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WHERE WE STAND

● We stand for the rights of Jews, as Jews, in a socialist future.

● We fight for a socialist movement, embracing the cultural autonomy of minorities, as essential to the achievement of socialism.

● We draw on our immigrant experience and anti-racist history in order to challenge oppression today. We support the rights of, and mobilise solidarity with, all oppressed groups fighting for equality.

● 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.

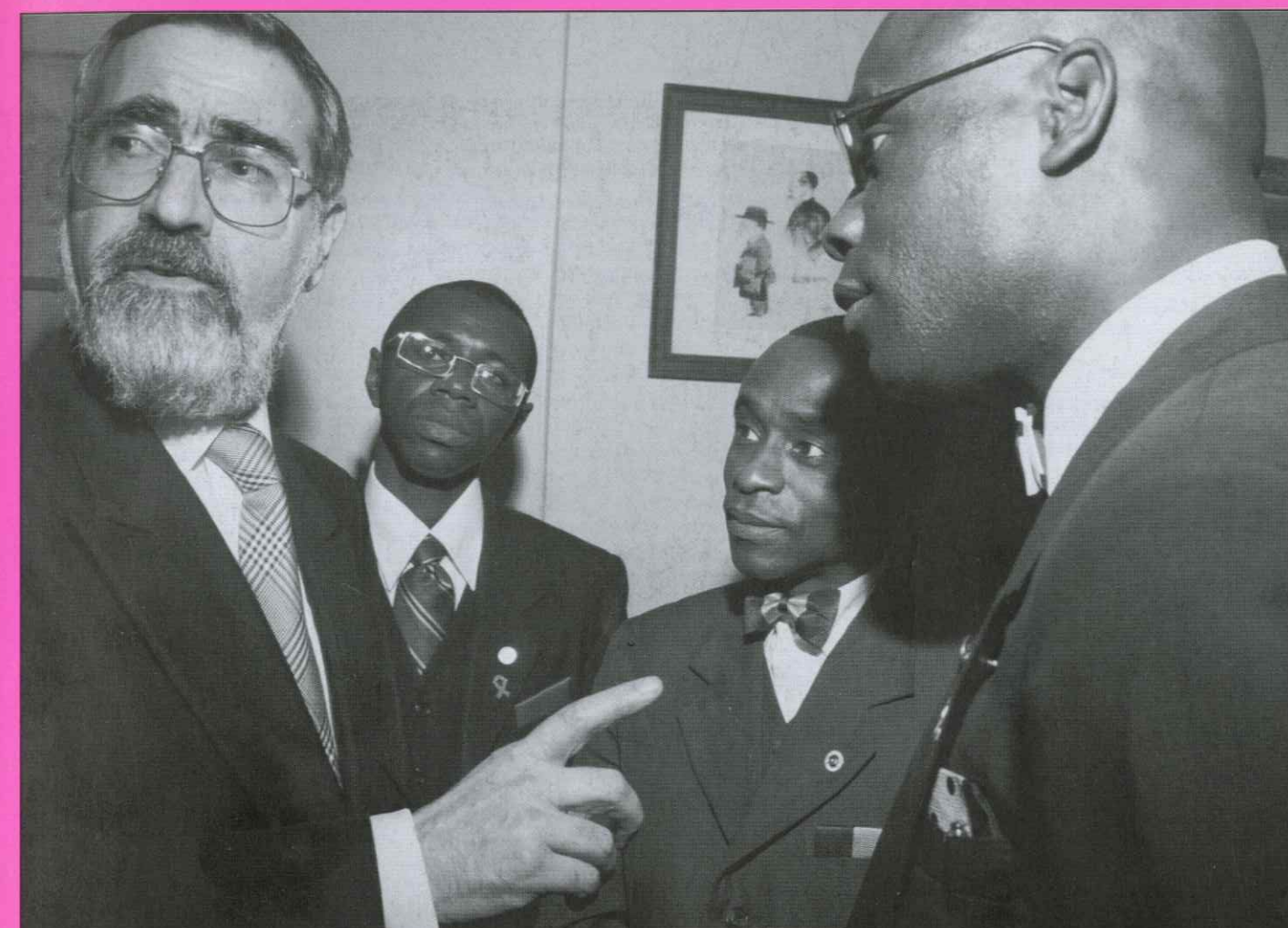
● We work for a socialist solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict based on equality and self-determination of Israeli and Palestinian Jews and Arabs.

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Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 39 • Winter 1998 • £1.50



Defending common ground? Rabbi and Farrakhanites get down to fundamentals

Gypsy genocide ● ethnicity monitored
Bund in the New World ● gay news ● eye on Zion
poetry ● new fiction ● art

Jewish Socialist

NEWS

Fascism down under	3
Noah Project	3
Sponsored walk	3
Blair Peach	3
Eye on Zion	4
Peace links	4
Social Action campaigns	4
Lucian Blit	4
In memoriam: Nancy White	5
Wacko Jacko	6
Homeless support	6
Queer remembrance	7

FEATURES

Bund in New World	9
Gypsies in the Holocaust	12
Questioning ethnicity	14
Keneyne Horror story	16
Religion meets nationalism	17
Uniting against fascism	20
Bund in Galicia	22
Story: Sarah's triumph	24
Poetry	27

REVIEWS

Dark continent	28
Palestine 1948	29
Rocker's son	30
Day of Atonement	31
Chagall	32
Jewish writing	33
On the shelf	35

PLUS Ask the Rabbi 7 • Diary 8

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel and David Rosenberg.
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Cover picture: John Nathan

Minority views

A debate has blown up in Britain's Jewish community about what attitude to take towards dialogue with British representatives of the Nation of Islam (NOI) - an exclusivist Black group that has thrown the kinds of insults at Jews that are usually the preserve of neo-Nazis. The aftermath of a recent public meeting on Jews and Blacks, held by the Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE) provided an opportunity for members of NOI to meet Jonathan Sacks - the Chief Rabbi of Britain's orthodox Jews and no stranger to exclusivist ideas himself.

The Jewish community has had an ambivalent relationship to black people and other minorities in British society. As many Jews welcomed the chance of upward social mobility after the Second World War, their community leaders tried to distance themselves from poorer and more recently settled immigrant communities. Keen to gain the benefits of 'whiteness', they ran in fear of being labelled 'ethnic minority', and marginalised Jewish immigrants from Asia and Africa.

When the Greater London Council offered resources to London's ethnic minority organisations in the 1980s, the Board of Deputies of British Jews discouraged Jewish groups from applying and provided the GLC with unsolicited and unflattering references for those who did. The Board's own commitment to strengthening ethnic minority participation in London initiatives was so paper thin that it broke off relations with the GLC's Ethnic Minorities Unit because it had awarded a grant to the Jewish Socialists' Group.

To the extent that the Jewish communal establishment expressed nationalistic identity, it tried to direct this towards Israel - where Jews were the majority. The instinctive support given by oppressed African, Caribbean and Asian communities in Britain to the oppressed Palestinian minority in Israel and the Occupied Territories further widened this gulf. And yet even the most established Jews have not been able to shake off their reality as the children and grandchildren of immigrants and refugees; even the most 'successful' still meet glass ceilings in 'polite' British society.

As enthusiasm for Zionism has begun to wane, the Jewish community has had to reassess its position in a society which has itself finally accepted its multi-ethnic character. Just as Jewish leaders here reluctantly and belatedly recognised the value of dialogue with Palestinians, so they have sought acceptable partners for dialogue among other ethnic minorities in this country. Generally such dialogue has concentrated on attitudes and steered away from deeper questions about the role of the British state in relation to minority communities, although some mainstream Jewish leaders have begun to criticise police racism and question some of the harshest aspects of immigration legislation. Generally, though, they are happier bringing together Jewish and black lawyers, businessmen and academics, rather than Jewish and black public sector workers, minicab drivers, unemployed people, single parents or Jewish and black radicals who are challenging fundamentalism, nationalism and religious coercion in their own communities.

The period when the Jewish community has begun to orient itself towards dialogue with the Black community is a period where problematic developments are occurring within those black communities, when disillusionment with, and alienation from, the political process is gaining pace, leaving a vacuum that groups like the Nation of Islam are only too happy to fill. Within Britain's Muslim Asian communities, groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir and al Muhajiroun, which espouse similar patriarchal, separatist, antisemitic and homophobic ideas, are also finding some resonance. For different reasons, exclusivist fundamentalist ideas are gaining headway in Britain's Jewish community. Disillusionment with or lack of interest in Zionism, the ossification of the religious mainstream, a genuine search for a fulfilling sense of identity, a quest for new certainties as old myths collapse, and a well-engineered sense of crisis about the content of Jewish life for the next generation, have all led increasing number of Jews into the arms of a new fundamentalism.

When Jonathan Sacks engages with the Nation of Islam it is not so much a meeting of minds as a meeting of mindsets. The challenge for Jewish socialists is to offer a meaningful path for Jewish engagement with ourselves and the world around us. We need to encourage the community to engage and unite with black and other minority communities on demands which challenge the status quo, which go beyond attitudes and get to the heart of the oppression and institutionalised racism that dominate the lives of black people. At the same time we must challenge the reactionaries in our own communities who want to keep our minds sealed in a separatist ghetto.

ONE NATION, ONE LEADER?

The Australian federal elections in 1996 which resulted in the defeat of the Labour government were a huge success for the Liberal-National coalition. One unexpected outcome was the formation of the far right One Nation Party.

One of the Liberals' new candidates in 1996, in a remote part of Queensland, was a young woman, Pauline Hanson, known in the town of Ipswich as the 'Fish and Chips Lady'. She was popular with the locals - mainly farmers and sugar plantation workers - who were agreed on their dissatisfaction with the 13 years of Labour rule and with the particular attention paid to the indigenous Aboriginal people.

Hanson increased her popularity by repeating old racist and xenophobic platitudes, blaming the growth in unemployment on the immigration of cheap labour from Asian countries, and claiming that multiculturalism was ruining 'genuine' Australian culture and the English language. The racist undertones in her speeches caused alarm in the Liberal Party. Eventually she was replaced by another official candidate, but she remained as an independent candidate and was elected. She had the support of various smaller right-wing groups, such as the League of Rights, Australia First Party, Australians Against Immigration and the Returned Soldiers' League.

The issue of land rights for Aborigines is high on the political agenda. It divides the general population - but unites these right-wing groups. In parliament, Hanson criticised the government for spending too much of 'our hard-earned' money on supporting Aborigines in health, education and employment, much more than on the average Australian. She stated that she would not represent Aborigines in Parliament: 'I don't expect them to vote for me and I don't owe them nothing.'

Since her maiden speech in parliament, moderate journalists and commentators have dubbed her as reactionary, racist and a

potential danger for the community. They supported the Labor opposition's call to Prime Minister Howard to show the government's resentment of these provocative and divisive statements. But the PM said: 'I will not dignify Mrs Hanson with a reply. In six months time all this will be forgotten. Besides, it's time for Australia to grow up and tolerate other opinions. We all support the democratic principle of freedom of speech.'

It was not 'all forgotten'. By mid-1997, Hanson registered a new party - One Nation - and opened branches in state capital cities and many country centres. She built up enough of an infrastructure to face a state election in June this year in her home state, Queensland that resulted in One Nation gaining 23% of primary votes and 11 deputies out of 88, helping to cause the downfall of the Liberal-National coalition. Hanson's performance won her a message of congratulations from the American Ku Klux Klan.

