

Reuben Goldberg Memorial

in Bradford

11am Sunday 26 April

Cenotaph: Dedication to

Reuben at the annual

Holocaust commemoration

Central Library: Dedication

of a plaque

1 in 12 Club Memorial

gathering of friends

and comrades

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● We recognise the equal validity and integrity of all Jewish communities, and reject the ideology of Zionism, currently dominating world Jewry, which subordinates the needs and interests of Diaspora Jews to those of the Israeli state.

● We work for a socialist solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict based on equality and self-determination of Israeli and Palestinian Jews and Arabs.

Join the Jewish Socialists' Group. Write to: Membership Secretary, JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX

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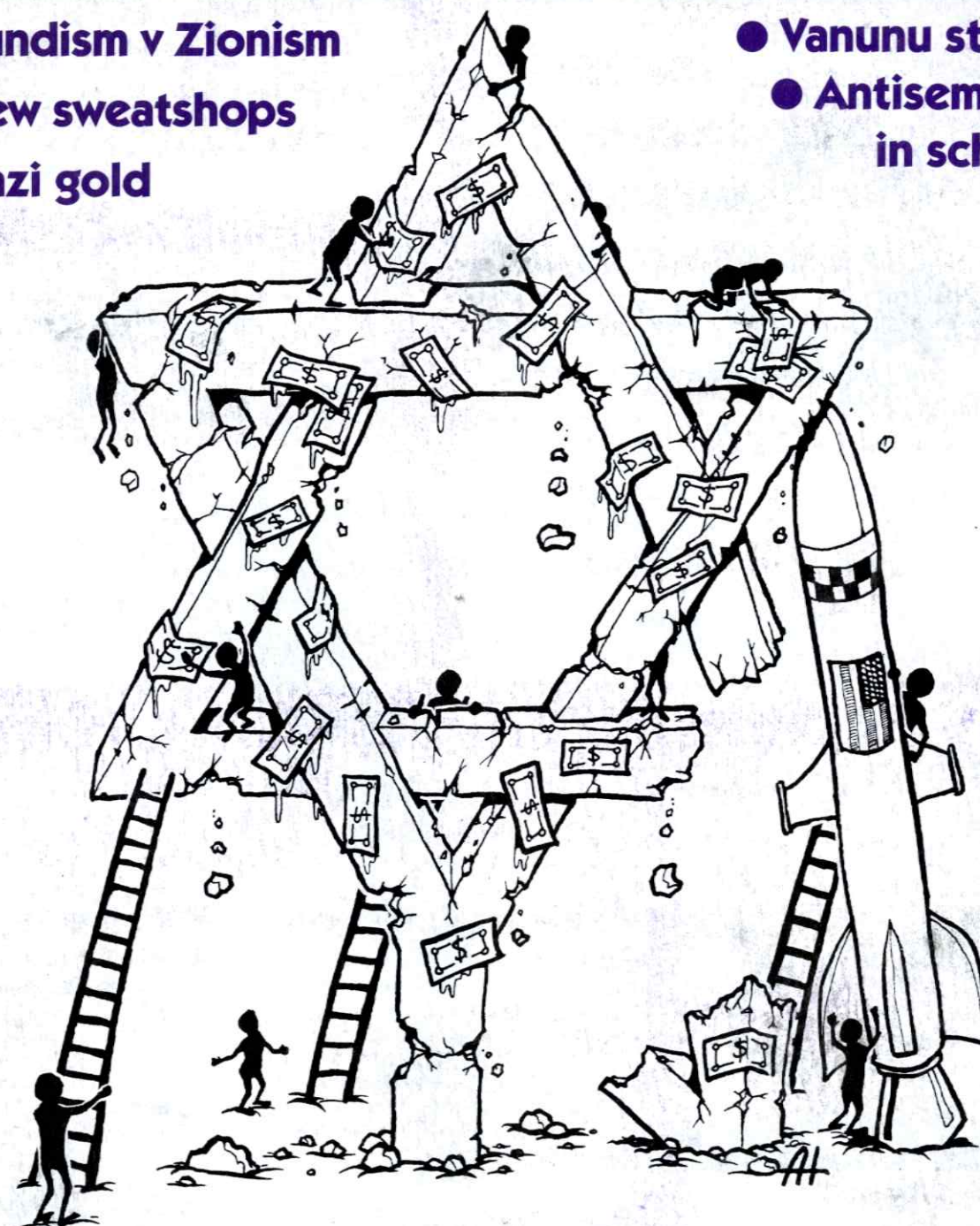
● **Bundism v Zionism**

● **New sweatshops**

● **Nazi gold**

● **Vanunu staged**

● **Antisemitism in schools**



ISRAEL'S 50TH BIRTHDAY

Has the consensus collapsed?

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Jewish Socialist



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Israel at 50

'It is a sad paradox of Jewish history that Jews should have acquired their own statehood only in the middle of this century when the obsolescence of the nation state is becoming more and more obvious.' The renowned Marxist, Isaac Deutscher, was writing on Israel's 10th birthday. Before the Second World War Deutscher had been a fervent opponent of Zionism. After the Nazis his critique of Zionism reflected sorrow more than anger. Regarding himself as a very close friend of the Israeli people he begged Israelis to 'beware of being carried away by their new-fangled and already red-hot nationalism...their state is not above criticism; it is an earthly creation not a biblical sanctity.'

'The future of Israel,' he wrote, 'may well depend on whether Israelis are on guard against nationalist conceit and are able to find a common language with the people around them.'

When blinkered enthusiasts rejoiced in the 'miracle' of Israel's birth and proclaimed it the fulfilment of a mystical historical dream, Deutscher argued that Israel was created as an 'act of Jewish despair' in response to the catastrophe that engulfed millions of Europe's Jews and that it was built on an injustice towards the indigenous Palestinian people.

As Israel prepares to celebrate its 50th birthday, and as a new century beckons, with its global impetus for change, we must ask whether Israel has addressed or aggravated this injustice and what can be done to ensure that the next 50 years for the Israeli and Palestinian people are not dominated by the conflict and insecurity that have characterised the last five decades.

Israel now constitutes a third of world Jewry. It has become a modern, wealthy, highly developed industrial society but one in which that wealth is less and less evenly distributed with the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories the most excluded, exploited and downtrodden.

The intifada – the rebellion throughout Palestinian society that began in 1987 – forced many Israelis to contemplate this reality. Israel's army responded brutally but the political response that began in the early 1990s was more hopeful. The late Yitzhak Rabin who had ordered the army to 'break their bones' searched for a political compromise which pointed towards a 'two-state solution'.

The Oslo Peace Accords have focused on political and constitutional issues of territory, sovereignty and authority but any new political arrangements will founder if the enormous economic inequalities are not addressed. Israel's military spending alone is currently twice that of all spending within the Palestinian economy. Meanwhile a third of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories depend for their livelihood on Israeli business. A two-state arrangement which merely reproduced the current economic relations of domination and subordination will prove to be no solution.

If political and economic change are both required there is a crucial third factor which must be simultaneously addressed – the cultural factor. Like similar conflicts elsewhere the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been poisoned by nationalism. Israel's national cultural identity has been defined by Zionist ideology – a belief system that talked the universal language of liberation but which has been thoroughly exclusive and discriminatory in practice. Exclusive systems can generate equally exclusive reactions from their victims. As the articles on pages 20-26 show, the Zionist consensus in Israel is exhausted and may be cracking beyond repair. This opens up opportunities for the Palestinians but they too must acknowledge a further warning from Isaac Deutscher, originally directed at the Zionist movement 40 years ago:

'For a subject people, independent statehood is a vital necessity but once such a people has reached the stage of independence, nothing can be more retrograde than to fix its mind on that stage and refuse to look beyond it.'

States and leaders who come to an accommodation with each other but remain enveloped in nationalist ideology will fail their peoples but when states recognise their own diversity and consciously seek to strengthen a pluralist reality they can offer the promise of true coexistence and progress.

On the 50th anniversary of Israel's birth and the Palestinian's catastrophe we pledge ourselves to work for the political, economic and cultural revolution that can transform the lives of the people of Israel and Palestine.

RED HERRINGS

The Red Herring Club gave a taster of the talent it can provide for children by running the Children's Events at the Bund celebration in November. The first arts workshop of the Red Herring club took place at Jackson's Lane Community Centre on Sunday 14 December with Michael Rosen presenting an afternoon of 'Stories, Spiels and Kibitzing for Kids'. Around 50 children and adults came, about half of whom had heard about it at the Bund event.

A similar number took

part in a music and song workshop with Leon Rosselson on 18 January which included collective songwriting from a traditional Chelm story!

The next arts workshop is on, also at Jackson's Lane. If you know anyone who might be interested and might have missed the first few, point them in the right direction through the *Jewish Socialist* address.

The Red Herring Club's arts workshops for children are funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England.

BLOWING IN THE WIND

Anti-nuclear activists in Israel have responded strongly to the renewed crisis in the Gulf. A leaflet distributed by Israeli Whistleblowers Against Atomic Holocaust states: 'The tension with Iraq and the possible use of mass destruction weapons raises again the issue of the principle guiding policy concerning mass destruction weapons: to construct and hoard mass destruction weapons, living permanently with the possibility that they may be used any minute? or a ban on their construction and hoarding in every state in the Middle East, enforced by international supervision in every state in the region? ... Israel can make a positive contribution... by declaring its support for a ban on the construction and hoarding of mass destruction weapons in every state in the region.'

Contact: Israeli Whistleblowers on fax: 00-972-9-7413969.

THE BIG BUND BASH

Nearly 400 people of all ages came to the JSG's Bund Centenary celebration in Holloway, North London on 16 November, more than doubling the expectations of the organisers. See the letters on p7 and the photofeature on p18-19. Everyone who came took away with them a specially produced Bund centenary brochure and programme. If you would like a copy, Please send a cheque/PO for £1 and a large (A4) sae to JSG, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.

WRITE ON!

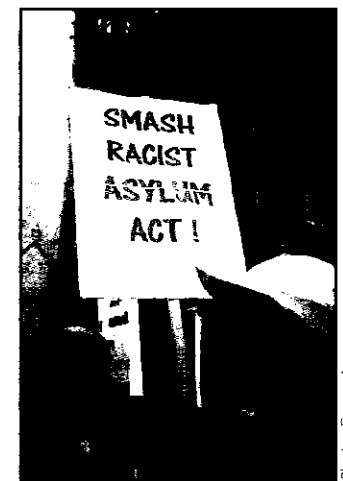
A group of Jewish women in Sheffield are appealing for prose, short stories, poems and essays from Jewish women under 30 for an anthology representing a wide range of cultural, religious and secular perspectives. Send your contributions to: Mekella, Tamar and Judith, 164 Crookesmoor Road, Sheffield S6 3FS Tel: 0114-226 6990.

LET THEM STAY

The National Coalition of anti-Deportation Campaigns is calling for support for a major lobby of parliament on 29 April. The coalition brings together families and individuals facing deportation and their supporters.

Since it was founded, 36 of their campaigns have succeeded in winning the right for people to stay in Britain. The demands of the lobby are: Stop deportations – amnesty for all! Re-unite divided families! Restore Benefits! End detention under asylum and immigration law! Review all immigration laws! The lobby is from 1.30-3.30pm, with a public meeting from 3.30-5.30pm.

The Jewish Socialists' Group will work to build



maximum support from the Jewish community for this lobby.

Details from National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 22 Berners Street, Birmingham B19 2DP.

REMEMBERING REUBEN

More than 60 people attended a memorial meeting in East London in February to celebrate the life of Jewish Socialists' Group member Reuben Goldberg who died of cancer last October aged just 45 years. People from London and Bradford, who worked with Reuben in dozens of organisations and campaigns from the Schools Action Union of the 1960s, the Bradford 12 campaign of

the 1970s, the Travellers' Rights campaign of the 1980s through to the Newham Monitoring Project in the 1990s, paid tribute to his commitment and activism, his powerful intellect, his integrity, honesty, gentleness and warmth. We will all miss him greatly.

Another memorial event will take place in Bradford on Sunday 26 April. See back page for details.

LOOK IN THE MIRROR!

An exquisitely produced blue and white brochure arrived recently from the advertising director of the *Jewish Chronicle*, providing their advertising rates for the year and listing their special supplements.

Some of these may be of interest to *Jewish Socialist* readers: property auctions (January), brides (April), private medicine (May), Israel property (July)... But the really fascinating stuff was their 'Readership

Data'. Does this reflect you and the Jewish people you know?

'Home ownership 95% – far in excess of the national average; car ownership – 60% live in multiple car owning households; holidays – 51% take more than one holiday a year; 86% of Jewish Chronicle readers are in the socio-economic group ABC1.

And, by the way, 'The *Jewish Chronicle* reaches 80% of the adult Jewish community in the UK...'

INTERNATIONAL PARTY

Within the space of two months I was privileged to attend Bund centenary celebrations in New York, Paris, Brussels and London. All combined celebrations which, in New York and Paris, took the form of banquets, and seminars which looked at the ideas of the Bund and their relevance to today. *The Shvue* (Oath), the hymn of the Bund was sung in a various arrangements. At all the events I was struck by the warmth and commitment shown by Bundists of all generations.

Each event had its own character. The New York celebrations were mainly in Yiddish; those in Paris and Brussels were in French; in London they were in English. The Brussels and London events stressed the relevance of the ideas of the Bund to other minorities. However in all the speeches and contributions to the debate there were some common themes.

Firstly, adherence to the socialist or social-democratic movement and to the key ideas and traditions of that movement. The Bund's history includes a revolutionary past and a present affiliation to the Socialist International. As French sociologist Michel Wieviorka said, it combines a revolutionary past with a reformist present. But it does not seek to deny or minimise its history. Motl Zelmanowicz in New York talked with pride of the Bund's celebrations of May Day in Poland in the 1920s and 1930s, with red flags flying. He saw this as an indication that the Bund was an organic part of the international workers' movement. Benjamin Nadel, the General Secretary of the Bund, said that the Bund was originally a classic Marxist party which now sees itself as democratic socialist. Richard Marienstras, who spoke in Paris and in Brussels, pointed out that many people have tried to deny the significance of class politics in the world today. In France, though, where in the previous week the employers' organisation had broken off dialogue with the government over the proposed introduction of a shorter working week, they had been proved wrong.

Secondly there was the notion of *doyleit* (or 'hereness'), a key Bundist principle. In its classical formulation this related both to the Bund's non-Zionism and to its belief in the principle of national cultural autonomy for different minorities within states composed of a multitude of minorities. Yves Plasseraud in Brussels showed how today this principle is gaining currency in Eastern Europe as a way of recognising the needs and interests of national minorities



Bundist banquet in New York

within a non-territorial framework. For example it has been adopted as policy in Hungary (and incidentally has even found its way into the programme of the rebels in the Chiapas region of Mexico).

Michel Wieviorka, who chaired a session at the Paris seminar, argued that the Bundist conception of *doyleit* occupied a midway position between the individual within a nation state, who is equal to and subject to the same laws as other individuals, and a destructive, competitive communitarianism. He characterised two positions within this: a toleration of minority customs as long as they are within the confines of their own communities, on the one hand; and movements which organise around universal ideas within minorities, on the other. The Bund was a representative of this latter position. Marienstras characterised this as a minority group using culture to place itself in a relationship with its history.

Thirdly, *veltkehkeit*. This can be translated as secularism but, as speakers at the New York seminar made clear, it was a secularism which represented a modern alternative to the traditional, religious obscurantism of communities in the Russian Empire and Poland. It sees religion as a private matter for individuals, but is not anti-religious. As Henri Minzeles emphasised, many Bundist leaders came from religious

backgrounds and used religious ideas and religious practice to fight for new ideas. At a time when fundamentalist and anti-modernist ideas continue to make their presence felt, for example in Israel and in other Jewish communities in the world today, the Bund's notion of *veltkehkeit* has a continuing relevance.

The fact that two of these key themes are encapsulated in Yiddish words points to the importance of Yiddish in the history and in the current practice of the Bund. The two Bundist journals published regularly, *Undzer Tzayt* in

New York and *Lebnsfragn* in Israel are both in Yiddish. The New York conference was held almost exclusively in Yiddish, though the European events were in French and English. Although the New York event was able to connect with Bundist tradition in a more direct way due to its use of Yiddish (and the participation, for the most part, of Bundists who speak Yiddish in their daily lives) it was less accessible to younger people who may be enthusiastic about the ideas of the Bund but do not speak Yiddish perfectly or even at all.

The ideas of the Bund have a relevance and an attraction today. The challenge is to convey them in the languages in which Jews normally communicate, for example English, French or Hebrew as well as Yiddish, and in a way that shows their continuing relevance to the problems that continue to be faced by Jews and other minorities.

Michael Heiser

The challenge is to convey the ideas of the Bund in the languages Jews speak today

How will history record the Bund? Who will tell its story in good faith? These questions rose to the surface of a fascinating two-day conference on '100 years Bund' in Warsaw at the end of November. Academics from Europe (east and west), America, Australasia and Israel presented 30 papers on aspects of the Bund's history locating the Bund in its various contexts – the history of Eastern Europe, labour history and Jewish history. Some papers covered broad subjects such as 'Women in the Bund' or 'The Lodz organisation of the Bund'. Others were more specific, such as 'The Bund and the Polish Question 1897-1905' or 'The Polish Bund and the Fight Against Antisemitism in the 1930s'.

Before the conference began, delegates visited the graves of Bundist leaders in Warsaw's Jewish cemetery. In the opening session Marek Edelman – sole survivor of the ghetto uprising command group and current resident of Warsaw – spoke about the Bund's achievements. There was a short speech from Piotr Ikonowicz of the revived Polish Socialist Party (PPS) – a party that had collaborated with the Bund especially in the 1930s. Among the audience were a number of older Polish socialists who could recall their party's work alongside the Bund.

