as horrible but necessary, despite its moral effect on Germans: Himmler, for instance, repeatedly declared the final solution was 'painful' and 'repulsive' but he nevertheless persisted with it 'out of love for our people'.

Finkelstein comments that 'the Nazi mass murderers imagined that they, not the Jews, were the war's victims'. This raises some interesting questions. The Afrikaners who built up apartheid see themselves as a victimised minority. The same is true of the Unionists in Northern Ireland. What these people do may be wicked, but the fact is that in their own eyes they are just defending themselves against powerful enemies bent on their destruction. That means that we socialists have to go beyond just demonising

the shelf

them if we want to bring about radical change. Easy to say. Hard as hell to do.

A special issue of the journal *Race and Class* entitled *Palestine: Diplomacies of Defeat* (Institute of Race Relations, £4) contains interesting articles about the issues facing the Palestinians after the Oslo accords. As the title suggests, the underlying assumption - surely correct - is that the accords represent a major setback for Palestinian nationalism. Azmi Bishara, from Birzeit University, takes a thoughtful look at the choices open to Palestinian socialists, all of them far from ideal. In another useful survey, Mark Taylor gloomily outlines the prospects for the Palestinian economy, which he describes as 'a subsector of the Israeli economy'. Elsewhere Israel Shahak continues his attack on religious fundamentalism - the Jewish variety - by spelling out the ideology of Gush Emunim, which has alarming parallels with mainstream, secular Zionism. Not pleasant reading.

If you haven't read Seumas Milne's *The Enemy Within* (Pan, £5.99) do yourself a favour and buy yourself a copy. The book looks at the charges of fraud during the miners' strike levelled against Arthur Scargill by the *Daily Mirror*, all of

which turned out to be complete fabrications and were almost certainly set up by MI5. Meanwhile most of Scargill's predictions about what would happen to the British coal industry have turned out to be correct. The guy is honest and not stupid, which puts him two above many people. Maybe his recent decision to form a breakaway socialist party will turn out to be the right one.

Finally a plug for Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (Routledge, £11.99) which I recently read and found completely fascinating. With his privileged start in life, Russell could easily have conformed and had a very pleasant life. Instead he fought for the Labour Party, went to jail during the first world war, was hounded out of academic jobs, worked tirelessly for nuclear disarmament, and denounced the American attack on Vietnam long before most people. Russell could be nasty, and I have long thought his best-selling *History of Western Philosophy* was terrible. But he stood up for the right things, at considerable personal cost, and all credit to him. He also wrote beautiful prose. Here's a sample from the end of his *Autobiography*:

'I have lived in pursuit of a vision, both personal and social. Personal: to care for what is noble, for what is beautiful, for what is gentle; to allow moments of insight to give wisdom at more mundane times. Social: to see in imagination the society that is to be created, where individuals grow freely, and where hate and greed and envy die because there is nothing to nourish them. These things I believe, and the world, for all its horrors, has left me unshaken.'

Raf Salkie



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