The success of One Nation sent shock waves through the country. The Jewish community was opposed to Hanson's activities from the start, although she declared: 'I am not an antisemite. I have a positive attitude towards Jews as long as they are loyal Australians.' Jewish community leaders took the initiative to alert and unite other ethnic groups in an organised opposition. When Hanson visits capital cities and regional centres, spreading her xenophobic poison, she faces a barrage of protest. In Melbourne and Sydney the participation of Jewish youth has been noticeable. Although One Nation did not make the breakthrough that was feared in the October elections, they still prove attractive to many voters. Hanson's activities have damaged the social fibre within Australia and its economic standing among its Asian neighbours, but most importantly, may cause long-term changes to Australia's democratic and liberal fabric

Pinchas Ringelblum, Melbourne

AMAZING FEET



A nine-mile sponsored walk along London's canal paths raised more than £200 for Jewish Socialist magazine and the Jewish Socialists' Group. Stakhanovite medals are due to our Walthamstow comrade Mike Gerber who raised more than half of this sum alone from

his work colleagues at the RMT union, which just shows you that railworkers are not sectarian against other forms of transport.

Further fundraising ideas involving other parts of the body are welcome.

NEW GREENS

The Noah Project is a community-wide organisation which works to promote environmental responsibility within the Jewish community through education, celebration and action. It is building a national network through synagogues, Jewish organisations and the Jewish press to promote green awareness, producing educational materials, adding a Jewish voice to the secular and interfaith environmental movements, and stimulating practical action to promote stewardship of the environment. Noah produces a quarterly

supporters' newsletter, writes a monthly column in *London Jewish News* and is developing educational material for children of primary school age and a green guide for synagogues and Jewish communal organisations. The project recently marked Shavuot with an Adamah (Earth) walk on Hampstead Heath, the first of many celebrations of the links between the rhythms of the earth and the rhythms of Shabbos and festival cycles. *Contact the Noah Project, PO Box 1828, London W10 5RT.*

BLAIR PEACH 20TH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE 1979-1999 WHO KILLED BLAIR PEACH? UNITE AGAINST RACISM

On 23 April 1979, East London teacher Blair Peach was knocked unconscious and killed on a demonstration against the National Front in Southall, West London. Eyewitnesses saw Blair hit over the head with a police truncheon, but no inquiry took place and no one was ever charged with his murder.

The Blair Peach Anniversary Committee has been set up to look at ways in which Blair's name can be used to promote anti-racist initiatives.

**ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION CONFERENCE
SATURDAY 6 FEBRUARY, GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE,
SOUTH LONDON
NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION AGAINST RACISM
SATURDAY 24 APRIL, SOUTHAL, WEST LONDON**

REMEMBERING LUCJAN BLIT

Lucjan Blit was General Secretary of Tsukunft, the youth organisation of the Bund before World War II. His social background was completely different from that of these youngsters. He was university educated – one of the very few from well-to-do families who threw in his lot with the most oppressed.

As the General Secretary he was in constant touch with even the tiniest organisation in the remotest place, but was also in demand as a speaker. A visit by him to an organisation was like a holiday.

Ex officio, he was a member of the Central Committee of the Bund, and so was in daily contact with its leaders. Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. On the

fateful night, when they were seen alive for the last time, he was sitting with them at the same table. When, at around midnight, the two of them were called away by the Soviet authorities, they asked Lucjan to wait till they came back. He did wait until the late hours of the following day – but they never came back. Lucjan believed that they were killed that same night.

Soon after that, Lucjan came to London, where he helped Szmul Zygielbojm in his efforts to help the Jews in Poland. He



lectured at the London School of Economics. A most loved leader of the Bund's Youth Organisation, he died in London 20 years ago.

Majer Bogdanski

JUST JEWS

Social Action is a progressive Jewish initiative committed to speaking out and taking action on issues of social justice that challenge the religious and ethical teachings of Judaism. It is a tangible expression of Tikkun Olam – repairing the world.

In recent years it has produced educational material, raised money, lobbied parliament, held special events and services and run practical action programmes on a range of issues such as homelessness, asylum and

immigration, disability, land-mines and the environment.

Current campaigns include working with the Jubilee 2000 Coalition to mark the millennium by writing off the unpayable debt of the world's poorest countries; planning Human Rights 50, a weekend of synagogue activities and a major central event of commemoration, celebration and rededication to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (11-13 December); Mattir Asurim, a human rights project which focuses on the rights of asylum seekers and the rights of disabled people; and Bayit, a longstanding campaign on homelessness, with food collections, drop-in centres, and a furniture store.

This work is carried out centrally through task groups, locally by rabbis and synagogue congregations and nationally by concerned individuals. Social Action would welcome support from *Jewish Socialist* readers, particularly for Human Rights 50 and for Jubilee 2000. Contact Vicky Joseph on 0181-349 4731.

PEACE LINKS

Four Mothers Movement, campaigning for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. Contact Linda Ben-Zvi, Tel 00 972 9 9508356; fax 00 972 9 9561180; e-mail lindabz@post.tau.ac.il.

Peace Now in Jerusalem, active in protests against the proposed Har Homa settlement on Abu Ghneim Mountain. Tel 00 972 2 5660648; email: peacenow@actcom.co.il.

Yehuda Igos Solidarity Committee. Yehuda Igos is an imprisoned Israeli anarchist/conscientious objector. e-mail: morac@netvision.net.il. **Gush Shalom**. Radical alliance for peace. Tel 00 972 3 5221732; email: info@gush-shalom.org; website (Hebrew and English, with good links to other sites): <http://www.gush-shalom.org>. **LAW Palestinian Human Rights Association**, action

against demolition of Palestinian homes at El-Khader); email: halper@iol.co.il. **The Other Israel**, biweekly email briefings and newsletter. POB 2542, Holon, 58125 Israel; email otherisr@actcom.co.il; website: http://members.tripod.co.uk/~other_Israel/ **Alternative Information Center Jerusalem-Bethlehem**, Email: aicmail@trendline.co.uk; website: <http://aic.netgate.net>.

LIFE'S WORK

More than 100 people came to the South African High Commission on 14 September to celebrate and commemorate the life of Nancy White who died suddenly in the summer. Nancy's main political work was in the movement for freedom in South Africa, but she had a broader involvement with progressive campaigns through her work as a typesetter for a wide range of radical organisations, including *Jewish Socialist*. We send our condolences to her family and many close comrades. This message from our editorial committee was read out at the event: 'We were very saddened to hear of Nancy's sudden death. Nancy was the typesetter for *Jewish Socialist* magazine from 1988-1994. It always felt very rewarding to have a typesetter who was so enthusiastic about the content of the magazine, and who often remarked about how interesting and enlightening a particular article was and what she had learned from it. Our role as proofreaders was made much easier by the quality and care of Nancy's work.'

'She was remarkably co-operative about being asked to do pedantic last-minute changes, literally at the midnight hour. She also rose to the challenge of transliterated Yiddish words and phrases well before such words became fashionable in *Guardian* film reviews and editorials. She made one memorable slip which we, as proofreaders, completely missed. The Chief Rabbi found himself demoted to the position of Chief Rabbi. We had long been trying to deflate his ego, but had not realised how simply it could be done.'

'Such inflated egos, unfortunately, can be found within progressive movements too – opportunists, publicity seekers, power trippers. But thankfully they are outnumbered by the ordinary people who do not seek headlines, glory or reward, but give their total commitment to struggles for social justice and equality. Among the ranks of the committed was Nancy, enabling the voices of those in struggle to be heard far and wide.'

EYE ON ZION

The Israeli left is losing heart at the lack of any real prospects for peace, says Spike Katz

Bibi Netanyahu has made a smart, if classic, move in appointing Ariel Sharon as Foreign Minister. Bibi benefits in three ways. First, he temporarily neutralises a rival for the party leadership. Second, Sharon is a potential excuse for the catatonia of the peace negotiations – he will always oppose anything smelling of peace. And third, if the Americans force Bibi to make concessions, Bibi hopes Sharon's positioning within the government will mute opposition from the Right.

While there was the expected verbal outrage from the Israeli Left and from the Palestinians to the appointment of this butcher of Lebanese-invasion fame, there has been little concrete action. Netanyahu has succeeded in exhausting the opposition. Since you never know his real intentions and can never predict his next reaction, people have run out of steam. After a couple of days, Sharon's post was taken as a given. There is always, after all, the next crisis or grenade to respond to.

The establishment opposition – the Labour Party – can offer no leadership. The party head, Ehud Barak, has spent more energy dismantling the party's left than he has in creating a strategy. With a woosy ideological vacuum, he is busy courting the religious and the settlers, in pathetic anticipation that they might be future coalition partners. Even mainstream Labourites, like Shimon Peres, are expressing disenchantment. Barak has not managed to pass Bibi by even one percentage point in public surveys, a remarkable achievement for an opposition leader in bad times.

Meretz ('Energy') the

party led by Yosi Sarid, which is supposed to be to the left of Labour, has a presence in the Knesset, but no grass-roots base. A bit more initiative is shown by the non-parliamentary groups Dor Shalom ('The Peace Generation', a group formed by young people after Rabin's assassination), Bat Shalom (a Jerusalem women's peace group) and Peace Now. A new centrist party is being formed by the Tel Aviv Mayor, Roni Milo. Although he was elected on the Likud list (Netanyahu's party), his platform was liberal, anti-religious and pro-peace.

Only the religious parties are growing in influence. With the budgets of key ministries under their control, they have become textbook fundamentalists. Take, for example, Shas, the Sephardic religious party. Years ago they suffered a string of indictments for pocketing political funds. Today they are investing in community services for poor neighbourhoods, such as cheap afternoon schools for kids. One feminist activist told me, 'They are the masters of the land.' Where once they complained of discrimination, today they feel very powerful.

Their latest strategy is building a strong alliance with the Islamic organisations inside Israel. Through their long control of the Ministry of the Interior, Shas invested significantly in improving the infrastructures of Israeli Arab villages, which have been neglected since the founding of the State. Schools, electricity and sewage systems have been translated into potential Shas votes within the villages. Some are, unbelievably, predicting that in the upcoming municipal elections, there will be Shas mayors in Arab towns! Others from the left suspect that the Shas leader will be the next PM. (Sadly enough, this is seen as an improvement on Bibi.)

Within secular Israel, the reaction against the religious parties is passionate to the point of blanket hatred. Disrespect and disregard by secular Israelis has turned into fear and abhorrence. This presents problems for leftists with a sophisticated anti-fundamentalist analysis. It also is beginning to scare the more wide-awake religious, who are trying to damp down the hostility. They are hinting at a re-evaluation of the numbers of young religious who go into yeshivas instead of serving in the army – a point of great irritation in secular Israel.

The government is also pouring copious cash into settlements in the occupied territories. For poor Israelis in development towns and urban shums – no matter what their political affiliation – this is hard to take. As the two-year recession sinks the economy into the international economic morass, resentment is growing against the green and pampered settlements. Class and deprivation were at the bottom of a spontaneous action by unemployed working-class men in Cholon, a town just outside Tel Aviv. They turned in their Army reserve duty cards, saying that they no longer feel they have a home country to defend.