The level of information conveyed was impressive, especially as the Bund's own recording of its history has clear limitations. Its massively detailed five-volume *Geshikhte fun Bund* ends in the mid-1930s when the Bund was on the verge of its short-lived major breakthrough in Poland. It remains untranslated from the Yiddish. Exhibitions and videos that have been produced give a flavour of its politics and its social impact but cannot yield sufficient detail to enable a thorough analysis.

Information about the Bund is concentrated in a number of places. The largest collection is in the Jewish

OUR HISTORY IN THEIR HANDS

Labour Movement archives of the YIVO institute in New York, which it inherited directly from the Bund. Valuable archive materials collected for a different purpose are in Moscow and are now being looked at by researchers. The Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw has a great deal of information on Jewish life in Poland including the inter-war period when the Bund was so prominent in Jewish and Polish life. And an increasing level of information is concentrated in

have a more rounded picture of their history. But things seem to be turning out differently. The danger is that the Bund's history will be incorporated into a new, purportedly more tolerant, Zionist historiography. Certainly the comments made during the conference by Bund researchers from Israel seemed to confirm this. One suggested that we should focus on the 'similarities' between the Bund and Zionism as 'modernising' movements in Jewish life, which 'mobilised among the

the end of the 1930s.

In a paper on the Bund's rhetoric and campaigning against antisemitism in the 1930s, a professor from Jerusalem University described the Bund's 'beautiful but ineffective' fight against antisemitism but noted how its rhetoric had strengthened its assault on Zionism in the Jewish community which helped it electorally.

Assuming the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, speakers referred to the importance of making the history of the Bund 'part of the Israeli collective memory'. The real challenge is to make it part of Jewish collective memory, and their formulation seems to privilege Israel's place in Jewish life. This flies in the face of the Bund's own philosophy which recognises the precedence of the world Jewish people over any single national community.

The most heated exchange, though, came in a discussion about Israel's attitude to Yiddish where despite the detailed testimony of a Bundist who has lived in Israel from the early years of the state, backed up by other speakers who listed discriminatory practices, the younger Israeli academics denied that any significant discrimination against Yiddish had taken place in the Jewish state.

Such views were challenged from the floor but, in the long run, it is vital that the Bund's history, philosophy and experience can be distilled within the framework of its own positive cultural and political values rather than be co-opted within an ever more adaptable Zionist ideology which ultimately remains as hostile to Bundism as it was a century ago.

David Rosenberg



A statue of the Polish nationalist Josef Pilsudski guards the Europejski Hotel which hosted the Bund conference

Israel which has a Bund Institute in Haifa. The Institute for Contemporary Jewry in Jerusalem also has a significant interest in Bund history.

The Warsaw conference resulted from the collaboration of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and the Israeli institutes and, to a lesser extent, the German Historical Institute based in Warsaw. It demonstrated that the leading role in researching the Bund is currently occupied by Israel, with left-Zionist researchers in the driving seat. The Bund Institute was set up with a legacy from a Bundist. Perhaps he thought it would enable younger Israelis to

same social strata', rather than emphasise ideological differences. In fact beyond the intelligentsia there were clear class differences in the strata wooed by these two opposing movements. Another Israeli academic said that we should attempt to remove ideology from the history and focus on the Bund as 'social reality'. In this way they can look at the history of a 'defeated' movement without acknowledging that its ideas were not defeated when the Nazis entered Poland. Indeed, compared with Zionism and religion, Bundism had massive support and popularity among the Jewish masses at

STONEWALLED

Amid the euphoria at conquering East Jerusalem in 1967, did anyone ask whether the soldiers at the Wall were pious enough to be there? Did any rabbis check if they were Jews? Perhaps the Hassidim were too busy making sure the students in their yeshivas were exempt from military service.

In 30 years of occupation, though, things have changed. After a *meshugenne* frum mob spat and threw stones and shit at Jews who wanted to worship in a Masorti service at the Wall, Jerusalem's finest were ordered to disperse the worshippers. It was a nice item for end of the year news quizzes. 'In which country, in 1997, did police arrest Jews trying to pray?' I wonder what this year's 50th anniversary will bring.

LABOUR ILLUSIONS

When he got the foreign office job, Robin Cook installed a bust of Ernest Bevin - 'Labour's great foreign Secretary', as Tory

dybbuk's diary

papers say. Though regarded by many people as an antisemite because of his brutal response to Jewish militancy in Palestine in the late 1940s, Bevin had admired Zionism when he was TGWU leader. Histadrut representative Dov Hos had to explain to Brother Ernie that a White Paper which reported that Zionist labour institutions excluded Arab labour wasn't meant as praise. Bevin turned against Zionism only when it threatened British dominance in the Middle East.

Bevin's bust hasn't worked its

charms for Robin Cook, though. The only thing 'red' about Robin is his beard, nevertheless the FO's Sir Humphreys, more used to advising Douglas Hurd and Malcolm Rifkind, were bound to balk at letting 'ethics' interfere with export licences. Nor are they happy about restoring trade union rights at GCHQ. And whoever heard of a Foreign Secretary approving pursuit, rather than protection, of war criminals? Ernest Bevin certainly didn't.

The uncivil servant who wrote 'bollocks' on Cook's human

rights memo was just indicating where they'd put the boot in.

MAIL ORDER

Fears that writers Marks and Gran would whitewash Black-shirt leader Sir Oswald Mosley were fuelled by the *Mail on Sunday's* preview of the four-part series. Jonathan Cake, who plays Mosley, said: 'There are so many paradoxes. Mosley was a very fervent pacifist. He always said he was in politics to prevent war, and if he gained any real power in Britain he wouldn't have sent Jews to their deaths.'

As *Mail* writers Sarah Oliver and Simon Kinnery observed, 'that is less certain'. More certain, though, is where Mosley got his support. One of his staunchest establishment admirers in the 1930s was Lord Rothermere, whose newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, featured articles like the one by Tory MP Sir Thomas More - 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'

DON'T ASK THE RABBI

Dear Rabbi, Can I pick my nose on Shabbos?

A recent ruling in Israel asks you why your finger is up your nostril? Is it to disentangle noes hairs or is it there as a recreational activity? Obviously the former is necessary and can be permitted but the latter is not. Therefore what other anti-social habits may be permitted on Shabbos? The rabbis have spent a long time thinking about masturbation. They have concluded that if a devout man were to become sexually aroused during Saturday prayers he has been distracted from the word of God. A discreet fumble

underneath his tallis bag on his lap is thus permissible providing he doesn't enjoy it.

Dear Rabbi, I note a court in Hounslow has excused that subtle and versatile singer Shirley Bassey from calling her assistant a 'Jewish Princess' as it is a 'Hollywood term'. Perhaps the Rabbi could advise me of other 'Hollywood terms'.

'You black bastard' is a Hollywood term which is used for Afro Caribbean people who try to enter 'A' list celebrity parties without a birth certificate.

Dear Rabbi, We want to name our baby daughter Shirley. What are the origins of this name?

The Hebrew for Shirley is 'Tslappa'. The name first appears in the book of Gerry-mandering where Tslappa, daughter of Jacohen Ben Pile-em-High, helps the homeless tribes by giving them shelter in homes blessed with the holy asbestos dust. It also appears in the book of Bondthemes where Tslappa Blowsy, a goddess among the people from the land of Notaste, praises her Israelite slave - 'For you are nothing but a Jewish Princess'.



ART ATTACK

JS As an ambitious thematic project, and the first exhibition of its kind in Britain, *Rubies and Rebels: Jewish Female Identity in Contemporary British Art*, curated by myself and Vera Grodzinski, was bound to lay itself open to criticism on all fronts. Predictably, there were those who felt that an exhibition such as this was self-limiting and ghettoising. Equally predictably there were those at the other ideological extreme - including Amanda Sebestyen, (JS37) who attacked the show for being insufficiently radical, artistically and politically.

Any curatorial choice is ultimately subjective. One of our intentions had been that the debate it provoked should lead to other independent projects.

I would not have been averse to greater radicalism. In your last issue, Jenny Polak and Cynthia Mandansky described what a radical Jewish identity art exhibition would look like. It would include work which addresses and presents a critique of Ashkenazi hegemony, class politics and Jewish labour history, right

wing British and American colonialist policies, the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the scope and work of anti-Zionist positions, homophobia in Jewish communities, the cost of whiteness and the effects of assimilation, Jewish sex workers, sexism within Jewish families and much more.' Such art seems conspicuous by its absence, and there's no guarantee that indignation and/or anger makes for eloquent art.

The space at the Barbican's Concourse Gallery would have made it difficult to accommodate complex mixed media and/or installation works. Practicalities aside, much of the most powerful and persuasive work being produced by Jewish women concerned with identity issues was solidly crafted, unequivocally personal and deeply felt. Much of the work that was 'issue-based' rang somewhat hollow and seemed to err on the side of pretentiousness.

While I cannot hope to budge Sebestyen and those of a similar persuasion from their deeply felt ideological positions, certain claims about censorship, cowardice and

worse were levelled at the curators of *Rubies and Rebels* which are untrue.

Our decision to exclude Jenny Polak's *Reverse the Flow* was not based on antipathy to its politics but on the feeling that the work was aesthetically unresolved and weaker than the three pieces by her we selected. We had never promised to include it but had agreed to consider it. 'Shadowy sponsors' from the 'conservative Zionist establishment' did not determine our decision. We operated independently of any establishments, political, religious or financial.

In Lynn Leon's case the decision not to use an explicitly political topical text to accompany her *Identities* series was reached with the artist's agreement. The ambivalence, open-endedness and political thrust of her work is what makes it so memorable.

Regarding artists not included in the exhibition: Lily Markiewicz and Pam Skelton agreed to participate. Markiewicz failed to produce an appropriate new piece for the occasion, while Skelton's most suitable piece was too large, as she herself concurred. Susan Hiller, Leslie Hakim-Dowek and Jessica Shamash were all

carefully considered. The former two's work was deemed too oblique in its references both to Jewishness and gender; while the later failed to provide a detailed enough installation proposal.

To claim that the presence of the 'Jewish establishment' was confirmed by the fact that three of the 21 artists represented were related to better known male members of the Jewish intelligentsia is nonsense. We decided to dedicate *Rubies and Rebels* to the memory of Sandra Fisher in order to pay tribute to a gifted and neglected artist who felt strongly about her Jewishness. Being R B Kitaj's wife had little to do with this. It seemed appropriate to ask him to say a few words at the opening - a calculated risk, admittedly.

Few, of the artists exhibited would see themselves as 'insiders', nostalgically or complacently celebrating a shared culture. If Seder tables, Hebrew lettering and family albums featured, they functioned as pointers to a religious and cultural tradition towards which all the artists have mixed feelings. Indeed their complex and ambivalent attitude to their Jewishness makes their art so interesting. Monica Bohm-Duchen, London

SUPERB FEAT

JS Your Bund Centenary event was truly excellent - educational, interesting, fun, and a superb feat of organisation. More than that, it felt like the first time in my life I had been to a Jewish event where it is permitted to think. Thank you. Cathy Pelikan, London N6

I really enjoyed and valued the Bund Centenary celebrations. Thanks and congratulations to everyone responsible for its huge success. Barbara Peltu, London NW11

I write to congratulate you and all the comrades who worked so hard to make the Bund centenary such a great occasion. A lot of hard work must have gone into the organisation and preparation. Shalom Charikar, Middlesex

BOLSHED OVER

JS Not being Jewish, eating meat and admiring the Bolsheviks does, I guess, exclude me from the Jewish

Socialists' Group. But I am very interested in eastern European history and life, including Jewish life. Your anniversary do was great, much better than the Wiener Library effort. Congratulations. Fred Milson, London SW4

WORKERS' CIRCLE

JS I am researching the history of the Workers' Circle, which was the focal point of radical Jewish political and cultural activity in the East End from 1909 until the 1980s.

Formed by politically

conscious immigrants, the Workers' Circle brought together Anarchists, Bundists, Communists and left wing Zionists, for mutual aid and in the struggle for a better world. Based at Circle House in the East End, it also had branches throughout Britain.

I would like to hear from anyone who belonged to the Circle, or whose parents or grandparents were members. Also, from anyone with memories of attending the Yiddish shule or going to meetings or concerts at Circle House.

Please get in touch with me via *Jewish Socialist*, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX. David Mazower, London N19

RICH PICKINGS

It was not only the Swiss banks that profited from 'Nazi gold'. Other countries and earned well by helping the German war effort, says David Cesarani

The London conference on 'Nazi Gold', held at Lancaster house on 2-4 December last year, was one of the largest gatherings of scholars, researchers and archivists concerned with the history of the Nazi era and the Holocaust ever to have taken place. Amongst the delegations from the 42 countries and six non-governmental organisations at the conference were Professors Yehuda Bauer, director of research at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem; Horst Möller, head of the Munich Institute for Contemporary History, representatives of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the French National Archives, historians of the US State Department and the British Foreign Office, led by Dr Gill Bennett. Also present were scholars attached to over a dozen historical commissions at work in various countries, including no less than four in Switzerland with parallel ones in the United States, Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Canada, Argentina and Brazil. The conference brought together such eminent historians as Professors Donald Watt, Harold James, Jean-François Bergier and Annette Wieviorka.

Survivors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, who attended as 'observers' rubbed their eyes in disbelief. The contrast between this lavish attention and the almost complete indifference to Holocaust history during the 1950s and 1960s was almost too painful to contemplate.

Why had it taken so long to focus on the Nazi plunder of individuals, mainly the Jews of Europe, and what now appears to be the inadequacy of subsequent compensation awarded to the victims of Nazism? Donald Watt pointed out that by 1945 there were many organisations working for the relief and rehabilitation of Nazi victims and those uprooted by the war. The victorious Allies, ruled by traditional notions of statecraft, naturally tended to operate at inter-governmental level. British diplomats were particularly keen to minimise any innovation in the post-war settlement that might enlarge the power of non-sovereign bodies. They insisted that individuals pursue their claims for restitution and compensation through their respective governments on the basis of their nationality.

The report by the US historical commission acknowledged that the Allies' prime concern in 1945-46 was to reconstitute gold plundered from central banks in order to restart the European economy. 'The issue of heirless assets of the individual victims of Nazi persecution never became a significant issue in the post-war negotiations of the Allies, including the United States.' That changed after 1989. 'The end of the Cold War gave us a chance to examine issues long pushed to the background ... previously unavailable documents have been declassified ... as Holocaust survivors come to the end of their lives, they have an urgent desire to ensure that long suppressed facts come to light and so see a greater degree of justice to assuage, howev-

er slightly, their sufferings. And a younger generation seeks a deeper understanding of one of the most profound events of the 20th century as we enter the 21st.' The end of communism ungagged the 'double victims' who were ruined by the Nazis, then denied recognition or recompense by the Soviets. Finally, the muscle of American Jewry, led by World Jewish Congress president, Edgar Bronfman, moved the issue to the top of the political agenda.

Yet there is something suspiciously trite about this explanation. The essential story of Nazi plunder was recorded in the earliest histories of the Holocaust. New sources shed light on the extent of the gold trade between the Third Reich and the neutral powers and how much they knew about the provenance of the gold they purchased from the Germans, despite their assertions of innocence. Research by the Swiss Independent Commission of Experts, revealed that Swiss commercial banks accepted three times more gold from Germany than previously thought. Declassified documents seen by the Eizenstat Commission exposed the extent to which the allies knew they were handling looted 'non-monetary gold' in the process of restituting what ought to have been state-owned bullion alone.

The historical material was available in the Public Records Office in the late '70s. Books on the subject appeared a decade ago, notably Werner Ring's *Raubgold aus Deutschland* (1985) and Arthur Smith's *Hitler's Gold* (1989). What is new is the instrumentalisation of this knowledge and the prominence accorded it, reflecting the new cultural climate.

We live in a culture of compensation in which it seems that half the population is in an ambulance and the other half is chasing it. Holocaust survivors and their children see vast sums paid to the 'victims' of bad marriages, wrongful imprisonment and medical error. They see soldiers and emergency workers claiming compensation for 'trauma' experienced in the course of employment for which they received remuneration and training. The pursuit of such awards may be justified, but it was unheard of 40 years ago when the remnant of world Jewry and the battered population of a continent tried to pick themselves up again.

The victims were not silent in 1945, nor were they entirely ignored. But for psychological and political reasons they made modest claims. In November 1944, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) organised a conference to assess Jewish losses in the war and demand mechanisms for the restitution of stolen property and assets, the compensation of individual survivors and collective reparation on behalf of the slaughtered millions. The WJC put the bill at \$8 billion at 1944 currency values.

At the 1945 Paris Conference on Reparations, the Allies set aside only \$25 million from 'heirless assets' and recovered 'non-monetary gold' for the resettlement of displaced persons and humanitarian work. The bulk of this went to Jews, but it was a fraction of the total of looted wealth that was

known about even then. The occupation authorities in Germany moved slowly and did not pass restitution legislation until 1947. Even then, restitution was limited to property and proven claimants in Germany. The recovery of confiscated securities, bank balances, mortgages and insurance policies was subsumed in a large general claim.

Meanwhile, in 1949-50, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany took up the offer by Conrad Adenauer, chancellor of the new Federal German Republic, to provide material compensation for the sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis. Even though the conference estimated that between 1933 and 1951, world Jewry had expended \$1.1 billion on the care of Jews forced out of Germany, and continued to spend \$20-30 million in each successive year, it recognised that a huge claim could cripple the new state and would not be viewed with favour by the western Allies who were seeking the rehabilitation of Germany. They put in a claim for \$500 million and settled for \$450 million.