Two other Israeli groups have been carrying out militant activities. University students, demonstrating against increased fees, have been treated with a heavy hand by police, while settlers who closed a number of roads in the territories to show their rejection of Bibi's peace negotiations in the States, were quietly watched by the same Israeli police force. Now both students and lecturers are on strike and studies are unlikely to start on time.

Meanwhile there was a recent conflict in Um El Fahm, an Israeli Palestinian town whose traditional lands have, over the past 50 years,

been repeatedly reduced by state allocations to surrounding Jewish villages. A couple of weeks ago the Army announced the seizure of further Um El Fahm land for use as 'firing areas' and the already crowded villagers rose up. The response of the Army was brutal and the papers called the resulting three days of conflict a 'mini-intifada.' The next week, several large fires in different Israeli woodlands were declared the result of arson. All of this feels very close to home for the average Israeli.

With a peace agreement now reluctantly signed, both Bibi and Arafat face militant resistance from their constituencies. This promises to be a very tough period.

Burnt out, no longer in partnership with Palestinian allies (who have taken a principled stand to discontinue contact with progressive Israelis), struggling against a government which is simultaneously paralysed and provocative, the Israeli left is at a very low point.

Some women, activists of the moribund Women In Black, are trying to reunite a feminist peace movement whose weakest moment came at this year's annual Feminist Conference, which was thoroughly hijacked by religious women. Inviting 16 women from around the country – Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, straight and lesbian, young and older – they have established 10 discussion points to clarify for themselves the relevant issues for leftist Israeli feminists.

At the same time, depression is hard to shake. More and more progressives are talking about leaving the country, even buying apartments in other countries 'just in case'. Jobs which involve living elsewhere are at a premium and alienation has eroded the will to resist. As one activist told me, 'Israeli politics today is a pretty sad business.'

HOME-MADE

North London Action for the Homeless was set up in the early 1990s on the initiative of Rabbi Marcia Plumb of North London Progressive Synagogue in conjunction with several churches in the district, the Finsbury Park Community Action Group, representatives of the Stoke Newington police and other groups and individuals. This initiative had the support of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues (ULPS) Social Action Committee and particularly its organiser, Steve Miller.

The primary short-term objective was to provide a drop-in centre which would supply meals to homeless people. We also envisaged taking limited political and social action and, in the long term, actually providing housing ourselves. After a year of discussion, planning and negotiation with the synagogue, we started to receive training sessions from Steve Miller; and the synagogue

agreed to let us use their hall and kitchen. We obtained small grants and finally opened our doors to the public in November 1993, on a once-a-week-basis each Thursday lunchtime.

At the first session, we had a good number of volunteers, but only two users. The second week no users turned up at all! Undaunted, we continued and, within a few weeks, our clientele had risen to 10, then 20 and in the new year it was nearly 30.

All meals were and are home-made; some are donated by local businesses. We established a regular clientele and things went smoothly, all on a volunteer basis. However, after a few months, the administration and the work needed to organise the volunteers increased, so we appointed a part-time administrator on a temporary basis.

By the summer of 1995 we had opened a second weekly

session on Monday evenings. Around the same time our indefatigable secretary/fundraiser, Sheila Durston, obtained a grant which enabled us to take on a more permanent co-ordinator.

We added to the services, with the periodic attendance of a chiropodist, an optician, a dentist, a health worker (who now attends once a week) and others – and finally, in 1996, we obtained Lottery funding of £35,000 to employ a part-time welfare rights worker. He attends every session, and has been a great help to many of our users. Sadly, Sheila Durston died suddenly a few months after this appointment.

In the political/social field we have not been as active as planned, although we have written letters to appropriate departments protesting about government cuts. We also produced directories of other local drop-in centres, where furniture is supplied to homeless people and there are rent deposit schemes.

The drop-in centre continues very successfully, with 30 - 50

users at each session, a group of regulars plus occasional visitors. Some of our users have become volunteer helpers. We have appointed a new fundraiser who has had some success – though we are still worried about resources for the future. We also provide used clothes which are well received; we are always short of men's clothes, particularly shoes.

Most of the users are not street sleepers, but live in inadequate or isolated bedsits, squats or other unsatisfactory accommodation with limited or no facilities.

Most are not Jewish – though a few are: an Orthodox rabbi invited to participate in the scheme asked how many Jewish homeless people there were. We ask no questions – but clearly many of the users have not had a decent meal since the last session they attended. All of them are on the margins of society and survive only with the kind of support that we are able to give.

Michael Ellman
Chair, NLAH

MANNY GET YOUR GUN

In June this year, in a free vote, the House of Commons voted by a majority of 336 to 207 to equalise the age of consent for straight and gay men at 16. A month later, the House of Lords decided that, nevertheless, homosexual acts between consenting 16 and 17-year-old men would remain illegal. Coming soon after a public intervention by Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who declared that 'homosexual acts for adolescent boys' could not be 'part of the morally healthy society' based on 'traditional Christian principles' he would like to see, the general perception was that the equalising move had been bashed by the Bishops. This was unfair. Tory peer Baroness Young, who moved the amendment to restore the original wordings of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 (buggery) and

the Sexual Offences Act 1967 (amendment of law relating to homosexual acts in private), was quick to refute suggestions that a conspiracy of the Christian clergy was afoot. Indeed, she was 'very grateful' that none other than Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, Commonwealth Chief Rabbi from 1967 to 1991, had pledged his support, alongside the secretary-general of the Moslem Council of Great Britain. (Rabbi Jakobovits, it will be recalled, was elevated to the peerage by Margaret Thatcher after producing a report on urban poverty which chided Robert Runcie's *Faith in the City* for 'political bias' and recommended 'self-help' to Britain's black immigrant population: 'Cheap labour is more dignified than a free dole, and industriousness generates greater wealth than increased wages for decreasing hours of work.'

In fact, despite stiff

competition, Lord Jakobovits gave perhaps the most entertaining speech of the three-hour debate. First he corrected Baroness Young. He was 'opposed' to keeping the age at which gay sex becomes legal at 18 - as even this could give the impression that 'such conduct is legitimate and morally acceptable'. However, though he was sure that 'human progress in the long run is inevitable' and that such 'unnatural acts' would one day be criminalised once more, he conceded that it was unlikely that their Lordships could 'revoke' the 1956 Wolfenden Report 'for the time being'.

His noble Lordship proceeded to an incisive critique of the ideological distortions of everyday language worthy of a media studies graduate. 'Public opinion is being manipulated by insistent use or misuse of euphemisms', he complained. 'I

like to think of myself as a gay fellow. I enjoy gayness. I object to others appropriating that term'. He approvingly told of how 'until recently the language to describe such behaviour evoked abhorrence, for instance, by associating such practices with the depravities of the biblical city of Sodom or the pagan Greek island of Lesbos'. Straightforwardly descriptive language such as this was now being replaced by rhetorically loaded terms like 'homophobia', 'an addition to our vocabulary which is intended to shape new attitudes and uproot existing moral order'.

Lord Jakobovits showed his grasp of moral reasoning and cherished liberal principles to be similarly acute. 'Homosexuals demand their civil liberties alongside all other citizens. I am the first to concede that demand so long as it does not harm others. But a tiny dissident

DON'T ASK THE RABBI

Advertisement

The Scraatchi Synagogue

We don't understand why a synagogue should just be seen as a place of worship. At the Scraatchi Synagogue you don't just commune with God. If you're in PR or marketing we could be just what you're looking for – a revolutionary new concept in networking.

We are within the conservative tradition. (Well as Scraatchis we've never been anything else.) This yomtov we have invited top shofar blower from America – Ms Lewinsky.

The Scraatchi Synagogue Lobby the man above



Dear Rabbi,
Every time
my husband
speaks he says something
offensive. I want a divorce
but he won't give me one.
What can I do?

Mrs I Jakobovits

The Rabbi replies

The Talmud recognises that not all husbands are perfect and a loudmouth husband is called a *gob*. Obtaining a *get* is really an unimportant detail. Perhaps you should concentrate more on finding ways to make sure he never speaks again. Even if you manage to escape, why should the rest of us put up with him? In conclusion – even an ignorant git with a *gob* won't get you a *get*.

minority of under 5 per cent - perhaps under 1 per cent according to the latest studies - cannot demand that the other 95 per cent or 99 per cent must accept and treat as equal violations of the moral code which, after all, has distinguished civilised life for millennia'.

Lord Jakobovits once said that as Chief Rabbi, though his views might not always reflect the majority opinion among British Jews, 'nevertheless they would recognize that I am the authentic interpreter of Judaism and speak with an authentic voice on Jewish teachings'. Human rights lawyer and Liberal Democrat peer Anthony Lester begged to differ. 'Speaking as one Jew to another', he said in response to Jakobovits' lesson, 'it is extremely dangerous for any minority to speak in the language of majoritarianism.'

Their noble Lordships were

unmoved. Baroness Young's motion was passed by 290 votes to 122. The government had been persuaded by campaigners to include the measure in their Crime and Disorder Bill after last year's ruling by the European Human Rights Commission that the current law discriminated against homosexuals. Jack Straw, unwilling to risk a delay to his flagship bill - intended, ironically, to make good New Labour's pre-election pledge that 'Young Offenders Will Be Punished' - removed the offending clause. Separate legislation is promised for the 1998-99 parliamentary session, but, were it not for the conscientiousness of the ennobled fundamentalist coalition in protecting us from the irresponsibility of our elected representatives, gay equality would now be law.

Martin McIvor



Queer Remembrance, Jack Gilbert of the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline at the Cenotaph in November, commemorating those who fought and died at the hands of the Nazis

WE'LL DO IT OUR WAY

For Binyamin Netanyahu, in trouble at home and abroad, the commemorative march from Auschwitz to Birkenau was a photo opportunity too good to miss. Surrounded by flag-waving heavies, the Israeli Prime Minister and his wife joined the march, tying it in with Israel's 50th anniversary, he declared that the only safeguard for Jewish life is the Israeli army.

The dead cannot protest. But when Netanyahu addressed live Jews at Warsaw's Nozyk synagogue, Helena Datner, deputy leader of the Union of Jewish Congregations in Poland, walked out expressing 'pain and regret' that he'd had nothing to say about the 20-30,000 strong community that is reviving Jewish culture in Poland today but simply spoke about Israel's achievements and urged them to move there. Perhaps they remembered how Likud's political founders made a pact with Poland's pre-war right wing colonels, offering to rid them of their troublesome Jews.

Moving east, the *Jewish Chronicle* reported earlier this year that Jews in the one-time Soviet 'homeland' of Birobidjan had 'recovered their pride and heritage'. They have a high school, two synagogues, a library and a Yiddish daily paper. But that didn't satisfy Israel's ambassador in Moscow, Aliza Shenhar, who said: 'It is difficult to understand why they want to learn Yiddish in schools, instead of Hebrew'.

SORRY NO BLACKS, NO PALESTINIANS

Some of the West Bank settlers have been flexible enough to find advantages in the 'peace process'. Settlers from Efrat complained the Israeli authorities were violating the Oslo accords by siting caravans for Ethiopian immigrants near their settlement.

They warned the Defence Minister that they would obstruct the conveyancing of land for housing the Ethiopians, and report any building activity 'to all official bodies interested

dybbuk's diary

in the peace process'. This makes a change from slogans about Jews having the right to settle anywhere they like in 'Eretz Yisrael'.

But the Ethiopian Jews are black. The Jerusalem weekly *Kol Ha'ir* reported that erection of caravan homes for them had been halted after settlers complained that their presence would lower the property values of apartments in Efrat. *Hine ma tov u ma na'im, shevet akhim gam yahad!* (How good and beautiful it is to sit together as brothers).

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Imagine finding yourself on a boat in the Thames with Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, king of the swingers Peter Stringfellow and Christine Hamilton. Seeing this delightful evening on offer for just £15, to launch Rabbi Boteach's book *Kosher Sex*, I naturally couldn't resist. Unfortunately, Peter Stringfellow had to drop out. However, I managed a sympathetic word with Mrs Hamilton, about her husband losing his job last year, and the couple having to give up their fine Georgian home. Not wishing to hurt their feelings by offering charity, I suggested they might try to obtain seasonal work at Harrods.

Rabbi Boteach, who admits he is 'not humble', says his L'Chaim Society is the 'most exciting Jewish organisation in the world'. At a time when more humdrum Jewish charities are struggling, it certainly seems amply funded, and has made its name with celebrity guests like Ronald Reagan and Diego Maradona, each with their own

take on divine intervention. Last year the rabbi wanted to invite Russia's nationalist antisemite Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (as though we don't have enough local talent). Well - we're English; we expect our clergy to be a bit daft.

Rabbi Boteach blends his *chochma* with showbiz flair, and shares a PR firm with Gary Glitter and Gerry Cottle's circus. When I saw the L'Chaim society advertisement offering nine different Scottish malt whiskeys at their *kiddush* I was almost tempted to go along for some spiritual sustenance.

I must admit, the title *Kosher Sex* sent a frisson through some of my friends in north west London. 'What does he say about flavoured condoms?', asked A, anxiously. 'I mean, it's not as if they do prawn cocktail or smokey bacon, ...do they?' B reported having a recurring nightmare, where she is making passionate love with her latest handsome hulk when the wardrobe door flies open, revealing a bearded man in black who says he is a *shomer* from the Beth Din.

WINNER TAKES FALL

I always remember Helen Goldstein turning heads on a May Day march, striding out under a blue and white Mapam banner in a sea of red.

As writer Helen Zahavi, she found fame and fortune with film-maker Michael Winner, renowned for his sensitive human dramas and subtly sparkling *News of the World* column; but now, her chequebook fatter though her face looks thinner (unlike Michael who enjoys a good dinner), Helen says he took too

many liberties on their *Dirty Weekend*, and she would have said so at the time except that she felt sorry for him because he was due to have open heart surgery.

Poor old Michael's had enough humiliation this year in a row over a restaurant table at La Gavroche. 'Do you know who I am?' he allegedly demanded. They did, and after some words, he was barred from coming again. Now he shrugs, and mumbles gently about Ms Zahavi's independent nature. Her latest paperback, *Donna and the Fatman*, has just come out, a story about a feisty female avenging herself on a balding fat slob used to getting his way by violence and intimidation. It is obviously not modelled on Michael Winner, a nice guy who doesn't even frighten head waiters.

MYSTIC SHMOK

Following controversy over another writer's work on China, several publishers turned snuffy over my study on Marco Polo's Jewish origins showing how, following traditional caravan routes, he brought back lok shen from China, after introducing small bagel-shaped mint sweets to the celestial kingdom.

Publishers aren't always afraid to chance their arm and they seem to be cashing in on the latest craze for mysticism. Three mathematicians have examined the Equal Letter Skip method of Michael Dronin's *The Bible Code*, which discovered predictions of events like the Kennedy assassination. They found that applying the same method to Moby Dick you could have predicted the murder of Leon Trotsky. Or, if we are to believe *The Guardian's* photo caption, on 2 June, 'The killing of Tolstoy'. Now, that really is a scoop.

Meanwhile, my friend Simon Rocker in the *Jewish Chronicle* quotes a fellow from Finchley synagogue on another mystical initiative: 'There's a lady who does colonic irrigation who'd been to the Kabbalah Learning Centre in the States...' Out of one end and in the other, so to speak.

Bringing it all back home**1 טער מא' - מאנ' פעסטאצ'יע**

קענו קאפיטאליזם און רעאקציע - פאר סאציאליזם און דעמאקראטיע!

קענו נאציאנאליזם און ראסדיסקרימינאציע - פאר פולער גלייכבארעכטיקונג!

קענו יעדן טאטאליטאריזם - פאר שלום און אינטערנאציאנאלער סאלידאריטעט!

קענו סאוויעטישער אנרעסיע - פאר א פארייניקטע וועלט פון פרייע פעלקער!

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There's a long shelf of books and articles on the Bund's history in eastern Europe. But hardly anything has been written about the Bundists in the United States and the contributions they made there, or about their deep and continuing ties with

comrades in the old countries.

It's a surprising gap which I think distorts our view of Bundist history. In fact, I'd argue that we can't fully understand what the Bundists accomplished in Europe without understanding how they interacted with fellow

A turbulent first half of the 20th century brought many Jewish Socialists of the Bund to America. Gail Malmgreen looks at their struggles and achievements

Announcement of a May Day rally co-sponsored by the Bund in New York, 1963

socialists in America – many of whom never forgot or lost touch with their Bundist roots.

The Bund was founded and grew up during the peak years of mass migration across the Atlantic. Inevitably, Bundists were swept along in the wave. The Jewish socialists kept coming to America, year after year, reinforcing their impact on Jewish America and at the same time, constantly renewing ties with the homelands in Europe.

What they found when they stepped off the boat was a kind of Jewish metropolis on a scale they'd never seen. On the eve of the First World War, Warsaw had about 300,000 Jewish inhabitants. New York already had more than a million. They found much that was familiar and different – the scale, the flavour and especially the nature of the larger, non-Jewish society in which they were to live. That melting pot that always bubbled, but never really melted. The New World offered prosperity – relative prosperity, despite the sweatshops and crowded tenements – and, even more important, relative freedom. Freedom from the legal restraints and persecution that drove so many out of Europe.

So they seized their opportunity and proceeded to create what was, for many of us, the world of our grandfathers and grandmothers. They built schools, lecture halls, libraries and a flourishing Yiddish socialist press. They founded socialist *landsmanshaften* and the Workmen's Circle with its branches in every sizeable town and city. They built a Jewish labour movement several hundred thousand strong at its high point. And they formed new political organisations. Within the American Socialist Party there was the Jewish Socialist Federation, with its journal, *Naye Welt*, and later the Jewish Socialist *Verband*, with the journal *Der Weker*, *The Awakener*.

We all know some of the famous names – the roll-call of Bundists who made good. David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union; Sidney Hillman, of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; Baruch Chamey Vladeck a New York City councillor and manager of the *Jewish Daily Forward*; Joseph Weinberg and Joseph Baskin, president and secretary of the Workmen's Circle. And there were many others – who were better known then. Bundists in their youth, they came here in their teens or early twenties and set out to build a new Jerusalem on the Hudson River.

They brought the United States a completely new vision of trade unionism, mirroring what the Bund and other socialists were doing in Europe with their housing complexes, health clinics, workers' education programmes, theatre groups and summer camps. In the New Deal period they helped to change the face of New York and America.

At the same time, through all this sturdy, overlapping, interconnected network of Jewish institutions, they built a broad base of support which found its way back to the Bund. It was support that would be there for the Bund in its darkest and most desperate times.

I recently saw an advert for a public service broadcasting documentary on immigration. It showed a family in peasant dress, standing at a ship's rail, straining for a glimpse of the Statue of Liberty. The narrator's voice intoned: 'When our family left Poland for America, we never looked back.'

For many Jewish socialists, nothing could have been

further from the truth. Not only did they look and write back, they travelled back. The interchange was constant and intense, the bonds never broken. *The Forward* was read in Warsaw, Vilna and Lodz, and the *Folksaytung* in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

A couple of vignettes that capture that sense of connectedness: January 1923, on a freezing cold afternoon, a large crowd is gathered at the graveside of Vladimir Medem, one of the fathers of the Bund. The chief speaker is B C Vladeck of *The Forward*. Medem had spent the last eight years of his life in the United States, writing and teaching. They buried him in Brooklyn, next to Sholem Aleichem.

The Polish Bund was growing rapidly in the 1930s – but its followers were poor and its needs were great. Money was also required and much came from America. You may have heard about the Medem sanatorium, near Warsaw, and the film that was made about it. In this fundraising film, made to be shown in the US, you can glimpse Vladeck on one of his several visits to Poland.

Finally, let's look again at the two defining moments of Bundist heroism. One in autumn 1939, in the early weeks of the German occupation, when Arthur Zygielbojm appears on a balcony in Warsaw and calls on Jews not to allow themselves to be herded into the ghetto and imprisoned there. Soon after, a prime Gestapo target, he escapes across Europe with help from the underground. All the history books pick him up next in 1942, in Britain, as the Bund's representative on the Polish government in exile. And, in London, on 12 May 1943 he commits suicide in despair at the indifference of the world to Jewish suffering in Europe, in solidarity with his slaughtered Polish comrades.

But, go back between the middle of 1940 and his arrival in London in 1942. Zygielbojm was in the United States – brought there by American comrades – and toured the country from Florida to Texas to California, finding Yiddish-speaking audiences everywhere, and hosted unions or Workmen's Circle branches, speaking and raising money for the Jewish underground. This wasn't his first visit. Zygielbojm had spent a year in the States in the early 30s, also working for the Bund.

These instances could be multiplied indefinitely. Many travelled that route back and forth. If you stepped into the New York offices of the Jewish Labor Committee at any time in the late '30s or early '40s, you would have seen Bundists, just arrived from overseas, working side by side with others who came in their teens or twenties. These people, these organisations, didn't need the *New York Times* to tell them what was happening in Europe.

In 1934, a year after Hitler came to power, the garment unions, the *Forward*, the Workmen's Circle and their allies came together on the Lower East Side and formed the Jewish Labor Committee. Vladeck was its chairman and David Dubinsky treasurer. All but one of the founding officers were former Bundists. The Jewish Labour Committee would be the Jewish labour movement's umbrella group to co-ordinate anti-Nazi and rescue activity. They went into action with mass meetings and demonstrations. They supported the anti-Nazi boycott and they sent aid to anti-Nazi forces, both Jewish and non-Jewish, all over Europe, and to Jews in need, wherever aid could get to them.

Like the Bund, the JLC accepted the need to work,

as far as possible, with non-Jewish allies. It thus went to the leaders of the AFL and the CIO – uncertain allies at best and never fully committed to the Jewish cause. But they had something that was crucially needed – influence with the Roosevelt administration. The JLC used that influence in 1940 on the eve of the Holocaust to get from Roosevelt hundreds of emergency visitors' visas to rescue comrades who had escaped into southern France or Lithuania, just ahead of the German armies, but who were in immediate danger of arrest. With these visas they brought Bundists to the US. This is the original visa list in the Jewish Labour Committee archives: Alexandrowicz, Brumberg, Alexander and Victor Ehrlich, Ewinska, Gilinsky, Gotainer, Kasdan, Kurski, Litewka, Mendelson, Mlotek, Portnoy, Scherer, Zelmanowicz – and lots more. The JLC brought others – journalists and artists, labour Zionists, German, Austrian, Russian and Italian socialists, Jews and non-Jews. They were comrades in danger. But the number one was pitifully small and the shadow of the death camps was closing in.