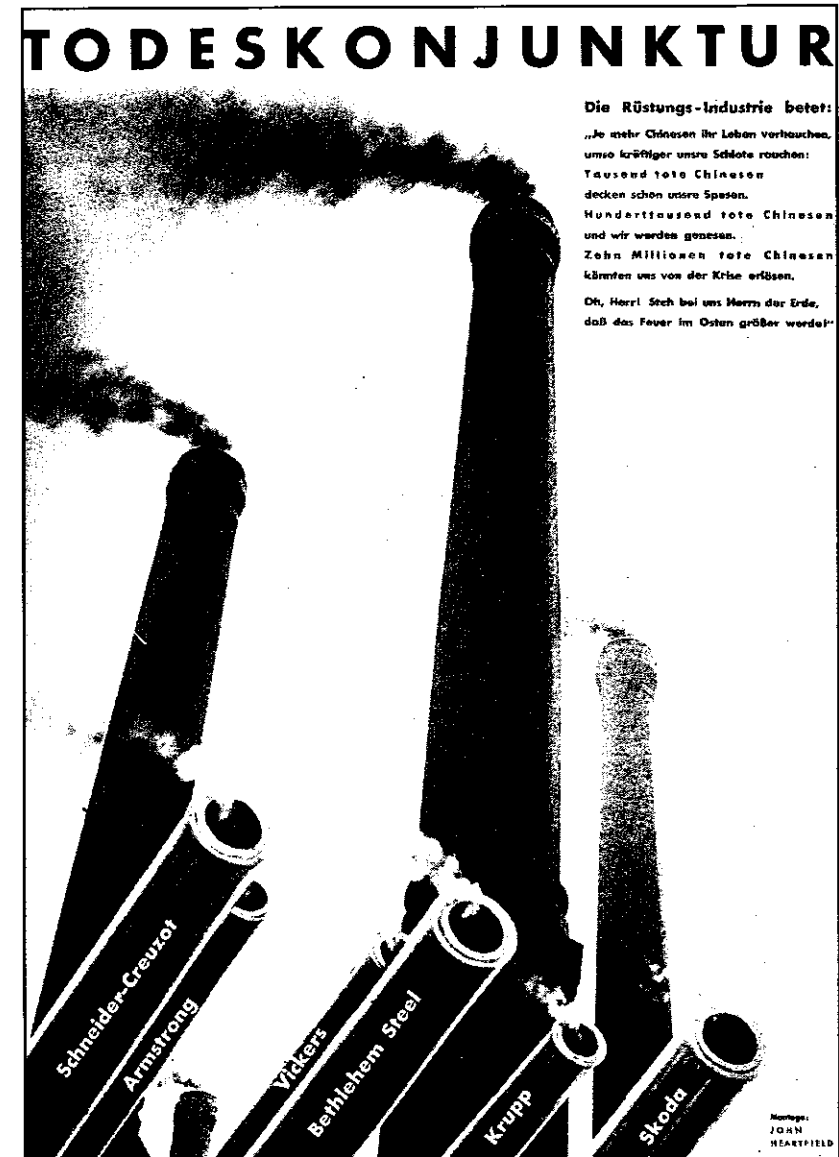
These negotiations were part of a broader process by which West Germany reached agreements with Israel and 15 other countries. Jewish survivors benefited from these, too. Until today, Germany has paid out DM100 billion and it is estimated that by 2030 the reparations bill will have topped DM124 billion. Yet the 'double victims' in eastern Europe are only now receiving recognition and monetary compensation. The reasons for prevarication and parsimony that diminished the initial aid to victims of the Nazis in the West no longer obtain.

Different standards are now also being applied to the conduct of the neutral powers before, during and after the war. Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Turkey all traded with Nazi Germany during the war. Despite Allied warnings in January 1944 that neutral countries should desist from accepting German gold payments since the gold was almost certainly looted, they continued to accept Nazi gold until well into 1944. The dubious nature of these transactions was compounded after 1945 by the stubborn refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing or make full restitution.

Yet while the Allies deserve credit for struggling to restore looted central bank gold, their own concern for wealth looted from individuals was lamentable. Financial institutions which were left in possession of 'heirless assets' were not subjected to scrutiny or pressure to disgorge this wealth.

This widening circle of culpability indicates perhaps the most important reason for inaction until now. The profits of genocide were not restricted to the Swiss and they behaved in a manner no more malevolent than other neutral countries, least of all were they driven by malice towards the Jews in particular. This is proven by the conduct of the Swedes, the British and the Jews in Palestine. They cheated, too.

The role played by Swiss financial institutions in laundering gold looted by the Nazis from central banks, individuals and murdered Jews is now well known. But Switzerland was only one of several neutral countries that profited from the war in general and the economic needs of Nazi Germany in particular. The activity of Swiss bankers, and the vast amounts of bullion that flowed through their



hands, is only part of the story. Sweden was just as important to the Third Reich, and even more crucial as a supplier of raw materials and finished goods for the German war effort. No single institution in Sweden was more complicit with the Nazis than the Enskilda Bank of Stockholm, owned by the Wallenberg family, run by the two brothers, Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg. Their story is a grim indictment of big business which has implications for every major multinational trading in the world today.

Thanks to patient scholarship by two Dutch historians, Gerard Aalders and Cees Wiebes, the full, damning record of the Wallenbergs' involvement with the Nazis is now in the open. The covert relationship between Swedish firms and their German counterparts developed during and after the First World War. German businessmen assigned nominal ownership to foreigners in order to avoid the seizure of their assets in enemy countries and, later, to evade penal taxation or tariff barriers. In the 1920s Germany used 'foreign-owned' subsidiaries to manufacture arms prohibited under the Versailles Treaty.

Today Bosch is a familiar name for electrical appliances but in the First World War the German

Prospects for the death business.
John Heartfield

company boomed making spark plugs for military vehicles. The troubles its US subsidiary experienced in 1917, when America entered the war, convinced Robert Bosch, the firm's founder, of the need to camouflage its true ownership in case of future conflict. A dummy US company was set up which 'took over' the German subsidiary whose shares were held initially by a Dutch bank, but in 1939 this bank collapsed and the Wallenberg brothers stepped in. Enskilda bank was paid a handsome fee to Bosch to 'purchase' a controlling share in the American Bosch Company (ABC). Ostensibly ABC became a Swedish company, but a secret contract stipulated that American Bosch would have the right to repurchase the shares.

The Wallenbergs were assisted by their US legal representative, Sullivan and Cornwall, whose partners included the immensely well-connected John Foster Dulles. After the US entered the war in 1941, Dulles warned the Wallenbergs that ABC faced investigation and confiscation. In January 1942 they prevailed on the Swedish government to certify that ABC was Swedish. The FBI and the US Treasury were never wholly convinced, and continued to harry ABC, but the truth did not emerge until May 1945 when documents captured by the American army revealed the extent of the deception. There was outrage in Washington: the Wallenbergs were blacklisted, their US assets were frozen and the brothers denied visas to even enter America.

Ball bearings are as important to war as bullets. In 1917, just before the US declared war on Germany, Marcus Wallenberg arranged to 'take over' a US ball bearing company which was actually a subsidiary of a German combine. On this basis the Wallenbergs became players in the ball bearings industry. In collaboration with Svenska Kullager Fabriken (SKF) they formed a cartel with German producers which controlled 80% of the European market in 1930. Jacob Wallenberg sat on the SKF board but, while the Nazis were in power the Germans were in the driving seat. By 1944 Sweden was supplying 70% of specialised ball bearings to the German war machine; SKF profits soared. While US bomber crews were being shot out of the sky trying to destroy German ball bearing factories, SKF continued, with impunity, to churn out bearings for export to the Wehrmacht. After SKF upped its exports by 300% to make good German losses after a successful raid on the main German bearings factory in October 1943, Carl Spaatz, the US bomber commander, protested that: 'Our whole bomber offensive is being nullified.' Even after the allies forced Sweden to agree to curtail this trade, SKF smuggled bearings in Germany on fishing boats.

One of the directors of SKF in America was Hugo von Rosen, Herman Goering's cousin by marriage. He arranged for bearings to be exported from US factories to Germany via South American dummy companies. In 1943 US airmen were being downed by Luftwaffe planes whose propellers turned on ball bearings that were manufactured that year in Philadelphia.

Swedish banks paid hard currency for gold looted by the Nazis. In January 1941, \$1.5 million worth of gold bars was sold by Germany to the Swedes via Switzerland. In 1944, the Reichsbank disposed of \$1.7 million in gold coins. Sweden arranged to

dispose of over \$17 million of German gold in cahoots with Swiss banks. Enskilda Bank engaged in even more unsavoury dealings. In 1941-42, the Nazis seized from Dutch Jews securities, art works and jewellery worth anywhere between 350 million and 500 million guilders. They sold off these assets through a specially created Dutch bank. Enskilda Bank appears to have purchased 5-10% of the total value of stolen securities. The Nazis used the proceeds of the sale partly to pay the cost of deporting Dutch Jews to the death camps. After the war, a Dutch commission fought for the restoration of stolen assets but was fobbed off by the Wallenbergs with a token sum, even though they admitted having partaken in this lethal sell-off to the tune of \$727,000.

The American authorities were initially determined to punish them, too. In August 1945, Enskilda Bank was blacklisted. The brothers were finally allowed into the US, only to be tailed by the FBI and interrogated by US military intelligence. But they had powerful friends. Dulles lobbied in Washington while one of their British banking partners, Sir Charles Hambro, put in a good word for them in Whitehall. Allen Dulles, John Foster's brother, headed US intelligence in central Europe; Hambro worked in Special Operations Executive. In March 1946, Jacob Wallenberg resigned from the board of Enskilda. But he was a temporary scapegoat. SKF and Enskilda were taken off the blacklist and their assets unfrozen; a year later, Jacob resumed his directorship.

Aalders and Wiebes speculate that the Wallenbergs benefited from the Cold War. Ever opportunistic, by 1945, SKF was selling ball bearings to the Soviets. In late 1946, Swedish banks extended a vital credit line to the wrecked Soviet economy. The USA wanted to sabotage these transactions and used the threat of reprisals for the trade with Nazi Germany to compel compliance. The ploy succeeded: Sweden frustrated the loan arrangement at around the same time that Swedish assets in the US were unblocked. Maintaining its dubious reputation, however, SKF continued to smuggle ball bearings into the USSR, using the very techniques perfected in their trade with the Nazis. During the Korean war, Swedish ball bearings were found in North Korean tanks that had rolled against US and British soldiers.

This traffic may have placated the Russians, but Alders and Wiebes believe that Raoul Wallenberg paid the price for the cynical conduct of his relatives. Thanks to the likes of Kim Philby, Russian intelligence probably knew all that the allies did about the Wallenbergs' collaboration with the Nazis.

To them, any family member was an accomplice and might prove a useful lever for exacting retribution or extracting restitution. Raoul Wallenberg's connection with the family business, however remote, may have been detrimental to his survival once he had fallen into the hands of the Red Army.

There is a piquancy to Wallenberg's fate. While he tried to save the lives of Jews in Budapest, his uncles were helping the Nazi war effort which bought time for the murderers. Raoul has become a latter day saint whose aura bathes Sweden in a beneficial light. Yet the country's reputation for neutrality and a humanitarian foreign policy is sullied by

business interests for which it provided a haven. Neither business nor the state have made adequate apology or ample amends for their wartime conduct and, while Switzerland remains the whipping boy, they will probably avoid having to do so.

Popular indignation against the wartime conduct of the Swiss is problematic not only because it is selective. Swiss banks were only doing what banks are supposed to do: make profits. The proof that Swiss behaviour was not unusually mendacious lies in the behaviour of Swedish financial institutions, not to mention banks in Britain, the USA and even British mandatory Palestine. Between 1933 and 1939, Jews in central and east central Europe shipped out capital, openly or secretly, on the hope of following it and making new lives in countries not threatened by Nazism, fascism or communism. British banks took deposits from Jews intending to flee Nazi domination who never escaped. Their assets were sequestered by the Custodian of Enemy Property during the war and ultimately used for Britain's economic needs. When 'enemy alien' Jews who survived the war sought to recover their assets, they faced the kind of insensate treatment that has been endlessly cited to belabour the Swiss. No honest appraisal was made of these 'dormant accounts' and 'unclaimed assets'. By and large, British banks and financial organisations simply pocketed the money.

An even more interesting case belies the notion that the Swiss are particularly culpable, except on grounds of scale. Yossi Katz, professor of history at Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, has uncovered evidence that Jewish financial institutions in Mandatory Palestine salted away the 'heirless assets' of Holocaust victims. During the 1930s, thousands of central and east European Jews invested in Palestine with an eye to emigration. Most perished in the Holocaust. After the war, some 11,000 lots of property were left 'ownerless', including 3,200 pieces of land and 8,500 bank deposits. Paltry efforts were made to locate heirs to this wealth; the land was mostly appropriated by the Israeli government. While Palestine was under British rule, the Custodian of Enemy Property was busy there, too. About £3 million in the accounts of the Anglo-Palestine Bank (today Bank Leumi) were seized: the fate of that money is still unknown. The bank refuses to publish lists of 'dormant accounts' and behaves in a manner that would have brought a blush of pride to any unreconstructed Swiss bank.

In a confused way, the rage against the Swiss is an expression of unease at the behaviour of high finance and big business at large. Since the collapse of communism, capitalism faces no rivals: people can attack it at will without fear of delivering themselves into the hands of 'the Reds'. The ubiquity of capitalism provokes resentment. Is it too big for its boots? Can it be trusted? The years 1933 to 1950 are an object lesson in the amorality of capital and the absence of any 'business ethics'. To paraphrase Gordon Gekko, the Swiss experience shows that 'war is good'. The Nazi years give a new meaning to the anti-Hollywood jibe, 'There's no business like Shoah business'. For the solid, 'honest', business community of Switzerland and Sweden, and more like them, not only did war and genocide not get in the way of profits, they were a nice little earner.

Children know best

Vijay Singh, a 13-year old victim of bullying in Manchester, wrote: 'I shall remember this for eternity and I shall never forget ... Monday - my money was taken; Tuesday - names called; Wednesday - my uniform torn; Thursday - my body pouring with blood; Friday - it's ended; Saturday - freedom'. On Saturday he took his life.

A recent Childline study entitled Children and Racism, based on the calls of 1,616 children reported that 'blatant, unrelenting, openly racist harassment and bullying plays a large part in the daily experience of many black and ethnic minority children at our schools and in the streets.'

Last year the Anne Frank exhibition and a programme of associated events were held in Camden, north London, as part of the European Year against Racism. A display by the Camden Anti-Racist Bullying Project made a link between Anne Frank's story and children's experience of racism today.

Up the road from the exhibition, reported the Hampstead & Highgate Express (19 September 1997), an 11-year-old Jewish schoolboy was racially abused, punched and kicked by a gang of older boys as he walked home from Jewish Free School (JFS). The next day they were there again. He was dragged into an alleyway, beaten about the head, stomach and chest, left bruised and concussed, and again his money was stolen.

Is this an unusual incident or is racist abuse and bullying as serious an issue for Jewish school children in Britain today as it is for other ethnic minority children? Those responsible for monitoring anti-semitic incidents in Britain, The Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD), its Community Security Trust (CST) and the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) generally play down incidents, but stories, anecdotes and cuttings from across Britain suggest otherwise.

'My brother and I are the only Jewish boys at the school. The others call us 'nigger' and chocolate biscuit ... I've told my parents and the teachers and they say ignore it...it's really getting me down. ... I thought of killing myself last week but then decided not to,' 9-year-old-David told Childline.

In the Childline report, 75% of children who called about racist bullying were the only, or one of a very few ethnic minority children in their class or school. This isolation is particularly potent if the adults responsible for the ethics, policies and practice of the school do not take the racist content of the bullying seriously. This was Gabriel's experience as one of the only Jewish boys at Longhill School, near Brighton:

'You're a Jew. I'm a Nazi. We kill Jews. I am

Adults, whether teachers, parents or the leaders of their communities, are leaving students vulnerable if they fail to acknowledge the level of antisemitism as well as other forms of racism and racist bullying in schools.
Simon Lynn reports

Further reading
Gerard Aalders and Gees Wiebes, *The Art of Cloaking Ownership - the secret collaboration and protection of the German war industry by the neutrals. The case of Sweden* (Amsterdam University Press, 1996).

going to kill you!' a bigger boy told 12-year-old Gabriel on the school bus as he repeatedly punched him. This was three years ago. Further incidents followed, and last May the same boy hurled Gabriel to the ground, breaking his arm.

'The school didn't handle it well as bullying or racism. It couldn't be proved as an antisemitic attack,' says Gabriel. His parents were told: 'You can't prove he had antisemitic thoughts in his head.' The school was concerned that the attack should not be seen as racist.

His parents fought hard from the first incident for the school to take what had happened seriously and brought ideas and material to help the school create a policy for dealing with racism. They faced incomprehension, and inertia – a failure to act in any way that made a difference for Gabriel. 'After the first incident they should have come down really hard,' Gabriel says. 'I told the year head, who harangued the boy, but nothing else happened.' Further incidents followed over the next three years, but none were recorded.

Three years later the boy seriously attacked Gabriel again. This time he was suspended for just three weeks. Gabriel, who pointed out that another boy had recently been expelled for stealing, feels he should have been expelled 'no question'. Gabriel was also expected to study in the same group as his attacker – his feelings, views and welfare, which should be at the heart of any anti-bullying policy, were ignored. Gabriel gave agreement to a police prosecution against the boy for assault and ABH, but the school still left him vulnerable and he has been repeatedly harassed.

His father says: 'His confidence in the school is zero'; he often wept and was distressed and did not want to go to school. His parents have battled with the school to institute a policy on racism and anti-semitism; they have taken the issues to a meeting with governors and then to the Director of Education (who took five months to reply). Now they finally feel they are getting somewhere, but for Gabriel it is too late: he is considering transferring

to sixth form college.