From then the lifeline had to be through the underground. Money was smuggled to resistance fighters in the ghettos and partisans in the forests. Money was brought by couriers to sustain Jewish survivors in hiding, children were brought over the Swiss border. And by the same routes eye-witness reports were smuggled back of the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history, of horrors almost beyond belief.

In March 1943 the Bundists and their friends in New York gathered to honour two Polish Bund leaders, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, who they now knew had been murdered in the Soviet Union. It was the largest such memorial gathering held anywhere in the world.

In a letter dated April, 1945, the end of the war in Europe, Pinchas Schwartz, a Bundist who was visiting Detroit on a fundraising tour, wrote to his friends in New York: 'All around me people are drinking champagne. Can you understand why I don't feel like celebrating?'

Instead of taking their place among the socialist parties of the new post-war Europe, the New York Bundists now faced permanent exile. They had to turn their attention to the urgent and heavy work of sustaining the survivors in Europe, Shanghai, Mexico – everywhere Jews had taken refuge.

They did it well, again in partnership with American Jewish labour and other US comrades. Families were reunited and resettled, homes and jobs provided. Children's homes, clinics, soup kitchens, reading rooms – all were needed. They knew how to provide these things. Their history had trained them.

And in America, with their world headquarters now in New York, the Bundists had to confront a very different post-war situation.

It was a country in which a new generation of Jews was moving up and out – up into the middle class and away from their inner-city roots. And an America where the labour, much less Jewish now, was also shrinking and becoming more defensive in its politics. Then there were the cold war strains and the conflicts of the 1960s and '70s, sometimes revealing deep divides on the left



The Jewish Culture House in New York, formerly home of a variety of Jewish Labour and Yiddish cultural organisations

and sometimes more generational than political. But the Bund has been here and has stood with us against anti-semitism, east and west, every form of discrimination, for peace and freedom and a better life for all working people. We salute its steadfastness. Speaking now for my own generation, some of its lessons have taken us a long time to learn.

A few years before the Bund came into existence, Y L Peretz wrote: 'Working for one's own hearth and kinsmen does not mean abandoning the banner of humanity at large. Today everybody must ... cultivate his own bit of ground, although – or rather because – we hope for a tomorrow in which there will be a common granary for mankind. From this granary each person will be fed alike, without regard to his ancestry or the colour of his skin.' (1894).

The problems and questions that the Bund wrestled with are still simmering today: the nature of Jewishness, the issue of secularism, the radical desire to make the world a better place – how do we link all these together and pass them on from generation to generation? How do you say: this is who I am; this Jewish history and kinship is important to me – and still avoid self-absorption and chauvinism? Is it possible to practise what the old Bundists used to call cultural nationalism – to keep your own bit of ground blooming, as Peretz expressed it, and still avoid putting up fences between yourselves and your neighbours, who must also be your allies?

The answers aren't likely to be carved on any tablets or printed in any manifesto.

I can only say, if you're going to look to the Bund and its history for inspiration, don't forget to consider both the old world and the new, and how closely interconnected they became.

As for the *Naye Welt*, it's still out there, waiting to be discovered.

Selective memory

At last there is a glimmer of official recognition of the Nazi genocide of Europe's Gypsies, and the history of their resistance is finally being pieced together. But the collapse of the Communist Bloc is bringing renewed terror from a new generation of fascists. Donald Kenrick reports

The Swiss banks have made the first symbolic payments to Romany (Gypsy) Holocaust survivors, more than half a century after the end of the Second World War and the liberation of the concentration camps. It is believed that much of the jewellery and money taken from Gypsies by the Nazis found its way to neutral Switzerland, along with gold from the rings and teeth of gassed victims.

Joseph Lehmann, now living in Singen in Germany, had fled from Poland to Switzerland. He was expelled from that country and spent the rest of the war hiding in the forest. He received \$1,380. The president of the fund made it clear to the press at a ceremony in February that the sums paid were not intended as compensation, but as 'humanitarian aid' to the three elderly Sinti Gypsies. The first payments had already been made at the end of 1997 in Latvia – \$415 for each east European recipient.

For the Nazis, the Jews and the Gypsies (Zigeuner) were their two greatest enemies. Gypsies were killed in mass shootings outside the main towns of occupied Europe, in the concentration camps and by forced labour in underground factories and elsewhere. There were Romanies imprisoned within the Warsaw ghetto as early as 1941. A group, recaptured after trying to escape, were taken to Treblinka and killed by machine guns. Others followed the Jewish inhabitants to be gassed at the same camp. The deaths of 200,000 Romanies have been documented and the figure may well rise as more archives become available in eastern Europe.

After years of silence, Romanies and other survivors are revealing stories previously unknown – stories of resistance and courage.

It is well known that the Romanies in Auschwitz main camp were among the most persistent in attempting to escape. These were mainly nomads from Bohemia and Moravia – the so-called Protectorate set up after the German army conquered Czechoslovakia. Vincent Daniel and Ignacy Mrnka (prisoner number 80,735) were two recaptured escapees who were shot. This was the fate of everyone who was caught.

In 1943 a special Gypsy section was set up in the neighbouring Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. Here there was an attempt at a mass escape by an outside working party of Romanies. In May 1943, thirteen prisoners attempted to overpower their guards and escape from their workplace. They too were unsuccessful. The guards shot several on the spot. The others were imprisoned in the Block II bunker and shot later that month.

The final act of resistance at Auschwitz was on 16 May 1944 when a curfew was announced and the SS guards tried to take the internees to the gas chambers. Warned by a woman who had been in the officers' quarter and had overheard the plans, the Gypsies had armed themselves with spades, crowbars and knives. They refused to leave their barracks. Disconcerted, the SS men withdrew to discuss their tactics. Finally, the action was called off.

But the Gypsies were not all saved. The SS then began to select young men and women from 14 upwards and deport them to other camps. Some were to

survive until the liberation. By August only children and old people were left when the SS arrived for a second time to transport them to the gas chambers. This time serious resistance was impossible, though few went quietly to their deaths.

In recent years more Romany survivors have told of the 'righteous Gorgios' – non-Gypsies who helped to save individuals.

The Austrian landlord, Baron Rochunozzy, was able to smuggle several families who worked on his land over the border to Hungary. When the Nazis found out, the Count himself had to flee.

Zekia A. has told of the Serbian peasant who saved her. Her family had all been deported to the concentration camp at Nish. She was aged eight and wandering around the market when she was recognised by a farmer called Milan. He knew her from the time Zekia's parents had helped with the harvest on his farm. Milan took her to his village, Chamrlia, dressed her in Serbian clothes and hid her at the farm until the war was over. During the day she would stay in the fields looking after the sheep, returning only at night to sleep in the house. Many of the villagers, including the mayor, were aware that a Gypsy girl was hidden in their midst but did not betray her. When the mayor heard of a coming German raid he would warn the farmer, and the girl would hide under bales of straw that day.

Others were hidden by locals in Slovenia and Holland. Edi Georg was sleeping in the stables when Dutch police arrived to pick up his family and send them to the transit camp at Westerbork and on to Auschwitz. He was helped by the Dutchman Hendrik Bethlehem to get a false identity and a place to hide until the end of the war. And in Amsterdam police inspector Knol, who had links with the resistance, managed to save four Gypsies from deportation.

Dimitar Nemtsov was serving in the Bulgarian army of occupation in Macedonia when he deserted and joined Tito's partisans. In Italy, Amilcar Debar, Giacomo Sacco and the Catter cousins all served in the resistance. Walter Catter was captured and hanged in Vicenza. His cousin had been killed a few weeks earlier in a guerrilla attack in Liguria. The latter's father went to look for his body and carried him back on his shoulders to the cemetery.

As we recall the events of the Nazi period, it is shocking to see the beginnings of a new genocide against Gypsies in eastern Europe.

The end of communism in eastern Europe has been a disaster for the Gypsies – if for no one else. The end of free medical care and creches, the loss of jobs in ailing factories, the return of state farms and collective farms to private ownership has left the Gypsies with no money, no jobs, the loss of their factory-owned flats and unable to get daily paid work on the small, privatised plots of land.

Romanies have replaced the Jews as scapegoats for the real or imagined ills of the majority population. Gypsies are attacked, whether they are poor and begging or well-off with big cars and expensive coats, earned from the proceeds of established small businesses.

Skinhead and other right-wing groups are attacking Gypsies both in words and deeds. Nearly every week brings news of another death or serious injury at their hands. Pogroms by villagers often follow a minor quarrel in a bar or pilfering of crops.

A few examples will suffice. In January 1997 a mob attacked Gypsy houses in the village of Tanhanu, Romania. In February police beat up Gypsies in two Hungarian towns – Szombathely and Mandatany. In the summer, skinheads beat to death a Romany man in Sliven, Bulgaria.

In May 1998, a Romany man was beaten up by skinheads in Orlova in the Czech Republic and left unconscious in the middle of the road where he was run over and killed by a lorry. In the same week, a Romany home in Krnow was firebombed and a woman of 48 was seriously burnt. The next month, Helena Bihariova, a 26-year-old mother of four, was beaten, also by skinheads, and thrown into the river where she drowned.

In the same month, skinheads attacked Gypsy children in Dupnitsa, Bulgaria, throwing a 15-year-old boy to his death from a window.

In Usti nad Labem in the Czech republic, the mayor proposes to build a wall down the middle of a street to divide flats occupied by Gypsies from those where non-Gypsy Czechs live. The Minister of the Interior has, at the time of writing, not been able to dissuade the local council from this action. It may be remembered that Usti nad Labem is the home town of Magdalena Babicka, chosen as Miss Czech Republic 1993, who said that her greatest ambition was 'to cleanse Czech cities of their dark-skinned inhabitants'.

Less publicity has been given to similar plans for Gypsy ghettos which are being prepared in Pilsen in the Czech Republic and Szekesfehervar in Hungary. The latter proposed ghetto will now not even consist of flats, but of converted containers. Similar containers have been used for housing Romanian Gypsy asylum seekers in Dusseldorf, Germany.

Postscript: In conflict-ridden Kosovo, the Romanies are being squeezed between Serbs and Albanians. The latter have been putting pressure on the mainly Muslim Gypsies for many years to register as Albanians in order to increase the percentage of Albanians in the province. Estimates of the Gypsy population go as high as 600,000, but the census figures are much lower. The Serbs are now forcing Romanies in Prishtina into the army to fight the Albanian separatists. Reports talk of Gypsies trying to flee to Albania being shot on the border by Albanian frontier forces.



Nazi photograph of Kalderash Gypsies in Belzec concentration camp, 1940

Action to support Romany refugees

Romany asylum seekers from the Czech and Slovak Republics have formed a new organisation in Britain and are campaigning to

- End internment of Romany refugees.
- Demand that Romany asylum seekers are recognised as political refugees.
- End deportations of Czech and Slovak Romany refugees. 20,000 Czech Roma have lost their citizenship. The UNCHR states specifically that refugees from Slovakia must not be deported if they would become homeless in their country of origin. The large majority of Roma are in that position.
- Challenge lies and disinformation disseminated by the Home Office and others about Romany asylum seekers.