It is not only physical threats that concern children. Verbal abuse, name calling, and teasing may be seen as trivial by adults but can be acutely distressing for children, undermining their confidence and self-esteem. Children are aware, too, that verbal abuse that is left unchallenged carries the threat of physical attack. With regard to racism, verbal abuse can tap into powerful stereotypes and images. A Jewish girl at primary school in Hove in Sussex told her family that she had been called 'lampshade skin' by a classmate. The parents felt that the head teacher dealt with it appropriately, and also made the abusing child apologise immediately. The head nipped the abuse in the bud, and dealt with it too within a multicultural and anti-racist ethic at the school.

However, the failure of schools to deal promptly with racist bullying was a particular feature of the Childline report. Half of all the children who phoned described harassment as going on for over a year: 'Callers described name-calling, teasing and harassment happening on a daily basis – "all the time"; "continually"; "every day"'. Many described racist bullying 'as a feature of their entire school life'.

Anti-bullying campaigns have stressed the child's responsibility to tell someone but have focused less on the crucial role of adults and their failure to respond effectively to what the child is telling them. There is plenty of good material and experience around for schools to draw on: Kidscape have published books and pamphlets; Childline; and local initiatives such as the Camden Anti-Racist Bullying Project, which has pioneered research and strategies for intervention as well as offering counselling to children, advocacy, and a parent's support group.

Individual schools that have effective policies may make wider links and resources available in their locality. A parent whose daughter at Jewish Free School (JFS) in Camden had suffered a severe racist attack on her way home, described receiving invaluable support and counselling through the confidential helpline set up by another Camden school, Acland Burghley, as part of their exemplary policies and practice against bullying.

What about children at Jewish schools? Anyone looking at the local papers in north London over the last few years, would find reports of attacks on JFS children. The last time anyone at the school spoke publicly about this, was the then headmistress Jo Wagerman, to a conference held by the Institute of Jewish Affairs (reported in the Jewish Echo 21 December 1990). She said attacks took the form of 'violent, sexual, threatening, terrifying' abuse, threats and beatings. She described 'a vicious unprovoked attack on a girl which took place on a London tube train. The rate of incidents at that time included one physical assault per month, and one or two cases of serious verbal abuse per week'.

This pattern seemed to continue through the 1990s. In one year, 1995-96, JFS recorded 1,450 incidents, described as 'attempted break-ins or attacks on pupils outside the school', though only a privileged few within the school know the nature of these 'incidents'. In the 15 months up to June 1997, under a new head of security, the number of incidents seems to have dropped, though the 70 reported are still significant. The school is cautious about



Anne Frank and her sister, Margot

talking in public about the physical and verbal abuse and attacks experienced by JFS children on their way to and from school. This caution is not just with regard to outsiders like the anti-racist/antifascist sub-committee of the Jewish Socialists' Group who recently wrote to them, but also extends to parents, teachers and students who have no opportunity to find out about, discuss or be involved in developing strategies to deal with the situation. It could be positive for students, teachers and parents to make links with others in the local community, who are involved in anti-racist activities and strategies, like the Camden Anti-Racist Bullying Project.

Cuttings from the last few years relating to attacks on Jewish school students includes: a racist attack on a Jewish primary school in Kenton in north west London 'daubed with antisemitic obscenities and windows smashed' (*Jewish Chronicle* 25 May 1993); antisemitic pamphlets sent to schools in Hemel Hempstead following the visit of the Anne Frank exhibition (*Jewish Chronicle* 21 June 1996); attacks on orthodox Jewish children in Gateshead; and incidents around a girls school in Golders Green in north west London (Board of Deputies 1996-97).

The Board of Deputies (BoD) has taken on responsibility for recording antisemitic incidents in Britain yet they seem to make a virtue out of playing them down. Mike Whine of the BoD says: 'We only record an incident if there is a clear indication of anti-semitism ... it is not enough to trash a synagogue or physically assault a Jew; and anyway 'we deliberately downplay incidents'. He gave me an example of racist literature which had been sent to many people through the post: 'We would only record this as one incident,' he said. This does not correspond with how those who experience such incidents understand racism. The BoD's require-

ment to prove the antisemitic content before recording an incident, mirrors the view of Gabriel's school in Brighton.

For anyone who wants to understand, monitor or respond to antisemitic racism in Britain, the information provided by the BoD and CST is insufficiently open to scrutiny, accountability or independent access. We need a debate in the Jewish community about who should fulfil this role and how they should fulfil it.

One problem is that the Jewish community leaders strive too hard to position Jews as 'white' and part of the mainstream of British society – as 'British people of the Jewish faith' rather than as one minority ethnic community alongside others. This makes them play down experiences of racism, and not make waves unless absolutely necessary. Such complacency leaves us unprepared, as I was when someone phoned me in the middle of the night to say: 'This is C18! Fuck off fucking Jew! I am coming round to blow your head off!'

From information I was given as well as anecdotes, cuttings and first hand accounts, racism and racist bullying are significant for Jewish children as for other ethnic minority children in Britain. But this has not been reflected in the public domain of the Jewish community – or anywhere else. Jewish children's experiences and antisemitic racism must be included in policies and practice on racism in schools. The Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE) has recently employed an anti-racist education worker, who will be able to make links with, and go into schools. This is an initiative to be welcomed. For Mary MacLeod of Childline says: 'As a nation we must take action to ensure that young people have an equal chance to learn, work and live free from discrimination and prejudice, and from fear of racial harassment and violence'.

Camden Anti-Racist Bullying Project display



Photo: Simon Lynn

Further information

Childline: free, confidential helpline for children and young people 0800 1111. Literature from Freepost 1111, London N1 0BR.

Kidscape: 152 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9TR. Tel: 0171 730 3300

Camden Anti-Racist Bullying Project, Raja Khan, c/o Camden Family Service Unit, St Margaret's, Leighton Road, London NW5 2QD. Tel: 0171 267 9717; fax 0171 485 3301.

Anne Frank Educational Trust PO Box 11880, London N6 4LN.

Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE), 33 Seymour Place, London W1H 6AT. Tel: 0181 455 0896, fax 0181 458 4700.

From generation to generation

A group of Jews who grew up in families of garment workers are campaigning for an end to Los Angeles sweatshops. Judy Branfman is one of them

Los Angeles is home to the largest garment industry in the United States. Before the massive immigration to the USA, more Jewish women in the Pale of Settlement had worked in the sewing trade than any other occupation. Of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants who poured into North America around the turn of the century, many went into the same trades. They filled the shop floors, helped start and lead the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (now merged to form Unite: Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees). They also became factory owners and manufacturers.

Manufacturers (Jews among them) from the militantly unionised east coast were attracted to LA with its strong anti-union sentiment, lack of regulations and a 1911 anti-picketing ordinance viciously enforced by the LA police department's 'Red Squad'. Many Jewish garment workers came to live in the land of oranges and sunshine where they could recover from consumption (tuberculosis), the sweatshop lung disease.

Many people grew up in families with a long tradition in the garment industry. Margaret Shifrin was born into one such family. 'My grandmother used to tell me about her sister, my Great Aunt Esther, saying: "My grandfather had a big house and he had a sewing establishment in the Ukraine. The peasants brought the cloth and he made clothing for them. He had apprentices ... My oldest sister Esther worked on the machines in his factory. She thought he exploited the girls who worked there. He said his own flesh and blood was against him ... Later she was active in the garment union here"'

Harry Fishberg, a retired cutter, who spent his pre-retirement years working in one of LA's surviving union shops said: 'I was nine when I came to this country. I went to work in the trade at 16 or so in New York. I wanted to be an artist. Everybody said: "Learn a trade." So I went to design school. My brother had a sewing shop - he was a contractor - so I learned to sew too. Then he suggested I learn to cut and so on, you see? I landed up in cutting....' In the tradition of families working around each other in the rag trade, the Marciano brothers, Sephardic Jews who came to Los Angeles from North Africa via France have turned their firm, Guess, into the city's largest clothing manufacturer and have taken an anti-union and anti-worker stance.

As a granddaughter and grandniece of garment workers in LA, New York and the Ukraine, I joined Common Threads, a women's group supporting garment workers' efforts to better working conditions through unionisation, in 1995. Common Threads comprises academics, students, activists and other community members who have done extensive outreach work and education about LA's

garment industry in colleges and community and union groups. They have also held rallies and events primarily to support Unite's campaign to organise workers who sew Guess clothing.

For the past six years Guess and their contractors have repeatedly been cited for violations of labour regulations. In 1996 the National Labour Relations Board filed a major complaint against the company. the US Department of Labour removed Guess from their Trendsetter List of manufacturers who make genuine efforts to reduce sweatshop conditions. In that year, too, Guess sued Common Threads for libel after a literary reading we sponsored in support of workers Guess had fired for trying to organize. The SLAPP suit (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) brought Common Threads and Unite good publicity and generated a second reading - The Literary Event Guess Couldn't Shut Down. Guess dropped the suit.

The Common Threads Artists Group grew out of the larger group, first designing a poster with the slogan, 'Guess who pockets the difference?', then opening a large and very public art installation about the history of LA's garment workers since the turn of the century. This is now on a public art website: www.usc.edu/Library/Ref/LA/PubArt/Downtown/HiddenLabor. Funded by a grant from the city's redevelopment agency and installed in nine windows of a former department store on the edge of LA's garment district, Hidden Labor: Uncovering L.A.'s Garment Industry is based on interviews and photos of current and retired garment workers.

After we had talked to a number of progressive Jewish groups, a member of the Sholem Community Organization suggested a rally with the slogan: 'Children and Grandchildren of Jewish Garment Workers Say No More Sweatshops - Don't Buy Guess.' Co-sponsored by Sholem, the Workmen's Circle/Arbeiter Ring, Jewish Labor Committee, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Common Threads, about 70 progressive Jewish community members and garment workers turned up outside a shopping mall with a Guess store inside. Our cardboard cut-outs of sewing machines with 'No More Sweatshops', in English and Yiddish, are now collectors' items. To our surprise, three of the four mainstream Jewish papers covered the event.

In the meantime, the Los Angeles Board of Rabbis issued a statement condemning sweatshops and affirming workers' right to organise. Along with several other large, mainstream but liberal Jewish organisations, they held a Seder in a community centre in the garment district. Then the LA Jewish Commission on Sweatshops was formed - comprising local chapters of the American Jewish Congress, the National Council of Jewish Women, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Jewish Labor Committee and rabbis from reform, conservative



Photo: Judy Branfman

Children of Jewish garment workers

and reconstructionist congregations and organisations. Hoping to capture the conscience of the Jewish community on this very difficult issue, they are planning to hold three hearings with different garment industry constituents: government officials, garment workers and Unite, and the industry manufacturers and trade associations.

At the first hearing, California's Labor Commissioner and representatives of the Department of Labor and California's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (CAL-OSHA) spoke about their problems and 'marginal success' in regulating the massive garment industry, with over 150,000 workers. The CAL-OSHA speaker reported the findings of a week of inspections 46 sewing establishments: 44 serious violations were found which were potentially life-threatening; 174 general violations (non life-threatening) were found. This investigation looked only at health and safety violations, not wage and hour violations which are even more prevalent throughout the industry. But even these officials seemed overly concerned with the impact of a new, higher minimum wage on this industry in which employers are constantly threatening to move overseas. This is strange considering that labour costs are a tiny proportion of the cost of a garment which carries a huge profit margin.

It was a good start for the commission. At the insistence of the apparel officials their testimony was given at a closed door session (so I was excluded). It remains to be seen whether the commission's recommendations will include unionisation of the industry or a more watered down version of monitoring that could exclude workers from the process

of defending their rights.

Word leaked out about the commission before its decision to hold the hearings, and no wonder, since 56% of LA's major manufacturers, a number of smaller manufacturers and industry officials, are Jewish. Along with 'a flurry of defensive faxes and calls from members of the fashion industry', Guess lawyers made recommendations as to who should and shouldn't be appointed to the commission: Jewish members of the apparel industry leadership should be appointed; Jewish members of Common Threads should not on the grounds that we 'would have a very slanted point of view'.

Over the past few years I have been alarmed at hearing the Marcianos described as Moroccan Jews at non-Jewish public events, as if their being Jewish made them logical sweatshop owners. But within the context of the LA Jewish Commission on Sweatshops, the question of what position Jews will take on labour abuses in the garment industry seems both relevant and public. As Rabbi Leonard Beerman, whose grandfather was a tailor and father a dress salesman, said in his introduction to the first hearing: 'What moves me to bring out some of these facts to the community is a sensitivity to injustice. And that's one thing shared by all Jews.'

Recent years have seen Guess stores opening around the world including one in London. We recommend that you ask the store manager about the conditions under which their clothes were made. Or better still, form a picket line and let shoppers know what's going on (line up a lawyer). Guess may not recommend you for a commission but you can be sure they will take note of your presence.

For information on the Guess campaign visit Unite's website, www.uniteunion.org or contact Common Threads at jbranfman@loop.com or write to PO box 962, Venice, California, USA 90294

Forget them not

Marek Edelman was a young activist in the Bund when the Nazis occupied Poland. A commander of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, he survived the War and returned to Warsaw where he still lives. He sent this message to the Bund celebrations in London

One hundred years ago, in a small room in Vilna, Arkady Kremer, Vladimir Kossowsky, John Mill, and 10 other people created the first Jewish political organisation: the Bund. Suddenly there came into being an organisation which declared that a Jew, a Chinese, a Pole are equal. This was the first organisation in Eastern Europe which declared that everyone has equal rights. For many years the Bund was the inspiration for the whole Jewish movement in Europe. It went through many vicissitudes; in Russia its fate was tragic; in Lithuania it disappeared; in Poland it became a mass movement, in the 1930s, leading 17 councillors into the Warsaw town council.

The Bund was a political force connected to the Polish socialist movement (PPS). Together they constituted the majority in the Warsaw town council. Even after the council was disbanded, its spirit remained in Warsaw. One needs to remind oneself who defended Warsaw from the Hitlerite invasion: apart from the retreating remnants of the Polish army it was the battalions of workers who numbered 14,000, 7,000 of them Jews, who were organised by the editors of the *Robotnik*.

There, on the barricades of Vola, Zolibor, Okhota, the first Bundists perished. That was where the fight began, not only for the freedom of the Jews: this was a struggle against Hitlerism for the freedom of the world. In those days, our people, Artur Zygielbojm, Abrasha Blum, M Niesdialkowski, Puzak were still in Warsaw. They were the

people who defended Warsaw and ought to be remembered. It did not take very long – only 28 days.

The Germans occupied Warsaw and demanded 12 hostages; two of our comrades, Artur Zygielbojm and Esther Ivinska were among them. For several days they were forbidden to leave the town hall, and for each attack on a German one of them would pay with their life. We were a force and this is why the president of Warsaw took us as hostages. By sheer chance these hostages survived. When the Germans came to arrest them, President Starzynski locked Esther Ivinska in a large cupboard because she was the only woman amongst them; after 12 hours the caretaker let her out; that is how she survived. This was the beginning of the resistance of the Bund. The Bund does not exist as an organisation here now, but its spirit is still present in Warsaw. The present law in Poland about the national minorities originates in the programme of the Bund. Later the ghetto came into being: they locked all of us up; we were forbidden to go to school, to eat, to sing, to dance, to read books. We did all that we could during this tragic time in the ghetto, when people were starving, filthy, infested with lice, to help them to remain human beings. Every evening in the locked yards we arranged literary events. The readings were performed by actors, pupils of the Yiddish schools and Tsukunftists (members of the Bund youth movement). This activity was a form of resistance. It was forbidden to learn so behind the façade of a public kitchen we organised primary schools, secondary schools – a university.

The spirit of freedom and equality was always present in the ghetto. In the end, the ghetto was liquidated, but the first armed resistance, on a larger scale, in Poland took place in the Warsaw ghetto. What happened is like a picture concentrated in the pupil of an eye. It became clear that the idealists, inspirers and those who carried out the resistance were, in the first instance, the Bundists. Of course, there were many other people, but the inspiration came from there, from us. We had fierce opponents. Religious Jews said: 'No, one should not put up any resistance, because we are weak, and if we submit ourselves to the Germans, maybe we'll survive.' We created a fighting organisation when no one realised that there would be a mass extermination.

I will say no more now, but I must mention all these people because I don't know whether there will ever be such an occasion again to speak about those who were the nucleus of our activity. If any of you remember Abrasha Blum, and I know there are here some who do remember, he was the spirit and conscience of that movement. In the worst conditions he managed to organise help, literature and newspapers. Mauritz Orzech was another: he always correctly evaluated the international political situation. Berek Shnaidmil, Bernard Goldshtayn, Lozer Clog who was the trade union leader in the ghetto. Such was Sonia Novogrodzka who was



Left: Bundists in the Warsaw Ghetto. Above: Marek Edelman

taken to the gas chambers from the place where she was feeding children. She organised the school system in the ghetto. She is held in the same esteem as Janush Korczak. And then the younger ones. Henio Rus – a man who lived for the movement; Miriam Shifman – a girl who organised the distribution of literature in the ghetto. And even younger ones who, with Pola Livshitz and Manya Katz, organised theatre productions for children, and sang Yiddish songs. All this took place illegally in the ghetto, in locked rooms.

I must mention another group of people: the ones who were the most courageous, who took the biggest risks. They were the ones who kept the contact between the ghettos. They strengthened us in our belief that we were not alone, that we were in contact with the Polish underground, that Poland was fighting fascism. This group included Michal Klepfisz, Zygmunt Friedrich, Vladka Peltel-Meerd, Marisa Warman, Inka Sviderska. There were also our children educated by Sonia Novogrodzka, like Yurek Blones, Yanek Bylak, David Hochberg; Tobcia Davidovitch – a little girl – saved 50 people from death. Remaining alone she said, 'I am wounded. I don't want to be a burden. I'll stay behind.'

These were our people and this was the Warsaw ghetto. But it was not only in the Warsaw ghetto. The only *kehila* (Jewish community) which was completely administered by the Bund was in Piotrkow. On the first day, when they were told: 'You have to send a transport to the gas chambers,' they all ran away to Warsaw. This was Samsonovitch, Keleman and several others. Please remember that the uprisings in Treblinka, Sobibor and in other concentration camps took place after the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto.

In 1943 the Jewish people in Poland perished. Their emissary, Zygielbojm, who represented the Bund and all the Jews in Poland called the world to defend the Jewish population, but achieved nothing. When the flames in the Warsaw ghetto began to die down he committed suicide as a sign of protest. Symbolically, this closes the epoch when the Bund in Eastern Europe was at the height of its success.

The test of time

Perec Zylberberg was the son of Bundist parents, a pupil at a Bund school and an active member of SKIF, the Bund children's movement. He looks back over his childhood in pre-War Poland and his youth in the anti-Nazi resistance

The period after the *Yomim Naroem* – the days between the New Year and the Day of Atonement – is always a period of reflection, and this was certainly the case on 16 November last year when a large gathering in London celebrated the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Bund in eastern Europe. It was an invigorating experience to be able to participate in the festivities and to talk to a

Political, social, educational, economic and cultural topics were analysed by helpers (helpers) who were only a few years older than the young Skifists. We felt an affinity with the struggles of socialists elsewhere, and started to think of ourselves as part of a worldwide movement. We rejoiced at the successes of the Austrian and Spanish comrades. We suffered when reactionary regimes imposed totalitarian rule anywhere, including our own country Poland.

At our summer camps, which we called socialist youth republics, we named our tents, houses, paths and playing fields after famous socialists. I am still exhilarated when I think back to those days. At the end of our summer camp in 1939, we came back to Lodz to find it pervaded by an ominous atmosphere. It wasn't long before we were transformed into bewildered and disoriented youngsters.

We weren't allowed to do any normal things, like going to school or to work. It was as if night had taken over, shutting out any daylight.

The SKIF, alongside the Tsukunft (socialist youth), the Bund, the trade unions and the cultural and recreational groups like Morgenstern (sporting and gymnastic) and Kultur lige (cultural promotion) went underground. We concentrated on mutual help, keeping

our spirits up and working out means of active resistance against the occupiers.

The Bund ran kitchens and tea halls for those who didn't have any means of sustenance. Our main aim was to carry on against the overwhelming odds. Pretty soon we were confined to a ghetto. We lost contact with the outside world. Relying on our own meagre resources, we tried to help those who were sick and without work. The whole Bundist camp participated in the unequal struggle against the Nazis. We found out, through clandestine radios, what was going on in the world. It helped keep our spirits up in the tightening vice of ghetto life.

My young days in a socialist environment were a reservoir for my whole life, the inspiration for a lifelong commitment. We retained our socialist ideals despite the near total annihilation around us. We knew then that our ideas would stand the test of time – and they have.





Labour MP, Dr Rudi Vis, opens the event. Left, Bund representative Perec Zylberberg (Canada). Centre, David Rosenberg (Jewish Socialists' Group)



Members of the youth section sell raffle tickets and Bundist souvenirs



Wlodka Blit Robertson and Barbara Blit stand in front of a display about Bundists in London which includes photos of their late father and husband, the Bundist, Licjan Blit

A DAY TO RELATE, DEBATE AND CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF JEWISH SOCIALISM

They came in their hundreds – young and old, men and women, Jews and non-Jews, political activists and the politically curious, to mark the Bund centenary in Holloway, north London on 16 November. The central hall was buzzing with conversations over coffee. Recollections were inspired by the exhibitions all around while the stalls did brisk business. In one room Bundists recalled their lives

and experience. In another, today's activists debated the continuing controversies inspired by Bundist ideas. In a third room, the culture in which the Bund thrived was celebrated through Yiddish song, poetry, stories and film, and in a fourth room the next generation of activists were entertained with music, poetry and magic. Jewish socialism was 100 years young!



Telling tales – storyteller Pamela Marre



Poet Michael Rosen animates his audience



Discussing socialism over coffee



Contested territories

Bundism and Zionism were both born at the turn of the last century, with opposing visions of liberation for the Jewish people. David Rosenberg explores their differing vantage points and looks at why they remain in conflict

The year 1997 marked the 100th anniversary of two movements – political Zionism and Jewish socialism – which were in bitter conflict though they addressed a common conundrum. In the late 19th century they called it ‘the Jewish question’ or ‘the Jewish problem’. Their problem was how to secure the future wellbeing of the Jewish people faced with the vulnerability of minority status, vicious antisemitism and discrimination. At a more philosophical level, both movements speculated about the future of Jewish identity in a community that was starting to question religious authority, and in an industrialising society that was challenging traditional beliefs and lifestyles.

The Zionists proposed a radical solution: to remove the Jewish people from the societies in which they had lived for generations and implant them in another country they would claim as their own where they could be secure and self-sufficient. Some Zionists were not fussy about where this might be, though others insisted that it must be a land with which the Jewish people had a deep historical bond, because this Jewish state, they believed, would and should be the centre of Jewish life.

The Jewish socialists, rooted in impoverished communities, believed that the liberation of the Jewish people could only take place where they were living. They dismissed the Zionists’ plans as dangerous fantasies. The Jewish socialists formed the first Jewish political party to fight for their ideals – the Bund. Zionism’s birth was announced too but its existence was theoretical rather than concrete; it was

some years before it functioned organisationally.

History is written by victors and at a superficial level the Zionists might claim victory. Jewish socialism exists in depleted form, betrayed by the revolution in Russia and all but destroyed by Nazism. Meanwhile, the class structure of Jewish society has changed. The number of working class Jews has greatly diminished. The Jewish intelligentsia, initially supportive of the workers’ movements has largely moved away from socialist politics. Particularly in America, many former left-wing Jewish intellectuals are now ideologues for the right, supporting the most intransigent forces in Israel. Zionism meanwhile has achieved its aim of creating a Jewish state.

But dig beneath the surface and a different picture emerges. Zionism has not solved the ‘Jewish problem’. Antisemitism continues to thrive in many parts of the world and, ironically, might even have been exacerbated in some areas by the actions of Israel itself. Nearly 50 years after the Israeli state came into existence, two thirds of the world’s Jews choose to live in the diaspora. And many diaspora communities have been swollen by Jews born in Israel who found life there intolerable. The world’s largest Jewish community today is not in Israel, but America. Far from being self sufficient the Israeli economy relies on massive aid from America. Yet many Israelis endure poverty and newer immigrants from Ethiopia and Russia encounter discrimination from other Israeli citizens. And security? Israel has been embroiled in five wars and faces a continuing rebellion from the Palestinian people who justifiably believe that they have an equal right

to the land and its resources.

If, in the late 1890s the questions facing the Jewish people as a whole could be addressed seriously by the ideology and rhetoric of nationalism (Zionism) or class politics (Bundism), the answers today must be more complex. But the issues at the end of the last century remain unresolved.

So why 1897? Above all it was the impact on Jews of the massive changes in the society in which they lived as the entire socio-economic structure began to change from pre-capitalist to capitalist. At that time there were nearly six million Jews in the Russian empire – 50% of world Jewry. Add those in adjacent territories – Austria, Hungary, Romania – and the figure rises to 70%. They had been settled for centuries in this area. Unlike the predominantly middle class Jews of western Europe, most were labouring people. Religion was starting to wane but they were unified by a common Yiddish language and culture.

The Bund marked a turning point in Jewish history. It presented the radical idea that the Jews were equal citizens and should enjoy equal rights. The rabbis continued to tell their congregants to and trust in God. Community leaders made deals with those who persecuted them. The Zionists believed that Jews could never attain equal rights, except in their own separate society. The Bund also had to struggle against the prevailing views among the oppressed. One Bundist said: ‘The Jewish worker had faith in God, in the Messiah, in Rothschild. He placed all his hope in good and virtuous people. He did not believe, however, in his own strength. And the Bund bade him trust in yourself. Within yourself lies your salvation. Your redemption lies in struggle. Equality is achieved through struggle.’

One of the myths of post-War Zionism is that it created a ‘new Jew’. But in fact, by the early 1900s the Bund had acknowledged the ‘new Jew’ on the horizon – a Jew ready to live or die not as a helpless victim of evil forces, but as a fighter against them.

In its early years the Bund won more support than the Zionists because of its work in two spheres – unionising workers and enabling them to struggle for better working conditions, and organising self-defence against antisemites. The Zionist groups believed that antisemitism could not be defeated only escaped from, although some left-Zionist groups did co-operate with the Bund in self-defence.

With the advent of the Bund, unprecedentedly Jews united with non-Jews against common enemies – antisemitism and despotism. The Zionists saw themselves working purely within the Jewish community. Relations with non-Jews were instrumental – to win support for their objectives, not to engage in common struggles. The Bund worked among the Jewish people but saw itself as part of the wider struggle of humanity for socialism and democracy, against tyranny and oppression. Throughout its existence it has worked with socialists from other communities, nations, peoples.

In the Tsarist Russian empire a range of socialist organisations temporarily pulled together in one movement, the RSDRP. In 1903 it split into the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The Bund had a troubled relationship with both, although it drifted closer to the Mensheviks. All socialist groups took part in the revolution that overthrew the Tsar early in 1917, but Lenin’s Bolsheviks seized the initiative later that

year, grabbing power in the name of the workers and peasants. Among others, the Bund warned that dictatorship would follow a minority coup. They paid the price of challenging the new authoritarians; many Bundist activists spent the first years of the Russian Revolution imprisoned by the Bolsheviks.

In 1919, Poland became an independent state again. The largest section of East European Jewry lived there. After the First World War the numerical centre of Jewish life was shifting to the USA but Poland became the cultural and spiritual reservoir of the Jewish people and provided the new stage for the struggle between Jewish ideologies. The three main elements were the Bund, Zionism and religious orthodoxy, all of which had real constituencies and bases of power. Zionists had members in the Polish Parliament. The orthodox controlled the religiously defined Jewish community institutions, and, especially through the 1930s, the Bund strengthened its influence on secular Jewish life and among the urban working class.

In the towns it had a huge youth movement, *Tsukunft*, a children’s organisation, SKIF, a daily paper, a secular Yiddish school system and libraries. It worked closely with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and socialist organisations of other minorities rather than with other Jewish parties.

In the late 1930s the struggle against anti-semitism dominated Poland’s Jewish community. The Zionist movement and orthodox leaders had no answers. With hindsight Zionist ideologues claim that only they could foresee the scale of the tragedy that was to befall Europe’s Jews and offered the right policy – mass exodus to Palestine. In reality, even the most convinced Zionists saw this as a process that would take about 25 years. The orthodox offered little beyond faith that God would provide salvation. Both the Zionists and the orthodox were willing to make deals with the antisemitic Polish government about evacuation on the grounds of common interest. This weakened the Jewish community and strengthened antisemitism. Many of their followers gravitated towards the Bund.

Politically this was expressed most clearly in the town council elections throughout Poland in 1938. In major urban areas the Bund swept the Jewish vote. In the most densely populated Jewish areas, Warsaw and Lodz, most Jewish councillors were elected from Bund lists. On the eve of the Second World War the Bund was the leading political party in Polish Jewry. In their most perilous situation, the mass of Poland’s Jews placed their faith in Jewish socialists. Pundits speculated that at the next general election in Poland the Bund would have been a significant partner in a socialist government. That election never happened. Fascism was triumphant. Poland’s Jews were decimated and with them most of the movement that had expressed their hopes.

The Bund played an extraordinary role in the war-time ghettos, allying with other Jewish groups and urging maximum resistance to the Nazis. The ideological conflict that had put the Bundists and the Zionists at loggerheads for decades dissipated in the struggle for survival. Many people know of the young Zionist martyr Mordechai Anielewicz, commander of the ghetto uprising in Warsaw. Few know that the five-strong command group included two Bundists, one of whom, Marek Edelman, is the

Opposite: Bundist self-defence group, Odessa, 1905

sole survivor today. To the chagrin of Zionists, Edelman still lives in Poland. Today, Zionists claim the Warsaw ghetto revolt as the first manifestation of the spirit of resistance and struggle that created Israel. Yet, in the early years of this century we saw the Bund's first armed resistance against antisemitic forces, the precursor of the spirit that created and sustained the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the resistance in other ghettos and in concentration camps.

With a few exceptions, the Nazi period illustrated the world's indifference to the destruction of Jews. Zionists, though, developed this into a conception of permanent distrust by Jews of the entire Gentile world. Zionists depict the Nazi genocide as the last stage of the diaspora, the consequence of having no Jewish state. But if Hitler had not been stopped at El Alamein, the Jews in Palestine would have been slaughtered too. Taking a longer historical view, Jews had suffered national disasters precisely when they had their own state (when the first and second Temples were destroyed).

In 1947 the remnants of the Bund assembled in Brussels. Zionism and the conflict in Palestine were high on the agenda. The statements that came from that conference and from another in October 1948, a few months after the State of Israel was established, make fascinating reading: 'Zionism cannot solve the problem of the great majority of the Jewish people who live, and will continue to live, outside the boundaries of Palestine.'

'The state of Israel being the result of an artificial partition of Palestine and being established by a bloody struggle between Jews and Arabs, is not only far from solving the Jewish problem all over the world, but also jeopardises the great and important accomplishments of the Jewish community in Palestine, even its physical existence. Jewish socialists and democrats should work for peace with the surrounding Arab states and for co-operation with the Palestinian Arab population through the establishment of a Jewish-Arab state based on the principles of democratic federalism.'

Emanuel Scherer, a Bundist theorist writing in the 1950s, observed: 'A Jewish state has been built against the will of the majority of the population in Palestine. It will perpetuate a dangerous conflict between Jews and Arabs (and) increase the chauvinist feelings among both sectors of the population.'

'The State of Israel is a fact. What seemed a dream even to many Zionists has come true but there are limitations and consequences. The armed vigilance of Israel cannot secure its position within Arab encompassment. Even if Israel had a grater absorptive capacity than it actually has it could still only take a percentage of world Jewry.'

'What Zionism fought for and what it has achieved are two different things. It strove for an all-Jewish liberation but has achieved at best a risky liberation of the minority of the world's Jewish population that have become Israelis. It still leaves Jews all over the world with their own problems that have to be solved where they live.'

The tension between Israel and the diaspora, between statehood and peoplehood, is the central unresolved question in the conflict today between Zionism and Jewish socialism. Zionism has tried to transform the Jewish people into a state-nation. Professor Leibman Hersch, writing in the 1949, stated: 'The period when the entire Jewish nation was united in a truly independent state of its own was limited to 80 years (the combined reign of David and Solomon) or only about 2% of the period described in Jewish history. In the centuries before or after the Jews were dispersed, under foreign rule or in exile. So nationhood without statehood, within Jewish history, is not a unique but rather a normal development.'

Statelessness does not mean homelessness. The countries where Jews live and work are their homes. Israel is the home and state of Jews living there.

Some Zionists claim that there is no contradiction between statism in Israel and care for the Jewish majority outside Palestine, but in reality they are antagonistic. By transforming all Jews into potential residents of Israel Zionism contradicts the concept of maintaining Jewish nationality outside Palestine. The insistence on the supremacy of Israel over other Jewish issues creates a conflict between the interests of Israel and those of Jewish people throughout the world. If Zionism continues to exhaust the resources and vitality of Jewish communities and subordinate their interests to the needs of Israel, the Jewish people might pay the price through disintegration. The decay of the diaspora might be the long term result of statehood. As Emanuel Scherer wrote: 'While transforming deserts into settlements in Palestine we might transform a once flourishing cultural settlement (the diaspora) into a desert.'

The Bund believes that historical destiny has made the Jewish people a stateless, dispersed nation with a consciousness of Jewish nationality and peoplehood. The world is their border. Only within a worldwide framework can Jewish problems be solved. Despite its constructive achievements, Zionism as a set of ideas and in its practice has had a detrimental effect on Jewish life and on the lives of other peoples it has affected. The perspectives and insights of Jewish socialists on the Jewish condition retain their validity, still providing a way of understanding ourselves and offering a direction for a secure and meaningful future. In a world where groups fighting for their rights define themselves variously as people, nation states, minorities and classes, the experience and ideas of Bundism have an important contribution to make to *sholom af der gantser velt* - peace throughout the world.

Bella Shapiro speaks at a Bundist May Day celebration, Lublin 1936



A LIVING CULTURE



The Red Herring Club has received a grant from the Arts Council of England's Arts for Everyone scheme to organise a monthly programme of arts activities.

A Living Culture is an exciting and innovative programme of participatory arts activities for children focusing on our secular cultural tradition.

Each session is led by a contemporary Jewish artist (musicians, writers, performers, visual artists). We are looking for professional artists with workshop skills and experience of working with children. Many talented artists who are Jewish are rarely commissioned to produce work for our community.

The Red Herring Club is a meeting place for adults too. If you would like to be involved, come along. Each session is designed to be participatory, Jewish-but-secular, stimulating and fun.

The forthcoming programme includes
19 April: the fourth and final Seder.
24 May: the Golem myth. Writing

with Ann Jungman.

21 June: Ian Saville explores Jewish stories through drama games.

Please see the children's listings in the *Jewish Chronicle*, *The Guardian* and *Time Out* for final details of dates and times.

The venue for each workshop is Jackson's Lane Community Centre, 269a Archway Road (opposite Highgate tube), London N6 5AA.

Workshops start at 1.45pm. Please don't plan to go away and leave your child at the session. Parents/carers should anticipate joining in! The café and bar will be open during the afternoons whilst we're there.

Tickets: Adults £4 (concs £3), Under 16s £3 Special offer: Adults £3 (concs £2), under 16s £2 if you pay by cheque at least one week in advance to:

JSG Red Herring Club, BM3725 London WC1N 3XX.