As well as these political aims, the new organisation aims to offer practical help and advice to Romany refugees, and make links with existing Traveller and Gypsy organisations in Britain.

The Roma Refugee Organisation urgently requires office premises and equipment, donations in money or kind, and other offers of solidarity. They can provide information, speakers to meetings, and can be contacted at: Roma Refugee Organisation, c/o 1st Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ. Tel 0171-267 8198; fax 0171-209 2669.

Hey jude...

The son of a holocaust survivor, Daniel Zylberstajn was born in Germany, and has lived in Israel, Holland and Britain. He reflects on what it means to be Jewish as the end of the 20th century approaches

The presence of Jews has always threatened social unity, and challenges definitions of what constitutes a society or nation. This ambiguity remains, and is further complicated today by the existence of Israel with the result that many Jews have ceased challenging the destructiveness of the world's nationalisms.

The most devastating results of cultural absolutism were experienced in Germany but Britain's imperial power had a horrendous impact over much of the world's population. It did so, partly by creating a dichotomy between the British, or more precisely, the English, on one hand, and the rest of the world who ministered to this British/English class, on the other. The 'second class' was set in a strict hierarchy with the poor 'valueless' people of Britain and elsewhere, declassified through their 'otherness' to the dominant group. Jews were clearly part of this 'second-class'.

British Jews have not, for the most part, taken a clear stance either against racism or against the irrational and destructive definition of human beings by 'race'; indeed, they have not been immune from racist attitudes themselves and seem not to have recognised the difficulties faced by other immigrants to Britain. I have not encountered outward-looking attitudes from many Jews. For example, apart from a tiny Jewish-Arab dialogue group, I have not heard many Jews challenge Islamophobia. Most British Jews seem not to think about the implications of western countries' legislation on immigration for all marginalised people. Indeed, some clearly participate in the formulation of policies which endanger immigrants, perhaps to emphasise that they consider themselves as 'belonging to Britain'. This indicates a preoccupation with an ethnic or genetic husk, rather than with content and moral application.

Viewing people primarily in a way that identifies 'difference', creates and cements myths. British Jews have colluded with definitions of culture and ways of life as 'white' or 'black', 'Jewish' or 'gentile' which promote separatism, affirm irrational preconceptions and support the validity of 'race' as a significant means of distinguishing human beings.

Using terms like 'cultural or ethnic difference' in a bid to celebrate multiculturalism and promote tolerance, though well intended, is part of a racist, difference-affirming gospel, through which the marginalised pass on that marginalisation to a new group.

Interestingly, among the disenfranchised poor of 18th century London, poor black people – those of African descent, but not Jews or Irish people – were accepted as equals. Both shared a common enemy, the wealthy and aristocratic 'English'. It is important to note that this concerned people of African descent, but not Jews, and Irish, as the 'English' aristocracy played these groups through preference and rumours against the rest of the poorer sections.

Of course, each of us is different. I hate the terms 'mixed couple' or 'mixed-race child'. I thought concepts like *halbjude* or *viertel-jude* belonged to a specific time and place. They assume that 'mixed couples' are created out of two easily-defined elements, like vodka

and orange. But no parent constitutes such purity: each person is the result of two different individuals, themselves, inevitably, a mixture. Why make a particular point out of such relationships, where one element is a visible characteristic? The answer is again, that in Britain, like many other contemporary societies, there is still an unquestioned adherence to notions of racial purity and essentialist culture which depend on skin colour and family name. It may be uncomfortable for many bearded fanatics to acknowledge, but just as there is no Aryan racial lineage, neither is there any Jewish genealogy. Although 'inter' marriage might have been rarer in old days, it certainly happened. As Rabbi Julia Neuberger says, in Roman times, Jewish rabbis were actively competing with Christians for converts.

The UK, convinced it bears Europe's most progressive 'system' to deal with 'ethnic minorities', intends to influence EU social policy on minority issues, which might just culminate in a reintroduction of currently prohibited racial theory in Germany. Just imagine a prospective equal opportunities form, this time to help German nationals like me to find a job in Germany:

Please tick where applicable:

Deutschstämmig	()
Türke	()
Jude	(✓)
Afrikaner	()
Schwul/Lesbisch	()
Behindert	()
Zigeuner	()
Andere Minderheit	()

A debate is underway in Germany about multiculturalism, and the country seems to be heading towards the same essentialist notions that are behind British policy. Recently, German conservatives asserted that Germany will not be an immigrant society, while others pointed to the country's cultural diversity saying: 'Look at the Jews, the Italians, the Turks' (all of which were defined in racial terms in the past), as if each group was a monolithic culture defined by its difference to German culture, whatever that may be.

Why does something that appears so obviously dangerous in a German context, be seen as no more than an annoying insult in the British context? Obviously, every person should have the same right of access, but the laws deny equality in implying the existence of races. I certainly repudiate the idea that I am member of the 'Jewish race' or '*die judenrasse*'!

'Difference' may be seen as an asset to a society, giving Europeans (or any other majority group) 'pluralist' credentials and offering opportunities for individual self-development and freedom (through food or music, for instance) or opportunities to 'broaden the mind' such as the hippies who travelled to India. But to the 'others' of each society, their 'difference' is still defined by antiquated essentialist notions of group membership.

Everyone has a right to identify as a group. The danger, though, is when such belonging is forced on individuals, by the dominating group. 'Ghettos' like Whitechapel, which is predominantly Bengali, and Shadwell, which is predominantly white, both in

London's Tower Hamlets, are defended as part of a carousel of 'multiculturalism'. The segregation of schools and cultural life in that borough, has racist implications for a whole generation, affecting both the poor, 'white', 'English' children there, of whom some are drawn towards fascist groups, and for young Bengalis, some of whom are drawn towards the fundamentalist Islamic *hizb'ut tahrir* as a way affirming their identity.

But this segregation in the East End of London was created by 'English' bureaucrats and politicians, who did not know what to do with new immigrants except treat them as 'other'. If you are 'Bengali' and apply for council housing in Tower Hamlets, you will automatically be assigned to 'Banglatown'. If you are a white-skinned 'English' person you will be assigned to a 'white' estate.

In Hackney, on the old Nightingale Estate, the council nurtured separate predominantly 'white' and 'black' tower-blocks. It did not matter if you were from Somalia, West Africa or the Caribbean; skin colour identified you to be same as all the other 'blacks' or 'whites'. If you say you are an orthodox Jew, you will be assigned to a Jews-only housing association. (Jewish separatism, incidentally, developed as a result of Jews being excluded from access to services, a fact which is taken for granted now, when it seems that Jews always wanted their own services.)

Many schools in England are separated according to 'ethnic belonging', with children trained to be cultural soldiers in the name of the great (multi)cultural revolution. This started early on, and concerns not only Jews but also the Catholic Irish, who were not given the opportunity to study alongside Loyalists. And in the educational institutions, not much progress has been made from teaching the history of kings and queens. The history of poor people in Britain, and of regions beyond Europe, is rejected as too demanding and irrelevant to the national interest.

This is not a British problem per se, but a problem of national curriculums everywhere, including Israel. The fact that they are national, a tool of the government and state policy, transforms them into propagandist institutions of cultural and historical half-truths. Why don't non-Jews in orthodox areas like Stamford Hill in London have a chance to be introduced to *Tanach* (the Five Books of Moses) in school or the option to learn Yiddish, the language of most of the Hassidim? Why is there only an option for Bengali children in the Tower Hamlets to learn Bengali? Because it serves the interests of maintaining difference and demarcating clear borders from both sides. How can people act as communities with local interests if they are being discouraged to act co-operatively and are seen as specimens only of an ethnic/cultural group? It forces us to ask precisely what the definitions of apartheid and segregation are.

Why blame 'Aryans' for defining Jews as a separate race when I am repeatedly told that there is something like Jewish racial purity? This racial madness is an audible and visible obsession. A good Jew these days has him- or herself examined by a rabbinically recognised wizard, who will then tell you whether you may or may not marry your cousin and produce healthy children of Abraham (see an advertisement by *Dor yeshorim*, a group which describes itself innocently as the 'committee for prevention of Jewish genetic diseases'. On their terms, this article probably justifies their efforts – perhaps it is my 'German' (antisemitic?) genes that provoke me to write in this way. And in fact it is the case that there are some 'German' genes in me! The wife of my mother's grandfather (a Jew, whose family lived for two generations in Germany, but

came 'originally' from eastern Europe was a Christian-born 'German'. I also have Dutch, Polish, and probably Indian, relatives amongst many others in my genealogy. A great uncle of mine even marched for Rommel, whilst his brother, my grandfather, was beaten unconscious repeatedly back in Germany by the Gestapo for being a 'half-Jew' and known anti-fascist (despite having served with distinction in the German Red Cross in the First World War. He later found refuge in the resistance movement in Amsterdam.)

Such complex genealogies are not an exception, but the norm. At some stage it becomes a matter of choice who you intend to be and what you want to identify as. Claiming I am a quarter Dutch, a quarter German, half Jewish and a bit Polish means nothing until we attribute stereotypes to such a description. Such national stereotypes discriminate against the internal complexities of the many histories of people that constitute a 'nation.' Many members of the Ku Klux Klan, the National Front, Nation of Islam, Kahaneites would be horrified if they investigated their 'genealogies'.

I used to believe that my 'Jewishness' safeguarded me from taking racist stances but in fact this has nothing to do with me being a Jew. I know Jewish people who are racist, and who discriminate or exploit other people. My perspective is a political one, not genetic.

My family was persecuted for being Jewish. Their Jewishness was thought to be an unchangeable biological fact. To be Jewish meant that you looked a certain way, thought a certain way and acted in a certain way. Let's try to look this argument from another perspective. The fact that my father was victimised, that when I lived in Germany, I personally encountered the pain of antisemitism, does not make me an essentially good person. I could have developed into a serial murderer, killing Germans – or Palestinians for that matter – out of revenge. My views come from the way in which I developed as an individual; my own experience has made me into a person who asks questions all the time! The son of the notorious German Nazi propaganda minister, is not a Nazi. Just to put culture and genes in their place, despite the name he has inherited, he is an outspoken and true opponent of antisemitism.

So what, really does it mean to classify a person? A linguistic statement perhaps? An adherence to a particular description of God?

We should not engage in a battle against orthodox Jews or any one else. Rabbinic scholars have a lot to teach us. The task is greater than that, and progressive or socialist Jews should not fall into the trap of identifying Jewish orthodoxy as the enemy, even though we might find some of their practices offensive. The causes of their cultural essentialism were nourished through many centuries of exclusion, inside borders that were drawn not by Jews, but by non-Jews. There are human beings behind each uniform! British cultural thought, even today, pushes its non-English members into cultural absolutist corners. If socialism is one of the sets of values that questions this age-old system, then there is a difficult task ahead. Let one of the tasks be to de-essentialise cultural and national thought in this country, not by battle, but through scrutiny of the foundations of on which we stand, and through deep engagement with the people around us.

Would it be too much to start asking what the mechanics behind the great hatred were – I mean, are? Without questioning, the Five Books of Moses would not exist let alone a discourse over interpretation.