THINGS FALL APART

After 100 years of political Zionism, Israeli society is divided as never before, says Michael Heiser

In Israel today, there are two broad political perspectives. The first is a religious/nationalist interpretation of the place of Jews in the Middle East. This is linked with right-wing chauvinist ideas, and is reflected in the policies of the coalition headed by Netanyahu. The second, called 'post-Zionism', relates to the 'new' or 'revisionist' historians like Benny Morris or Tom Segev and to the critiques of literary figures such as A B Yehoshua and David Grossman.

What divides these two perspectives is more important than what unites them. There are also interesting sidelights on how this new post-Zionist school relates to the diasporist Jewish Socialist or Bundist tradition. Bundism offered Jews a solution in terms of integration into the labour movement of the countries in which they lived – a solution which respected their specific concerns as Jews. The accent was on cultural, as opposed to territorial, autonomy.

Zionism argued that Jewish concerns were related primarily to antisemitism; that the solution was one of territorial concentration, where Jews could be the majority; and that the individual solution was immigration to Israel.

There were substantial differences of view as to what kind of society should emerge in Palestine – whether it should be capitalist or socialist, agricultural or industrial. There were arguments about whether labour should be exclusively Jewish, as well as strategic and tactical questions between the Labour Party and the revisionists. After the establishment of the state, there were political differences that related to both style and substance. Indeed, at one crucial moment in 1948, disagreements between different Zionist groups almost led to civil war.

However, for all that, what Zionists shared was more important than their differences. Although its adherents disagreed about many things, they agreed that the Zionist movement and, following its cre-

ation, the State of Israel had a particular 'purpose' as the 'Jewish National Homeland'. This was expressed in the 'law of return' according to which Jews anywhere in the world can go and settle in Israel.

Recent history has brought changes in the role of religion. Early Zionists were secular, although by no means anti-religious. Applicability for settlement or Israeli citizenship did not depend on any tests of religious observance – indeed, the fact that the criteria for Jewishness used by the Law of Return are more lax than those of the orthodox rabbinate has led to conflict and confusion.

It is certainly the case that orthodox Judaism has enjoyed a unique position ever since the establishment of the state. This is indicated by the absence of civil marriage and burial, legal prohibitions on Sabbath opening and the absence of public transport on Friday evening and Saturday. However this was probably due more to the particular position of the religious parties and their presence within Mapai (Labour)-led coalitions, than to any general wish to enforce religious observance on the majority of Israel's Jewish population. Most Jews remained resolutely secular, and all manner of memoirs have attested to the shock of immigrants from Arab countries at finding that Jews in the Jewish state tended to spend their Saturdays on the beach rather than in synagogue. Beyond specifically religious concerns, the religious parties tended to be, if anything, more dovish than most secular parties. For example, during the cabinet debate of a massacre carried out by Israeli troops in a village near Ramallah in the early 1950s, the representative of Poalei Agudat Yisrael argued that the action was contrary to Jewish ethics, rather than focusing on realpolitik and news management like the other members of the cabinet.

After 1967 this changed. One reason for this relates to Gush Emunim's position in the Occupied Territories and its relationship to the National Religious Party (NRP). After 1967 Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) became the main organiser of settlement in the territories. The conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem, of towns like Hebron and of the Judean desert and Samaritan hills, was seen as more significant than Galilee or the coastal plain. A whole religious-organisational infrastructure was developed to establish settlements and support them. Gush Emunim arose within the structure of the NRP, which had previously been a willing partner in coalitions headed by Mapai. This shifted the NRP into the 'national' or right wing camp.

The second change came from developments within ultra-orthodox Judaism. These Jews had traditionally seen Zionism as an alien, secular movement, believing that only religious observance could bring redemption and that Zionism was at best an irrelevance and at worst blasphemy. But in recent years significant elements in this camp have aligned with the right wing, and have even doctored their own history to create a 'Zionist' past. Most prominent have been the antics of Lubavitch (Habad) which included flooding Israel with leaflets and stickers proclaiming: 'Netanyahu – good for the Jews', a few days before the 1996 elections.

This has to be seen in the context of the strengthening of revisionist Zionism. Revisionism was boosted by the fact that Sephardi Jews, alienated by the clientism and patronising attitudes of the govern-

ing parties (notably Mapai) in the 1950s, voted for the Likud. This led to the formation of a cohesive ideological block, sometimes called the National Block (Gush Leumi). Its ideology can be characterised as opposition to all territorial compromise within mandatory Palestine, linked to a religious-historical compunction. They are therefore totally opposed to the Oslo 'land for peace' principle.

An example of what this attitude can lead to was reported in the Israeli press last August. Four yeshiva students drove into a petrol station in the Palestinian Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. They filled up at the pump, got back in the car, and attempted to drive away without paying. The petrol station attendant, Mahmoud Abu Sara, aged 74, attempted to stop them. He hung on to the car's open window. They drove several hundred metres before knocking him off, as they passed another car. He later died of his injuries.

This contempt for non-Jews, particularly for Palestinians, is integral to the religious nationalist attitudes which leads to incidents like this.

So much for the national camp. What lies in the other corner? There were always small non- and anti-Zionist currents. These include individuals such as Uri Avnery and Boaz Evron who called for a 'Hebrew nationalism' as well as the Israeli Communist Party, whose main support, if not its leadership, comes from Palestinian citizens of Israel. What is new is the emergence of a critique within the mainstream of Israeli society. Firstly there is an element who have been called 'revisionist historians', such as Benny Morris and Tom Segev. They have exposed the Zionist myths to show, for example, that, contrary to the received wisdom, the Arabs of Palestine did not flee in 1948 but were expelled.

Then there are Israelis like A B Yehoshua who question whether, following the mass aliya from the ex-Soviet Union and the increasing pressures of population, Israel should forever remain a land of immigration, or whether, instead, it should look ahead (this was in the heady post-Oslo days) to a time peace with a neighbouring Palestinian state.

Thirdly, and, related to it, crucially, increasing willingness to recognise both Palestinian nationhood and the approaching reality (if Oslo had been kept to in both letter and spirit) of Palestinian statehood.

It is an article of Israeli faith that in the 1967 war (unlike 1948) the Palestinian population were encouraged to stay put. For the most part this is true – with one exception. A few days after the 1967 occupation the Israeli Defence Forces drove the residents out of three villages in the Latrun area; Amwas, Beit Nuba and Yalu, and bulldozed their houses. A park was later built on the site. Last year, on the 30th anniversary Ha'aretz published the story alongside pictures taken at the time, showing the villages before and after their destruction. The photographer had been discouraged by his (Mapam-affiliated) kibbutz from publishing the pictures at the time. Ha'aretz also reprinted the account by Amos Kenan of serving in a platoon which had to deal with the displaced villagers. The same account, in English translation, is on page 129 of the Rough Guide to Israel and the Occupied Territories (which, incidentally, was withdrawn from sale following pressure from the usual sources).

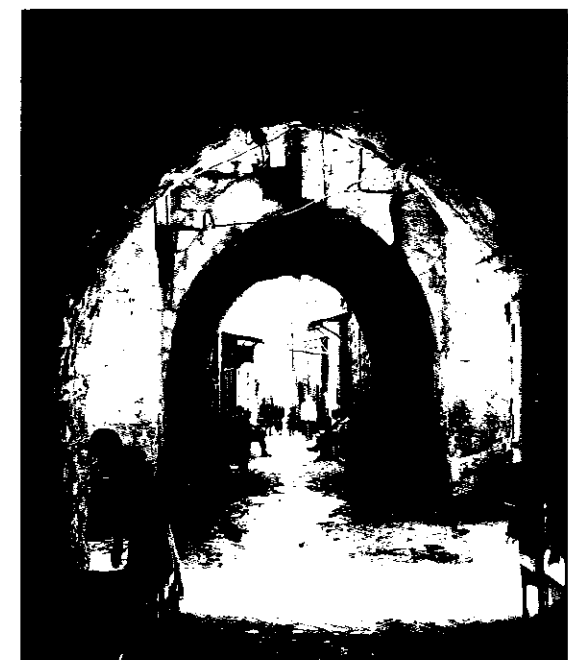
Last January, Ha'aretz ran an article by Uri

Avnery, longstanding prophet of coexistence and dialogue with the PLO, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the *Hebrew Manifesto* which called for recognition of Palestinian nationhood. On the next page was an article about Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who produces a literary journal, including translations into Arabic from Hebrew writers such as A B Yehoshua and the poet Yehuda Amichai.

Post-Zionism is an appropriate term to characterise these positions. It does not try to deny the reality of Israeli nationhood and statehood. But it does critically examine its past with a view to laying the ground for a future of co-existence, and of compromise between different national aspirations.

I would not claim that post-Zionism is a majority even within the secular left majority in Israel. Indeed, there is a debate about the meaning of the term. For example, an article in *Lebnsfragn*, the journal of the Bund in Israel (September-October 1997), identifies the heritage of the Bund as closer to the left Zionist tradition which has a social democratic heritage going back to the mass European workers' movement, than with post-Zionism which is characterised as 'post-modern' and lacking in values. However, a potential coalition could be mobilised around its ideas, drawn from Labour, Meretz and those parties whose support comes from Palestinian citizens of Israel (such as Hadash). It could include elements of Netanyahu's coalition who are not part of the 'national' block – the Third Way, a right wing break away from the Labour Party, Yisrael b'Aliya, the party of recent Russian immigrants, or the Gesher party of former foreign minister David Levy which has resisted Netanyahu's budget cuts.

At the start of 1998 the national-religious camp is still in the ascendant. Our hope must be that Israelis and diaspora Jews, whether secular or adherents of the reform or liberal traditions which are not part of this national-religious camp but are a significant force in world Jewry, particularly in the USA, conclude that they neither want to live in, nor support, a military theocracy, but wish to see Israel at peace with its neighbours having reached a just, 'historic compromise' with Palestinian national aspirations.



Opposite: Palestinian home destroyed by Israeli border police.
Left: the old city of Jerusalem

Act of courage

Locked up in solitary confinement in Israel for 11 years, Mordecai Vanunu's plight has been placed centre stage by a powerful one-man play. Jewish Socialist interviewed Yigal Ezrati, the writer and director of *Looking for Mister V*

In 1988 Yigal Ezrati came to Britain to win support for Yesh Gvul, a movement of army reservists who were refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories. They were not deserters, nor classic conscientious objectors but they knew they were being asked to carry out a role that their conscience could not justify. They could not regard the Palestinian people as their enemy, and knew that a peace which met the needs of Israelis and Palestinians was possible. Yet while the government sent soldiers to wage war against a people legitimately fighting against occupation, it was also refusing to take steps to find a political solution.

Since its inception, the army has been a pillar of Israeli society, an agent of conformity and consensus that has been almost impossible to challenge. Individual Israelis had challenged some of the central tenets of Zionism often from the comfort of a chosen exile in Europe or America, but Yesh Gvul was a challenge from within. Many of their members were met halfway – the army discreetly offered them duties inside the Green Line – but a significant minority spent time in prison. Yigal Ezrati was prepared to pay that price, and served six weeks. He returned to Britain recently as the writer and director of a play about Israel's most famous 'traitor' – Mordecai Vanunu, now in his 12th year in solitary confinement. His play *Looking for Mister V* previewed in London before a run at the Edinburgh Festival. Ezrati is clear about the link with his own experience. 'I was in jail for six weeks ready to pay for something I believed in. People in Yesh Gvul are very aware of questions of conscience. I admired the price he [Vanunu] was prepared to pay.'

For the first few years of his sentence Vanunu received support only from the most marginal sectors of Israeli society – the Communist Party and far left – but that is changing. Individuals from the more mainstream left/liberal Meretz camp, such as Dedi Tzucker and Shulamit Aloni have been very supportive. 'Last year there was a conference in Israel,' says Ezrati. 'I met people from the campaign and met Mordecai's brother Meir. The press and TV are starting to deal more with the Vanunu issue. A documentary was shown in Jerusalem recently. The papers are starting to discuss nuclear weapons. I wrote to Mordecai Vanunu when I had the idea for the play. He was very pleased with the idea. He said we should try to imagine the individual and ask questions about that individual.'

The strength of Ezrati's one-man play is in the casting of Jonathan Cherchi. But this itself reflects changes within Israeli society. 'This actor had wanted to do a play about Vanunu for many years. He was from an Oriental Jewish background. He felt the affinity with Vanunu so much from the inside. (Vanunu is from a Moroccan family.) He has worked in theatre for around 15 years. He usually gets the role of an Arab or a terrorist! Although there is still discrimination in many other fields, Oriental

Jews have become more significant in Israeli theatre. The generation of Moroccan Jews who are Vanunu's parents don't want to deal with the issue. For them it is a catastrophe, but there is now a strong group of leftist Oriental Jews called Keshet. They were pleased that the play raised their issues. One Oriental Jew recently wrote an article that compared the cases of Ron Arad and Mordecai Vanunu. One is a bomber and the other made actions for peace but it is Vanunu who is cast as primitive.'

A comparison has also been made with Udi Adiv, an Israeli jailed in the 1970s for 18 years (and released after 12) on spying charges. 'Vanunu does not like the comparison,' says Ezrati. 'But with Udi Adiv there was a recognition that he acted for reasons of ideology. With Vanunu they couldn't understand what a Moroccan Jew was doing studying at university. They think he did it just for money.'

The stereotypes of Oriental Jews and the discrimination they suffer are powerfully alluded to in the play. Oriental Jews are becoming more prominent in both the Labour and Likud mainstream political parties, but at the roots of society little is changing.

Ezrati's target audience is first and foremost the Israeli public, 'which was Mordecai Vanunu's audience too. He only gave the story to the *Sunday Times* because he knew that no Israeli paper would publish it.' But he believes the play will be received well in other countries because 'the issues are the same – the individual versus the consensus'. He is clear that this, rather than the smokescreen of 'security', is the key to Vanunu's case. 'He has nothing more to reveal. The response of the Israeli state was motivated by revenge. Also they wanted to make other people learn the lesson that they should not challenge the consensus.'

In Israel the audience reaction has been strong and positive. University researchers have found that many members of the audience who had previously regarded Vanunu as a traitor had their minds changed by the play. 'In one performance people from a school for prison officers came, as well as regular army officers. They liked the show and were very shocked by it. In the discussion they were defensive and talked about security needs but other members of the audience challenged them and raised issues about nuclear weapons and secrecy.'

Ezrati is pessimistic about Vanunu's prospects. 'The signs are very bad, maybe irreversible. His paranoia makes him believe that everyone is a collaborator. The only thing that might change is the conditions – his solitary confinement' in a cell that measures three metres by two. He is more hopeful, though, of the issues surrounding the development and stockpiling of nuclear weapons being confronted. Although he regards the peace process as flawed, he says: 'It has helped to kill the last taboos of Israeli society. Since Oslo, peace is an option and this raises nuclear questions.'



Actor Jonathan Cherchi

WATCHING BRIEF

On the 11th anniversary of Vanunu's incarceration, Hope Leïbersohn flew from Britain to Israel to take part in a week-long international vigil outside Ashkelon prison

Our minibus arrived every morning at the prison. We tried with whistles, a megaphone and shouting to reach him in the exercise yard. We hung banners on the prison fence. We leafleted the public who were stopping in cars and vans to see what was going on – curiosity and some sympathy from Sephardi Jews, more hostility from the Ashkenazi. Palestinians waiting to visit the other prisoners queued to take our leaflets. The guards stopped them joining us on the third day, threatening to stop their visits.

Meir Vanunu visited his brother Mordechai twice during our stay and brought good news about his increased time outside his cell, four hours a day – still alone – in the open air, in the sun. He had started reading our book, *Voices for Vanunu*, and thanked us all for coming.

We linked up with Israeli groups throughout the week

– Yesh Gvul, the movement of military 'refuseniks'; Women in Black, who demonstrate every week for an end to the occupation; socialist activists who publish *The Other Israel*; the school students' No More Hiroshima group; and Anonymous – a Tel-Aviv based animal and human rights group.

We delivered letters at the embassies of all our countries. We were photographed, filmed and interviewed by the media. I said I had come as a Jew from the diaspora who was ashamed of what the Israeli government had done in my name.

Israeli support gained momentum during the week. The take-up of leaflets was extremely high and there were lots of heated discussions. Responses were amazingly open, and shouting frequently turned into discussion and hand-shaking. Even in the difficult area of patriotism, many Israelis sense they are not told the truth by their media.

Before we came we thought we would be spat at or arrested. When we finished it was with 40,000 Israelis at a U-2 concert, with Bono telling Israel that a great country ought also to be a merciful country and that it should free Vanunu.



Strangers in the Suburb

Irene Bruegel grew up in the heart of Jewish north west London, but her family bore no resemblance to any others in their street

Given my ancestry, it would be surprising if I didn't look Jewish. Yet ours was the only house in the neighbourhood without a *mezuzah* on the door; the only one where the Jewish National Fund was never given a penny. I was the only girl at our end of the street who did not have a star of David, who went regularly to Sunday School, not to *shul*. I grew up, in Golders Green, knowing that both my grandmothers had died in the Holocaust, and plenty of other relatives too. I never 'found out' about concentration camps, I always knew. Our home was open house to camp survivors from the first day I can remember. Refugees flowed through; my father worked on the German archives, setting out the evidence of Auschwitz and the Final Solution. I was called Irene, after a grandmother, but also as a celebration of being born in 1945, the year of peace.

I grew up with a great sense of displacement, of coming after the events that defined my parents'

lives, our presence in London, my father's transition from top civil servant to poorly paid historian.

From my perspective as a child in 1950s Golders Green, I was as foreign to the Jews around us, as to anyone else in the area. My parents came from deepest central Europe. It showed in our furniture, my clothes, my hairstyle, the books and pictures around our house; in the fact that my mother was a doctor, that my parents spoke German – or Czech when they didn't want me to understand. It showed in the regular parcels of coffee, nylons, lipstick we sent back across the iron curtain and in my fervent prayers to a Christian God not to let Stalin die in 1952 when I overheard my mother saying that, if he died, we would go 'back'.

A series of coincidences brought my parents to live in a street of large, new, detached houses bordering Hampstead Garden Suburb. There, as a seven-year-old, my friends and neighbours were almost all Jews. But we were different, primarily because they were English. Their food was yukky English. Their parents spoke English without an accent but then they only spoke English. The fathers went off every day to their factories down the East End, bringing home dresses, handbags, shoes, toys. The mothers stayed at home, played golf, went to charity events. All this was as foreign to me, as the synagogue.

I thought of Jews as rich; they voted Conservative, sometimes Liberal, while we were socialists. It wasn't just our foreign name and foreign ways that made us stand out in our street, it was also the Labour Party posters and meetings in our house that brought in people from the non-Jewish parts of the locality, working class people, too. So being Jewish was, for me, a confused class label: Jews were the nouveau-riche, as my parents called them, lacking in what we knew to be Culture. This was very much an accident of history. If I had been brought up in Hampstead, not Hampstead Garden Suburb, in the refugee community, rather than the East-End-made-good, I might have developed a different sense of what it meant to be Jewish; as it was, 'the Suburb' gave me a distinct perspective.

With a background like this, I don't find it in the least surprising that Madeleine Allbright turns out to be Jewish and not to have known it. At one level, of course, there's denial afoot, but it is not necessarily a simple denial, based in antisemitism or self-hatred. To be Jewish may, in reality, mean for her, much as it does for me, to be an active participant in a given religion, to come from a very specific cultural niche. Intellectually, of course, I know different. I know full well that others would always define me as Jewish, sometimes with malicious intent, sometimes not. But in my formative years, in my street in London in the 1950s, Judaism was a majority culture from which I was excluded.

Plenty of people blame my (and Allbright's) parents for our confused sense of self. All we are describing at one level is acute assimilationism, but it was an assimilation that was real. My parents resisted defining themselves as Jewish, because they believed, first and foremost, in a multiculturalism in which identities were fluid and open to choice. My father's major concern throughout his civil service and historian years was with the rights of ethnic minorities within a unitary state. Fascism

denied that choice brutally and he knew it, but he also insisted there were 'good' Germans, and dedicated a book to those Sudeten Germans who died fighting for the Free Czech Army.

It may be the context of the new Czech nation arising from the Habsburg Empire that helps explain the peculiarities of Madeleine Allbright. Ivan Klima, who spent years in Auschwitz as a child, explains his non-Jewish Jewishness in terms of the history of the area. He notes that his Protestant forefathers, anxious to avoid forceable conversion to Catholicism in the early Habsburg years, opted to become Jews.

My father's Jewish forefathers, somewhat similarly, converted to Catholicism in order to be part of a modernising, progressive, social democratic politics within Austro-Hungary. They turned their backs on Judaism and, while our central European cuisine, my father's love of books and learning, our non-English name, instantaneously categorise us as Jews in the wider, ignorant, world, in reality they were Sudeten German through and through. That is how I came to be baptised as a Catholic within sight of the Jewish cemetery in Golders Green.

I met an old man recently in the town square of Olomouc, Moravia; who addressed me first in Czech and then turned to his Sudeten German mother tongue. He explained that he had spent the War working as an administrator in Prague for the Germans, only to end by saying, 'of course' he was also that bit Jewish. I doubt, too, that I am the only person around who a cousin who fought for the Germans, only to emigrate after the war to be in Israel with his brother who had joined the British Army in Palestine before the War. Confused identities, for sure, born of different survival strategies.

So when my Jewish socialist friends tell me to get back to my roots, these are not Jewish roots, in all conscience. Sure I have 'Jewish blood'; sure I grew up and still live with and amongst Jews and know something of the culture; but it isn't my culture. Like my parents, I have no more desire – or ability – to play-act Jewish festivals and Yiddish ghetto festivities to give my children 'a sense of identity', than to invoke ancient pagan, or Hebrew or Buddhist rites. I am not cultureless or rootless. For better or worse, my heritage is not that of the majority of Jews in this country. Indeed, it was forged, in part, as an outsider to that community.



KADDISH FOR ROSETTA

I will remember you:

elegant high planed
cheekbones
in a triangular face.

A clear petrol blue suit
blue as the sea.

A fine white top
maybe hand-stitched silk
or uncrushed linen.

I will remember you:

deep eyes,
an impassioned voice,
a traveller striding across
ruins
to a fine new
'five year planned' future.

I will remember you:

impossibly brown hair
thin and wisped,
that you kept immaculate
till you were almost ninety.

I will remember you:

casually draping
that day's hat
over Lenin's bust
while quoting fascinating
texts on the role of
Soviet women.

I will remember you:

the causes of one of 'The
Hundred'
you helped me carry
Greenham home
then asked why was
disarmament
now a woman's issue?
You demonstrated;
so many pickets, plaques
against America in Korea,
against apartheid, against...

I will remember you:

two hearing aids whining
having that argument,
an old rehearsal
about the nature of the
struggle,
socialism or feminism.
On evils – you argued class
and I, patriarchy.

I will remember you:

flooring me
after the wall had fallen
still publicly unabashedly
declaring, no, declaiming
your support of
Stalin.

I will remember you

then – not as you died
nil by mouth
a frightened mass
of drip tubes
clutching my hand
a fever racked body
you couldn't bear to leave.

I will remember you:

when I
hang my trilby on Lenin's bust
sit on your chair, use your
teacups,
when frying fish,
buying clothes,
or, waiting for a bus.
you will move me
an unexpected sound, the
shape
of a shadow.

Yisgadal veyiskadash
shemeh rabboh...

Let us magnify and let us
sanctify the great name
of God...

Tess Joseph

The Gingerbread Mentsh

A children's story
by Steve Cohen

Mrs Winowski, an old Jewish lady from Cheetham, was baking one day. She was making bagels and khallesh and kikhels and kukhn. And a gingerbread rabbi. The gingerbread rabbi had currant eyes and a currant nose and a currant mouth. He had a currant yarmulke and a currant tallit. He wore currant tefillin. Mrs Winowski put the rabbi on a baking tray and placed him in the oven. She then sat down to read a Maisie Mosco novel. After a while there was a knocking from inside the oven. A little voice was saying 'Oy, veh! I'm the gingerbread rov. It's too hot. I'm shvitzing in here!'

Mrs Winowski was very surprised by this. She put down her novel and opened the oven door. To her amazement the gingerbread rabbi jumped out shouting 'Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me I'm the gingerbread rov.' And he ran out of the front door – jumping up to kiss the currant mezuzah on the way.

Mrs Winowski shlepped after him. The gingerbread rabbi ran down the Cheetham Hill Road passing the kosher butcher's where Mr Limonsky the shokhet was about to slit a chicken's throat, because tonight was the sab-bath. The chicken was kvetching and claiming it wasn't Jewish. Mr Limonsky put down his knife and tried to catch the gingerbread rabbi but the rabbi could run quicker and shouted 'Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me I'm the gingerbread rov.' He ran down the road with Mrs Winowski, Mr Limonsky and, kaynaynehoreh, the grateful chicken running after him.

Soon he passed a house where Mr Abelman the mohel was about to perform a circumcision on a boy just eight days old. Mr Abelman put down his knife and called out: 'Stop gingerbread rabbi. You look good enough to eat. How come you ain't had no bris yet?' But the gingerbread rabbi laughed and shouted over his shoulder:

'I've run from Mrs Winowski and from Mr Limonsky and from a chicken. Run, run as fast as you can you can't circumcise me, I'm the gingerbread rov. And mazeltov to the new baby.'

He ran on through Manchester and through Prestwich with Mrs Winowski, Mr Limonsky, a chicken and Mr Abelman following him. This was the first time that the gingerbread rov had been outside his oven. And he observed a veritable miracle. The closer he got to Prestwich, the bigger and bigger the houses and mezuzahs grew. And the

mezuzahs in Prestwich became as big as the houses in Cheetham Hill Road. And luminous with it.

But beyond the mezuzahs were fields. And now the rov was in the countryside. A long way from the town. Here no Jewish man or woman, boy or girl had ever been before. Here there were no cars and shuls and bookshops and theatres and shopping arcades and universities and patio extensions and demonstrations and struggles. Instead there were just trees and grass and animals and fresh air. It was all very scary.

The gingerbread rabbi kept on running. Soon he met Faustus the fascist fox. 'Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me I'm the gingerbread rov.'

Now this fox was very cunning. So instead of chasing the rabbi he hid his swastika. He then put on a little yarmulke and tallit and started praying. By the side of a wide river.

The gingerbread rabbi was amazed. He went up to the fox and said 'You yidden?'

The sly fox said 'Coitainly rabbi. My shul is just the other side of this vide river. Ve are davening minkha and maarev in one hour. Jump on my back. I will help you escape your pursuers and you can come back and thank God in shul. Later on, if all goes vell and you do all I say, you shall become president of the shul.'

Now the ambitious gingerbread rabbi had always wanted to become a gingerbread makher. So he jumped on Faustus's back and the fox began to swim. As they reached the middle of the river where the water was deepest the fox said 'Stand on my kepele gingerbread rabbi or you will get vet.' So the little rabbi stood on the fox's skull-cap on top of his head.

As the river flowed more swiftly the fox said 'Move on to my shnozel gingerbread rabbi so that I may carry you more safely. I would not like you to drown.' The gingerbread rabbi climbed on to the fox's nose.

And now the rov could see the shul on the other side of the river. It was in the middle of a huge city. Plenty of smoke. Plenty of noise. Plenty of cars. Most parked outside the shul. He felt relaxed. He felt at home again. But just as they reached the far side of the river the fox quickly said grace before meals and his mouth went SNAP. The gingerbread rabbi disappeared inside the fox and was never seen or heard of again.

The moral of the story – keep on running.

Images of diaspora

Spike Katz found old themes and new insights at the 1997 Jewish Film Festival in London

Fifty years on, the Holocaust continues to motivate filmmakers. This year's opening feature was an adaptation of a book by one of the most universalist and compassionate survivor authors, Primo Levi. *The Truce* (dir: Francesco Rosi, Italy/France) was a missed opportunity. The genius of Primo Levi is his ability to make sense out of the senseless. The downfall of this film was to unravel that sense. Breathlessly promoted as having taken 10 years to make, it felt like the bits and pieces of a long haul stitched together by a very obtrusive musical score.

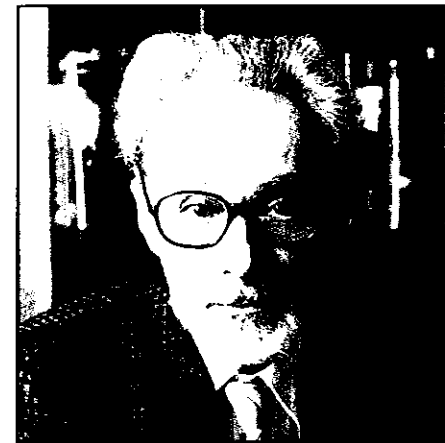
Lead actor, John Turturro, replaced the humanity of the Levi character with a kind of country bumpkin innocence, even passivity. The questionable insertion of mass heterosexual excitation as a prime side-effect of liberation from Auschwitz was an awkward embellishment on Levi who rigorously avoided any romantic theme. This film left me unmoved.

The best festival film, *Punch Me In The Stomach* (dir: Francine Zuckerman, New Zealand/Canada) is a comedic love letter from Deb Filler to her survivor father. Playing 36 characters from her extended family, the film centres on a trip she took with her father to Auschwitz. It addresses the post-Holocaust syndromes of the war generation (her uncle says, 'Punch me in the stomach; I can take it') and their children. She places in context the heavy parental expectations, the obsession to feed loved ones and the ironic attitude towards happiness that imbued the childhood of many post-war European-descended Jews.

While Filler's film has been welcomed by the progressive Jews, orthodox leaders have refused to show it within their institutions. The Holocaust is not a laughing matter, they insist, missing altogether the respect and honour this movie maker offers to her father's generation.

My one criticism is the imposition of an interview of Filler, the person, by the director/producer at the end of the film. The viewer needed no such literal and dry explanations. We were already wooed by Filler's talent, wit and sympathy – much in the tradition of Primo Levi.

Three films about smaller diaspora communities provide conflicting



Primo Levi – the film lacked his humanity

approaches to what keeps Jews Jewish. In *Expulsion and Memory: Descendants of the Hidden Jews*, Canadians Simcah Jacobovici and Roger Pyke trace the story of the *conversos*, those who remained in Spain and Portugal as converted Christians but secretly kept up Jewish rituals. Known even today as the 'new Christians' but still identified by the 'old Christians' as Jews, this film describes their resurrection as a community. Unfortunately the analysis of their experience examines little more than their symbolic and iconographic ties to an ephemeral Jewishness, ignoring all social and political ties.

Abraham and Eugenia: Stories from Jewish Cuba (dir: Bonnie Burt, USA) takes a narrow peek at the shrivelled (1500-strong) Cuban Jewish community. Since 90% of the Jews emigrated after the revolution, claims the director, it has been religious practice which has maintained continuity. Focusing on two characters, both devoted to the synagogue, we are left wondering how the remainder see themselves within the context of the revolution.

It was only with *A Kiss to This Land* that I felt I was learning about the construction of a diaspora community. Looking at the immigration of both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews to Mexico in the 1920s and '30s, director/producer Daniel Goldberg (Mexico) allows the immigrants, now in their 90s, to speak for themselves. Combining remarkable archive footage with eloquent oral history, this is everything a documentary should be – witty, moving and intelligent.

The characters who made their way as young people to Mexico, just as the USA closed its borders, supported each other over obstacles, taking risks, innovating and maintaining a commitment to their

values. In contrast to the other diaspora films where the Torah is promoted as the only worthy baggage, these immigrants had politics, beliefs and dreams.

When I viewed the obligatory Israeli blockbuster, *Lovesick on Nana Street* (Dir: Savi Gabizon, 1995), I was delighted to find it worthy of the eight Israeli Academy Awards it had won. Located in a crowded poor Sephardi shikun (housing estate) and in a mental hospital, it is the story of an eccentric local hustler who develops an obsessive attraction to a sophisticated blond city girl who comes to live in the shikun with her boyfriend.

Moshe Ivgy, infuses the lead character with both courage and craziness and as a home-boy he is treated sympathetically by his exasperated community. A snapshot of life in the shikun, this film reflects the increasing self-consciousness of working class Sephardim today.

I capped off my festival trawl with *Please God, Next Time Choose Someone Else*, a documentary from Rex Bloomstein (UK) for BBC's *Arena* made in 1982. With interviews of the big American Jewish comedians and commentaries by scholars such as the late Leo Rosten, it was a gallop through some damn funny material on the way to understanding the role of humour among Jews. The jokes kept the audience clutching our thighs.

As the comedians themselves age, so does the focus of their humour. I'll give you one from Billy Crystal and then wrap up with Milton Berle's best.

From Billy Crystal: a couple enter the divorce counsellor's office and say they want a divorce. 'But you're in your 90s; you've been married for over 60 years. Why now?' The woman replies: 'Well we've wanted to divorce for a long time, but we were waiting for the kids to die.'

From Milton Berle: Mr Goldberg, walking through the park, sees his old friend Mr Cohen sitting on a bench and crying his heart out. 'Mr Cohen. Why are you crying? A 92-year-old man like you, it breaks my heart.' Mr Cohen answers, 'Oh, Mr Goldberg. I'm so upset. I lost my Sophie fi ve years ago. So last year I meet this beautiful 18-year-old girl. She falls in love with me and now we're married. She cooks and sews and can't get enough of me. We make love all day long.' Then he collapses weeping. Mr Goldberg says: 'So you got a gorgeous 18-year-old and you're making love all over the house. Why are you crying?' Answers Mr Cohen: 'I can't remember where I live.'

Party lines

Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain

Phil Cohen

Lawrence & Wishart £12.99

Rather than having a communist childhood, mine was more 'the Co-op'. Everything from our house came from the Co-op – coal, milk, clothes, insurance and, in the end, funerals. My mother recalls the local Co-op organising picnics on Mayday out to the Co-op butchers' field. For a good part of her life she worked for the Co-op, running a fashion shop (where she upped the price of luxury goods like fur coats in order to reduce the price of stockings for the factory women, changing the prices back again in time for the annual inspection). My first ever 'political' meeting was a packed Co-op AGM. I recall a surreptitious slate of nominees for the board put up as they were deemed to be more friendly to the workers than the group favoured by the Co-op bosses!

Though my mother had led an apprentices strike as a teenager and later was a union rep on the buses, ours was a very unpolitical family. But we were taught to stick up for ourselves. During the pit strike in the early '70s my grandmother revelled in the miners' victory as her railwayman father had been blacklisted for years for striking in 1926. To my surprise I discovered a few years ago that my mother and two aunts used to go out with a set of brothers who were prominent in the Scottish Communist Party, though none of my family had joined.

These details may explain why my mother always insisted that I think for myself, but it left me rather ill-equipped for the rough and tumble of political life. Thinking for yourself is fairly difficult if all around you have a line to follow. How I envied those who had come from genuinely political families, who'd honed their arguments, who'd read the books, and who were naturally at home in the labour movement.

Often this was misguided. Those with the confidence I lacked were often middle class parvenus, the exceptions were those from a communist family background, some of whom were still communists.

Though I never had much time for the Communist Party's obsession with

Russia (or the mirrored obsession with Russia held by Trotskyists), in practice the CP were always good allies. They were – at least in Scotland – good fun, and most of all, reliable. CPers were often the mortar holding the unions, the peace movement (and indeed the Co-op, though I didn't know it then) together.