Permission to say goodbye

She came to England from occupied Europe in 1940 via France and an illegal crossing into Spain. Her husband was a prominent lawyer who worked first for the Czech government in exile in London, then after the war she worked within the London Jewish community. Auntie H had tuberculosis before the war and, in a terrible operation, lost a lung. The illness, years of war, the post-war traumas and her traditional Jewish upbringing left her totally dependent on her husband. The family legend has it that he made all her decisions: she worked for him as his secretary, his housekeeper and his wife. They did not have children and, when he died, Auntie H needed someone to live with. She took in a lodger, a woman 40 years her junior, whom she slowly turned into her carer. She was then in her 80s and growing blind and frail through the last five years of her life. Her husband had left enough money for her to pay for all the care she needed and in the end she had two main carers who looked after her affairs. I met H in 1989, after her husband's death, when she made her first post-war trip to Prague and found my father.

This is just background; this story is really about my auntie's funeral.

I want to tell you how I witnessed the end of this woman whom I grew to love and who represented the only surviving member of my father's very large family. Auntie H's wish was to be cremated and for her ashes to be scattered on the same plot in the crematorium rose garden where her husband's ashes had been scattered some years before. When she died, the carers could not find me at work and went ahead with all arrangements for the funeral by themselves. The funeral was set for what turned out to be a grey and rainy autumn day. I arrived at Golders Green crematorium with two bunches of flowers, one from me and one from my father, and attempted to place them by the coffin. That, I was told, was not allowed, as they may make the floor wet and slippery and therefore dangerous. The flowers were whipped out of my hands, placed on top of the coffin and I was quickly ushered out into the waiting room.

Well, I thought to myself, there may be time to say goodbye at the end of the ceremony. The service was led by a woman rabbi who sped through the words as fast as she could. Just as she was catching her breath to read yet another

Hebrew prayer, something creaked and the coffin disappeared.

Then the worst-ever recording of Dvorak's New World Symphony creaked out of an old harmonium and, as we stood there numbed, we were told that this was it: we had to leave. No time to ponder or say goodbye.

Well I thought to myself, perhaps I shall have a chance to reflect at the ceremony when we scatter her ashes. A week later I phoned the crematorium to enquire about this, only to be told that no ceremony had been ordered; they had assumed that as no one wanted to be present, there would be no event. 'In that case', I said, 'I would like to book a ceremony'. 'Of course,' said the woman at the other end of the line; 'you will have to pay £20 for the use of an attendant'. 'But I do not want an attendant', I said, 'I want to be alone with my aunt'. 'Sorry,' said the voice, 'you are not allowed to scatter your aunt's ashes by yourself.' Those are the regulations. But I would be allowed to scatter her ashes elsewhere. It is only in the rose garden, apparently, that these rules apply. 'So who would have paid for your attendant, had I not booked the ceremony to scatter her ashes?' 'We would,' came the answer. 'Would such and such a date be suitable Mrs "Carer"?' asked the voice on the phone. But 'I am not the carer; I am the only relative my Auntie H had,' I said. 'In that case,' said the voice, 'I am sorry, but you cannot book a ceremony to scatter the ashes.' 'But why not?' I exclaimed. 'Well, you may be someone undesirable; someone the family does not want present. So you will need written permission from the person who booked the cremation.' 'In what way undesirable?' I asked. 'Well,' said the patient woman, 'You may be gay, and the family may object to your presence.'

At that point I lost it. I phoned the manager and I was very angry. Though apologetic, the manager only confirmed that the information I'd been given was correct: I could not attend a ceremony to scatter my aunt's ashes without the written permission of the carer, despite the fact that I was the only one who wanted to attend.

Well, I obtained the written permission, did not reveal whether or not I was gay, paid the £20 and said goodbye to my Auntie H after her ashes were scattered on plot G in the rose garden at Golders Green Crematorium, by an attendant.

The End. Amen.

Eva

Down to fundamentals

Jews, like other minorities, have an instinct to turn inwards when the pressure is on – to seek support from our own community and to distrust 'outsiders'. For some elements within minority communities this distrust slips easily into separatism. Zionism's call for Jews to create their own state where they could become a 'normal' people – postmen as well as presidents, dustmen as well as dentists – is predicated on such fears. But though the Nazi period was the extraordinary cauldron from which that state came into existence, the demand for a state came long before, in the Russian Empire, when, unbeknown to its ideologues, the persecution they were suffering was hardly a whisper of what was to come. What is more, those ideologues were not the worst off: they were neither the poorest nor the people most constrained by the narrowness of Jewish life or the antisemitism that pervaded their world. They came predominantly from the young emerging middle class, the first to bask in the feeble beam of the Enlightenment as it belatedly shone through to eastern Europe. Their education was not confined to religion and their language was not confined to Yiddish or Hebrew.

There had always been Jews who crossed the boundaries between Jew and non-Jew, but at the turn of the century, the seismic economic and political changes happening in the surrounding society meant that for these Jews, crossing those boundaries between *shtetl* and city, Russian and Yiddish, secular and religious, shifted their very identity as Jews. And they were afraid. Afraid that they would not be permitted to compete on equal terms with their aspiring, middle class, non-Jewish counterparts – and with justification since, as we have seen all too clearly, not even a revolution rooted out the antisemitism that was woven through Russian life and culture. Poorer Jews who worked in factories and sweatshops, for the most part for Jewish employers, saw it differently. Many of them became politically active, some within the Russian revolutionary movements, others within the Jewish socialist party, the Bund, which asserted Jewish culture, language and needs. But though it may seem paradoxical, these Jews who were fighting for a better future on their home territory, had a wider vision of a world transformed for everyone, not just Jews.

We can start to understand the cataclysmic events that the 20th century has brought, only with hindsight. The failure of nation states either to reflect or address the complex and changing needs of the diverse groups that find themselves together within the same borders has made it clear to many of us that discrimination is one recurring product of nationalism. When territory is defined by the identity of one (or even two or three) primary groups, and the world economy is in the hands of a global elite derived from those who define the identities of the richest territories, the spin-off must be for 'lesser' elements to be downgraded and, as we now know, persecuted and even murdered.

Until the founding of the state of Israel, there was debate and, at times, open conflict between Jews over whether the best hope for their future was in fighting for a territory of 'their own' or in fighting for equality in the many territories where they already lived, from India to Iraq and from Roumania to the USA.

The Jews of the late 19th century were a generation in painful transition. Political change is always messy, uneven and fearful. There is the pull of the past with its appearance of security in religious and social certainties, and the lure of a future in which people gain control of their own destiny. This push and pull was, and still is, reflected in different elements within Jewish communities who, as urgently as ever, need to argue out how Jews can live as human beings alongside others and bring a halt to the wreckage of lives and landscape that has characterised the last 100 years.

This argument has been stifled by precisely the notion that afflicts nation states: that they are, or must appear to be, united and homogeneous. For minorities facing discrimination, oppression and persecution, the imperative to close ranks is even stronger. The threat of racism and antisemitism is used powerfully by those who lead and speak for communities under pressure to silence dissent, or at least keep disagreements internal.

In this Jews are not unique. Indeed, as nationalism emerges as a spent force, a liability for human beings who find themselves displaced and impoverished on an unprecedented scale, we paradoxically see separatist elements rising in significance within those states and communities which are most threatened. India's ruling fascist fundamentalist Hindu party, the BJP, which sets off nuclear bombs as a warning to the Muslims across the border in Pakistan in hitherto secularist India has shifted the political balance of the Indian community in Britain while encouraging that community to send resources 'home' in defence of their 'Hindu heritage'. In Algeria, murderously dictatorial Islamists, in an unfathomable relationship with the government, are terrifying the population into silence and paralysis. Israel's government, led by ultra-right wing fanatic Netanyahu, encourages gun-toting fundamentalist settlers on Palestinian territory while undermining any genuine moves towards peace at any level. As the consensus on Zionism has started to crack in the diaspora Jewish communities, the fundamentalist element has tried to grab control of those communities along with the Israeli state.

Similar forces are at work in the African-American and African-Caribbean communities. The failure of the civil rights and anti-racist movements and of the left to overcome the vicious racism suffered by generations of black people has given separatist, essentialist, right wing forces the opportunity to grab the microphone and claim to be the 'authentic' voice of what is, in reality, a complex, organic and multifaceted community.

Nation of Islam (NoI), under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, argue that it is useless to expect anyone else

The right wing combination of separatism, religious fundamentalism and nationalism exhibited by Farrakhan's followers has parallels in other minority communities, and we must find the courage to challenge them, says Julia Bard

to help young black people – boys in particular – out of the trap of racist violence and discrimination which make drugs and street crime appear to be their only way of taking control of lives that will otherwise lead inexorably to poverty, prison or a psychiatric ward or all three. Not put enormous resources into attention-grabbing events like the Million Man March in Washington in 1995. London's less ambitious 'March 10,000' last October which, in the event, numbered scarcely more than 2,000, had massive media coverage in the preceding weeks, for the most part positive, giving the organisation space to answer, though not very convincingly, the charge that their group is antisemitic; that Farrakhan is on record as having called Hitler 'a great man' and, of course, to argue against the Home Office ban on their leader entering Britain. Most importantly it was a chance to proclaim their belief in black supremacy. The fact is, they are competing for the same territory as successful white people. In an uncanny reflection of the Zionists, particularly the revisionist Zionists of pre-War Poland, their conclusion is not to challenge the ideological framework which defines them as 'the problem' or even 'different' (from what?) but to incorporate racist criteria into their definitions of themselves. Nation of Islam's notion that they are discriminated against because their 'difference' is 'visible', that 'black' is superior, in short, that 'race' defines the value of the person, falls right into one of the many gaping holes in antiracist analysis.

The wider antiracist movement has not so much splintered into pieces as dissolved. A reminder of the tyranny of structurelessness which undermined the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s and early '80s, the most ambitious activists are rising to the top, and are now to be found in the increasingly corporation-like central or local government or stalking the corridors of the Commons. This shapeless 'movement' has undermined demands for the state to intervene in even the most shocking and overt instances of racism. Stephen Lawrence's murderers were allowed to go free in part, it seems, so that the police could obscure an alleged relationship between themselves and criminals associated with those murderers. The Lawrence family fronted a powerful and compelling campaign to bring those murderers to justice and expose the racism and corruption of the police. They had massive public sympathy. Yet, just as the boys who are believed to have murdered Stephen were finally to face public questioning, Nation of Islam pulled a cynical and diversionary publicity stunt at the Lawrence

Inquiry. In private the family and their supporters were appalled. In public they were discreet. The victory that day, though, was the police's: not only did no new facts come to light to embarrass them but they sprayed liberal amounts of CS gas and took the names of many demonstrators who had been getting too popular for their taste as the



Women in white – scarves for fundamentalist females everywhere

Inquiry rolled on. Naturally, in the following day's papers, Stephen Lawrence's murder was buried under the welter of pictures of the besuited, bow-tied, shaven-headed men of Nation of Islam.