The CP had a sense of community, of family. The organisers always seemed to know who was ill, who'd just had a baby, where there might be a job going. And if people were getting on a bit they would still get a monthly visit to make sure their dues were being paid or to have some literature delivered and would still feel part of a movement. And this was the CP towards the end of its life.

For many CPers, the Party was the community which sustained them, and often included their own extended family. Raphael Samuel lovingly described this life in Faith, Hope and Struggle (*New*

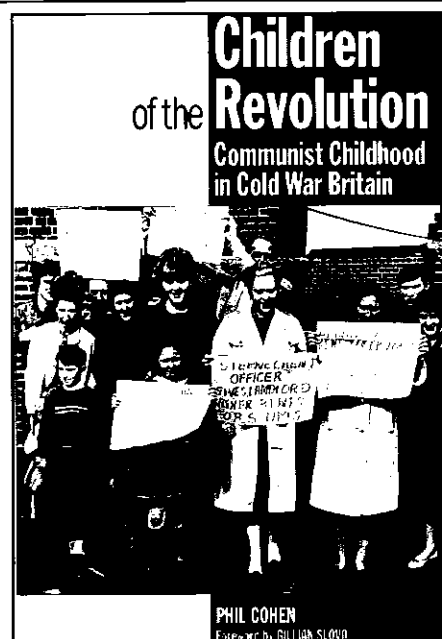
In practice the CP were good allies – good fun and, most of all, reliable

Left Review 154, Nov/Dec 1985) where 12 members of his family were in the Party. Of course Wesker's Chicken Soup with Barley covers the same ground.

That Wesker's and Samuel's family were Jewish reflects the disproportionately high number of Jews in the Communist Party. This included major figures in the British CP; Bert Ramelson, the industrial organiser, James Klugman, the Party's historian, Phil Piratin, MP.

This representation of Jews in the Communist Party was international. The US Yiddishist journal *Der Paken-Treger* (No 26, Fall 1997) suggests that up to a quarter of the members of the International Brigade who fought in Spain were Jewish, the American contingent being one third Jewish. The proportion of Jewish doctors and nurses was so high that Yiddish was the common language among medical staff.

It is no surprise then that Phil Cohen, in this record of the childhood of children of British Communist Party parents includes a number of Jews, or half-Jews in his book, including well known peo-



ple like Alexi Sayle and Michael Rosen. More surprising is Cohen describing his own grandparents as Russian Jews 'influenced by the ideas of the Bund, a left-wing Zionist movement'. A little attention to history is called for.

Phil Cohen describes normal Party life, the rhythms of the year – miners' galas, Mayday, the bazaars, branch meetings, *Daily Worker* sales, the summer holidays in a 'socialist' country. For some this meant an absent father (always out at meetings), a very conservative home life, a feeling of isolation from other children – coupled with a sense of destiny.

With Communism turning out to be just another false messiah, Phil Cohen's book was ultimately quite depressing. That so many otherwise sensible people were blinded to the excesses and murders in the Soviet Bloc, and continued to defend Stalin when all the evidence was against him is the common currency of fanaticism. That Stalin was happily wiping out all independent Jewish life, as well as most Jewish communist leaders in the Soviet Bloc was disbelieved by Communist Jews elsewhere – though the leaders must have known.

It was only the major events of Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968 that brought so many to break with the Party. The decision to leave or stay was a major emotional one for Party families, disorientating and disheartening. What seemed on the outside to have been an absurd obsession with Russia went much deeper than I imagined.

Warmth, friendship, a sense of destiny and a morbid belief in the rightness of the impossible is of course not the preserve of communists – check out the Lubavitchers. Perhaps my mother was right in telling me to think for myself...

Ross Bradshaw

Time and again

The Nature of Blood

Caryl Phillips

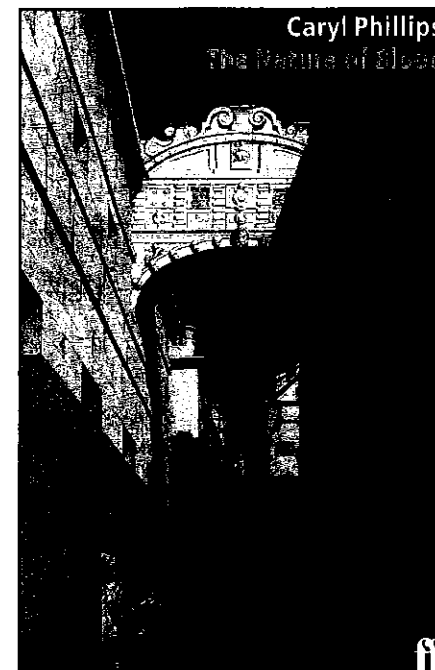
Faber and Faber

There is a compelling idea behind this novel – the interweaving of Black and Jewish experience of otherness across time and space. As the title suggests, Caryl Phillips' new novel explores the multifaceted metaphor of blood, and its narrative is an act of memory.

The four main themes of the narratives take place at two historical stages: 15th century Venice and Germany; and Palestine in the 1940s. Othello arrives in Venice as commander of the Venetian forces against the Turks. He subsequently becomes governor of Cyprus, having courted and secretly married Desdemona, the daughter of a Venetian senator. Phillips presents these imagined events through Othello's voice in the period immediately preceding Shakespeare's play. At the same time, from a documented account, the story is told of the Jews of Portobuffole, within the domain of Venice, who are accused of blood libel. Three leaders of the community are burned alive, more to satisfy public outrage, than through any legally sanctioned antisemitism.

The two relatively contemporary themes emerge from the Holocaust. Eva is a survivor in a camp liberated by the British. One of the soldiers, ironically named Gerry, encourages Eva to marry him, though she rejects his advances. Later she arrives in Britain to marry Gerry, only to discover he has a wife. Eva's uncle Stephan, a committed Zionist, leaves Germany and his wife and children for Palestine before the War, and is an official in a transit camp in Cyprus for survivors entering Palestine. At the end of the novel, as an elderly doctor in contemporary Israel, he is sleeping with a young Ethiopian woman for whom this is her first sexual encounter.

These are potent concoctions and the outcomes are either tragic or en route for disaster. The response to memory, the conjunction of image and reality, seems particularly significant. Othello is haunted by the memory of his African wife and child, intensified by his feelings of being an outsider in Venice. The Jews of Portobuffole are the victims of an imagined event where the collective uncon-



scious of the Christians constructs a case against them. Eva is tormented by dreams – memories of her parents and sister in pre-War Berlin; and as Uncle Stephan grows old in Israel he seeks out casual, passionless encounters 'in which memory plays an increasingly large role, and in which pity, from one to the other, seemed to be the dominant emotion.'

Phillips has done his homework in recording the lapping waters in Venice, the systematic escalation of the blood libel, the atmosphere of pre-War Germany, the officials of the Cyprus transit camp. There are resonances and antiphones across time and space. Othello and Stephan leave places to which they are deeply attached, where they have blood ties. Othello leaves his people to become an outsider in Venice where he has a position of privilege – but at what cost? Stephan still feels part of *mittel* Europe even though, as a Zionist in a transit camp, he is helping damaged people to a new life. Both Stephan and Othello have positions of authority in Cyprus on the brink of their respective homes, but they are undermined there.

The sexual encounters are loaded with ambivalence: Othello and Desdemona – who seduces whom? (Desdemona's side of the story might have been more challenging.) Is it ultimately pity, as well as passion, that Desdemona feels for Othello? And on Cyprus he leaves her in the care of another, one Michael Cassio

(Iago, the arch distorter of reality, is not even mentioned). Is Gerry's feeling for Eva based on tenderness, a strange lust for a starving young woman, or is it pity? What are we to make of the guilt Gerry shows, and of Eva's suicide? And what of Stephan's impotence, his sense of emptiness when confronted with the young Ethiopian woman whose life has been so disrupted by the transition from one world to another? The citizens of Portobuffole perceive the Jews as destroyers, blood suckers, abnormally sexual in their rapacity; in fact, Jews ritually cleanse their meat of blood.

At the root of this story is the senseless perverted destruction which results from the fabricated image and consumes the powerless; the burning of the Jews of Portobuffole; the Holocaust. The violence is terrifying but strangely not disturbing. This is where the novel fails. With writers such as Appelfeld, Levi or Wiesel, the physical violence is often submerged; it is the reflective and reflexive accounts and foreshadowings which give them such disturbing power. Oddly enough, in *The Nature of Blood*, it is Othello and Desdemona's impending fate which is most felt, whereas Eva's stream of consciousness in the death camps is horrific but sterile.

All the voices in the book have a neutral, characterless tone: they are a device which allows people and events to merge with each other through the shadows of time. But far from achieving an authentic dissonance, the accounts are merely separate. There are coincidences and resonances but the interlinking is weak and contrived. At the one point where Othello encounters a Jew of Portobuffole, the account seems implausible. He enjoins the Jew to write a message and take it to Desdemona. The Jew readily agrees. Wishful thinking. Given that the Jews of Portobuffole were ghettoised and about to go on trial, writing and taking a letter to the daughter of a Venetian senator, the latter likely to go ballistic at the thought of his daughter marrying a black man, would be a suicidal act.

Writing a novel through the Holocaust about the ties of Jews and Blacks is a daunting project for an Afro-Caribbean writer born well after the War. *The Nature of Blood* is a courageous novel but one which fails to avoid the serious traps which enmesh it.

Ralph Levinson

Taste of history

The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day
 Claudia Roden
 Penguin hardback, £20

Claudia Roden's *Book of Jewish Food* is an aristocratic book. Most cookery books reveal themselves all too obviously by the lurid illustrations on their jackets. This has an elegant, restrained cover which is an invitation to a cornucopia of Jewish history and its related food customs.

I was brought up in an Ashkenazi family. My parents came to England from Latvia in 1912, so my experience of food was entirely from this background. It was with great interest that I read of the various regions which have influenced Jewish food. Claudia Roden's description of family life in Egypt was a revelation. The preparation of food was a family and communal activity which she conveys in such a personal and warm manner. In the same vein she recreates the atmosphere within each separate community that she deals with. Illustrating with historical photographs and by graphic descriptions the different

circumstances – geographical, social and cultural – which have influenced Jews in their nomadic existence, she traces the routes taken by the various communities partly through the ingredients that were available to them in different regions.

As for the recipes themselves, I can understand and imagine what those of Ashkenazi origin will produce. They are clearly set out, easy to follow and most have interesting introductions or anecdotes. Explanations are given for all the Jewish holidays and their related foods.

The recipes from Sephardi regions are, for me, like learning a new language.

Many of the ingredients I have never handled, but this will lead, at this late stage in my life, to a whole new adventure in cooking. My children and grandchildren live in a more cosmopolitan environment than the one in which I was brought up, so I don't think the exotic foods and flavours will be such a surprise to them.

The least successful place for the development of a specifically Jewish cuisine is Israel. Claudia

Roden's description of food there is spot on. The best is from Arab origins. My first taste of humus, felafel and pitta bread was in Israel many years ago. As in nature, the eventual evolution of Israeli food amongst people from so many geographic regions will take time. Hopefully, as in the diaspora, something will remain of their individual origins.

I have not tested many recipes in Claudia Roden's book – those are joys to come. But I highly recommend it. It is a mine of information on Jewish history and food, with the additional advantage of more discoveries to be made through her tried and tested recipes from throughout the Jewish world.

Zelda Bard



Jewish yogurt vendors in Salonika

Restrictive practices

Refugees in Europe – the Hostile New Agenda
 Danielle Joly, Lynette Kelly and Clive Nettleton
 for the Minority Rights Group

Over the last decade European governments have co-operated to make it harder for refugees to enter the EU, flouting the spirit of the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees. This pamphlet describes the international instruments that helped refugees, and the recent EU gatherings at Schengen and Dublin that make travel within the Community easier, while making it even harder to enter Europe. Such restrictions aren't tough enough for UK governments who refuse to relax controls at Dover for fear that a few hundred Roma might pass through.

While the UK and France let in tens of thousands and Germany is home for hundreds of thousands, a million Mozambicans fled to Malawi while Iran and

Pakistan shelter millions of refugees. The Minority Rights Group fears that these poor countries will refuse to bear this burden if the rich countries are so restrictive.

Though the number of asylum seekers sharply rose in the 1980s, the numbers have been falling since 1995. And while unemployment in some EU countries is very high, it has been falling in the UK at a time when the Asylum Act was brought in, cutting benefits to asylum seekers. The pamphlet says that these laws were prompted by political and economic crisis in Western Europe. But the EU economies are generally growing. As for political crisis, they are planning the kind of union that suggests confidence and hope for the future, rather than crisis.

The fact is, the EU is clamping down on refugees because it does not want to share Europe's wealth with them. Laws were brought in to restrict entry because refugees were arriving in larger numbers, because they were mostly black and poor, and because those from Eastern Europe were no longer fleeing 'communism'.

The term 'asylum seeker' rather than refugee is illuminating. Most of these people seek for a long time and are then rejected or given temporary permission to stay in a European country. They rarely become asylum finders. The principle is to keep refugees somewhere near the place from which they are fleeing or, if need be, in a neighbouring country. If they did come to Europe they would be deterred by removal of benefits, being forbidden to earn their living and by prison. The authorities would take ages to process their applications and, in most cases, would only grant them a temporary status that would leave them in limbo for years.

While Jospin's government might improve French laws, there is little hope for change in the UK. Racist governments refuse to accept that most asylum seekers are really fleeing persecution. They believe they are 'economic migrants'. Some may be. Until the argument is won that immigration is good for the country, asylum will be severely restricted.

Bernard Misrahi

Antisemitism in its various forms is at the heart of most of the books under scrutiny this time. Michael Rosen's *The Golem of Old Prague* (Five Leaves Publications, £5.99) is – as you would expect from this excellent writer – a lively retelling for modern children of the classic folk story. A wise Rabbi called Judah Loeb uses his kabbalistic skills to make the Golem, a large and sometimes uncontrollable figure who defends the Jews of Prague against their enemies. Actually it is mostly the Rabbi in this version who does the defending, except at the climax where we get a double act: a Jewish family is accused of killing a Christian girl to make matzo for Pesach, so the Rabbi stalls the judge while the Golem scours the country until he finds the girl alive and produces her before the court. It's entertaining stuff, although a few uncomfortable questions arise. At one point a Jew disobeys the Rabbi's instructions and Rosen writes: 'The punishment for disobeying a Rabbi in those days was a beating, and that is what David the porter got'. Hassidic sects today have their Rabbinical dynasties, their superstitious stories about the 'Rebbe', and their hit squads. Should we encourage our children to read stories in which such people are portrayed as heroes? More generally, can we defeat antisemitism by relying on a clever man and a violent giant? Would their modern equivalents be Jonathan Sacks and the Community Security Organisation? I think we should be told.

The GOLEM of OLD PRAGUE



A CHILDREN'S CLASSIC
 by MICHAEL ROSEN
 ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN SIMONS

the shelf

Between 'Race' and Culture: Representations of 'the Jew' in English and American Literature (Stanford University Press, £12.95 paperback) is edited by Brian Cheyette, a leading authority on the treatment of Jewish characters and themes by well-known writers. Eleven critics examine authors such as Joyce, Fitzgerald, Twain, Dickens and Orwell. I was struck by how even authors like Twain and Orwell who attempted to write thoughtful attacks on antisemitism nonetheless remained trapped in anti-Jewish stereotypes and attitudes. There are difficult questions here, and the book does not avoid them. I'm even prepared to forgive its use of expressions like 'processes of othering' – though other readers might not be.

Anarchist Integralism by the endearingly named Luther Blissett (Sabotage Editions, £3) is a relentless attack on all the big names of anarchism: Bakunin and Proudhon are denounced as vicious antisemites; Kropotkin supported Russian involvement in the First World War; Rudolf Rocker's writings contain 'echoes of Aryan ideology'; latter-day anarchists are in bed with American anti-government groups that spawned the Oklahoma bombing; and Chomsky defended Faurisson, the Holocaust revisionist.

The last point is worth a quick rebuttal. Faurisson was tried in a French court for the crime of 'falsification of history'. The left was wrong both tactically and in principle, Chomsky argued, to collude with organs of the state which set out to define historical truth and to punish those who promoted a different version of history. I find holocaust denial as repulsive as anyone, but a moment's thought should convince you that letting courts decide on historical truth is appallingly Stalinist and gives powers to the state which will surely be used mainly against the left.

Returning to Blissett's more general attack on anarchism, I find it misdirected. Now that Leninism has disintegrated and social democratic sects like the Labour Party are openly and proudly following a business

agenda, the case for libertarian, anarchist-style socialism is stronger than ever. Bakunin predicted with deadly accuracy how Bolshevism would degenerate, and Kropotkin's scientific arguments that selfishness is not an inherent part of human nature are crucial to any defence of socialist ideas. Anarchists have been stupid and simplistic, but they are hardly alone in that.

And so to an important collection of interviews with Afif Safieh, head of the PLO London office. *The Peace Process: from breakthrough to breakdown* (Palestinian General



George Orwell – trapped in anti-Jewish stereotypes and attitudes

Delegation to the UK) begins with optimism in the build-up to the Oslo agreement but ends pessimistically in mid-1997, as the one-sided nature of the 'peace process' became all too clear. Safieh's appearance before the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee in 1991 makes instructive reading. It has become commonplace for politicians of all parties to complain about nasty interviews by journalists, but the crassness of the questions to Safieh by MP's is quite breathtaking. They repeatedly insist on 'one sentence answers', which Safieh refuses to give, aware that one-liners are fine if you just want to reinforce racist prejudices about Palestinians, but that more careful, nuanced arguments are needed if you want to challenge these prejudices. Anti-Palestinian racism springs from the same poisoned well as antisemitism: they both need to be exposed and challenged wherever they appear. The books reviewed here show all too clearly how much work still remains to be done.

Raphael Salkie