This dovetailing of the interests of the state and Nation of Islam is not merely tactical, it is also ideological. This is more clearly the case in the USA where, despite assassinations and extremely high profile and provocative actions, Louis Farrakhan and his boys have been strangely immune from scrutiny by the state. Indeed, Manning Marable of Columbia University has documented Nation of Islam's relationship with right wing racist and fascist organisations in America. Marable is a rare (but not a lone) voice in arguing publicly against what he describes as the 'politics of conservative black nationalism' which he attributes to utter despair. Nation of Islam give voice to the sense among many African-Americans that racism and white privilege will never be overturned. That being the case, they argue, rather than bang their head on the brick wall of white America, they will remove themselves to their own territory: proclaim their own superiority; protect their racial purity; outlaw homosexuality and drugs; keep their women under control; establish their own institutions and businesses and assert their sole right to buy and sell to black people. It is not hard to see how attractive this might be to the Ku Klux Klan and other fascist groups that run in fear of the taint of black people. This too has its parallels in the Nazi period when the right wing revisionist Zionists were attempting to do deals with Hitler who, they felt had a common interest with them: he wanted to get rid of the Jews and they wanted to take them.

Our discomfort at dealing with such poisonous ideas when they are exhibited by 'our own' people is understandable but it is very dangerous. Right wing, separatist elements who argue, like Nation of Islam and Jewish fundamentalists, that 'we' are the 'chosen' people, superior to all others are quick to invoke racism and antisemitism as a reason why we should not take issue with them; not wash our dirty linen in public. Religion is their trump card: the word of God or Allah is not open to argument, however pressing that argument may be – whether it's the view that Allah made black people supreme or the view that God sealed his covenant with the Jews as his chosen people when he gave them the tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. Even in the extraordinary event that thinking people could believe that either of these were the literal truth, there would still be a debate to be had about how to live your life with such baggage in a world where

the International Monetary Fund reigns supreme. Today where religion meets state resources, those at the top seem to adapt effortlessly to the ideology of competition and the market, and have found themselves a comfortable niche in the interstices of the amoral, acultural global market.

What is easy to forget but important to remember

is that these reactionary groups are just one element in a diverse community. They are at odds with many progressive people who, despite the setbacks, believe that human beings can flourish only in a world in which they meet, argue, express their differences, resolve their conflicts, a world in which their experiences cross-fertilise and produce new, stronger and more secure ways of living together.

This is not always easy to see, though, especially in the short term when discrimination and victimisation are so obviously the daily fare particularly of young people. When black boys are excluded from schools at a higher rate than any other group; when they are routinely stopped by the police; when they are targeted by drug pushers and drawn into crime, it is not hard to understand the appeal of a group that is claiming to rescue them. It is not hard, either, to see that local education authorities might be relieved to hand over money and premises to that group if it promised to take such a troublesome element off their hands, and educate them in their own way, no questions asked, as seems to be happening in Hammersmith in central London.

At a more subtle level but for not entirely different reasons we have seen the Jewish school system grow, depleting mainstream schools of Jewish children, isolating Jewish children from the surrounding peoples and depriving all of them of the necessary experience of living in a diverse society in which arguments must be had, conflicts resolved and new ways of living carved out.

I taped some klezmer music for a friend recently – a record by the Klezmatics who use old music as a springboard to create a new idiom. To my ears, it is music in flux, between folk and jazz; serious and sentimental; European and American; classic and avant garde; religious and secular; Jewish and non-Jewish. It transgresses boundaries and defies definition. I started to make notes on each track to describe that creative mixture to someone who didn't share its history; who didn't perceive the fragile boundary between memories and sentimentality. But the more notes I made, the more redundant they seemed: the music communicated this creative and subversive mixture without my interpretation.

Klezmer is subversive because it breaks the boundaries of Jewish life and asserts the relationship between some Jews and the communities they live within. Many of us have been brought up to believe that that relationship is fated: that ours is an unmitigated history of destruction of a minority by majorities down the ages, and that we can only protect ourselves by isolating ourselves either culturally, or physically. But however tense the interactions between Jews and non-Jews at different times in our history, we have never lived – and indeed, could not survive – in isolation from surrounding peoples. Indeed, Jewish survival, physical, cultural, political, economic – is not the



Bow... peep... scanning the March 10,000 in Trafalgar Square last October

result of the rigid adherence of a homogeneous group of people to an unchanging set of laws but is predicated on the flexibility of Jewish life, which has developed over centuries of living as minorities in many different societies. This has enabled Jews across the globe and in diverse political and economic situations to develop

differently, to live differently and to survive differently. Homogeneity – putting all our eggs in the basket of a single orthodoxy – would have wiped us out long before Hitler was ever thought of.

Jews are not alone in looking for their physical security to isolation in religious 'chosenness' or in a state of their own. Indeed, when the two together – religion and nationalism – start to win over a minority group, they make a particularly potent combination, pulling the powerful and the disenfranchised into an impenetrable unity while excluding absolutely those who dissent. Nation of Islam is one of the youngest of these groups to invoke this powerful mixture of religion and nationalism in order to marshal an entire community behind them. The danger, though, could be clearly seen at the 'March 10,000' when the mother of Joy Gardner, who was killed by officers attempting to deport her, spoke on the Nation of Islam platform. They had supported her she said and as a Christian she would ask God to bless them. Did she know they are committed to aggressively recruiting African-Caribbean people to their own anachronistic version of Islam? What does she think of their exclusion of women from the forefront of their public demonstrations? Does she agree with their separatist views? If not, would she feel able to say so?

The tragic fact is that even the self-appointed spokespersons of what remains of the antiracist movement are reluctant to speak out against the ideology of this black supremacist group which advocates racial purity and is profoundly homophobic. Jews are finally, finding a voice against the domination of their communities across the world by a growing combination of religious dictatorship and an Israeli state whose brutality against the Palestinians can no longer be ignored or excused. Jews are starting to look again at their history as one in which they have lived amongst other peoples, for better or worse, rather than as a tale of continuous tragedy culminating, inevitably, in the Nazi destruction and its sequel, the establishment of the State of Israel. They are breaking the consensus because they are beginning to see that we must live with other people. There is no other way. The different minority communities in Britain have elements within them that share this view. The people of African heritage must not allow themselves to be railroaded into support for a sterile and disempowering group wielding a compelling, but ultimately outdated, combination of religion and nationalism.

It takes some front

Dave Landau gave the first Reuben Goldberg memorial lecture in honour of a committed fighter against racism and fascism

A fable

A cattle dealer once drove some bulls to the slaughter-house. And the butcher came nigh with his sharp knife. 'Let us close ranks and juck up this executioner on our horns', suggested one of the bulls. 'If you please, in what way is the butcher worse than the dealer who drove us hither with his cudgel?' replied the bulls, who had received their political education in Manuilsky's institute. 'But we shall be able to attend to the dealer as well afterwards!' 'Nothing doing' replied the bulls to the counsellor, firm in their principles. 'You are trying to shield our enemies from the left; you are a social-butcher yourself. And they refused to close ranks.

The 1990s have been the decade of fascist revival in Europe. For a brief period, a fascist party, the Alliance Nazionale, was part of a coalition government in Italy. In France, the electoral strength of Le Pen's Front Nationale has grown throughout the decade. After reunification the Republican Party in Germany became a significant force. There were mob attacks on hostels for asylum seekers. Republicanism collapsed, but organised racist and fascist violence has grown and whole swathes of Germany are 'no go' areas for communities threatened by the Nazis. In Belgium the Vlaams Blok has become the strongest party in Antwerp. More than half the police force in the city are thought to be Vlaams Blok

supporters. In Austria the fascist Freedom Party is one of the strongest parties in Vienna. Its leader Jorg Haider could win or come second in the next presidential elections. In Eastern European countries, skinhead gangs patrol the streets in search of Gypsies. Jews and other migrants are fair game too. In the early 1990s Zhirinovsky, whose hero is Hitler, commanded massive support in Russia.

In Britain the fascists have nowhere near this strength. However there is no room for complacency, and we need a massive united movement committed to effective action. This idea of unity in action against racism and fascism is one which Reuben Goldberg fought for, and it is timely to look at the history and politics of the 'united front'.

The term 'united front' became current in left-wing politics in the 1920s and 1930s. However, under different names, organisation which attempted to unite the working class in common struggle and embrace a variety of political currents within that unity had been the principal form of working class organisation in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In this country, the Chartist movement was a clear example of this. This was the conception of Marx and Engels when they wrote the Communist Manifesto: 'The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interest separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.'

In 1948 Marx believed that as communist ideas were inherently superior and correct, they would win in the



Fascists on the march in 1930s Britain

battle of ideas within a broad workers' movement. He had yet to discover the strength of his proposition that 'the prevailing ideology is the ideology of the ruling class'.

Thus the First International Working Men's Association, was essentially a united front body in which Marxism, Bakuninism, Proudhonism, all kinds of reformism and utopianism, coexisted in conflict until, the tensions between them finally blew it apart. Even after this experience, the Second International largely had the same character. It was only with the outbreak of the First World War, when social democrats supported their imperial powers against one another, that it was seen as necessary for Communists and social democrats to form separate parties. And it was precisely this which led to the necessity of articulating the idea of the united front, because the Communist International quickly realised that, in most circumstances, the Communist Parties could not unite the working class in struggle. They had to fight for unity in action with social democrats and other proletarian forces.

Whatever ideas the Communist parties had developed about the united front, particularly the lessons from the victory of fascism in Italy, had been completely lost when faced with the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Stalin and the German Communist Party argued that fascism is just another form of bourgeois rule, that communists do not take sides between one form of dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and another, and that fascists, liberals and social democrats are all as bad as one another. Indeed the social democrats are regarded as the worst because they incorporate the proletariat into their own exploitation. They are 'social fascists'. If the Nazis take power they will polarise class forces and prepare the way for revolution. This view was carried through by the German Communist Party, leading to one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

A few Marxists saw the disastrous consequences of this policy. Two of the most prominent were Leon Trotsky and Georgi Dimitrov, but they both dealt with it in different ways. Trotsky and his comrades wrote pamphlets and articles and made countless speeches advocating the policy of the united front against fascism. Yes fascism was a form of bourgeois rule but it was a particular form which had, for Trotsky, two crucial features. Firstly it was committed to violently annihilating its enemies – on the streets when out of power and, once in power, destroying all working class organisations. The second was the method of building a mass movement amongst the petit bourgeoisie who felt crushed between the forces of capitalism and the workers' movement. The small matter of antisemitism wasn't a crucial part of Trotsky's understanding at this time. Trotsky therefore argued that it did matter what form bourgeois rule took. With the fascists in power, fighting back would be virtually impossible. We would be in prison or dead. There would be no unions or working class parties.

Saying that fascism was worse did not mean siding with one section of the bourgeoisie against another. None of them could be trusted not to turn to the Nazis in extremis. Trotsky advocated independent united working class action. Between them the German



Communist and Social Democratic parties commanded the support of millions. They could crush the Nazis before they became a real threat, on the streets, in the ballot box, in the war of propaganda – everywhere. Even by 1933, when the Nazis had grown strong, this was still possible. A united working class movement could bring most of the petit bourgeoisie behind it, taking them away from the fascists.

Georgi Dimitrov, leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, also understood the threat posed by fascism, and wrote about it without attacking Stalin or the leadership of the German CP. He mostly followed the same contours as Trotsky, but slipped in the idea of making alliances with the liberal bourgeoisie against the fascists. This became the touchstone of the policy of the Popular Front to which Stalin and the Third International turned after 1935. According to this perspective the working class should sacrifice its political and organisational independence to making deals with the capitalists; a policy which was eventually to disarm the working class as the Nazis occupied one state after another across Europe with the acquiescence of the national bourgeoisie and the national armies which put up token resistance.

The big gap in Trotsky's understanding of fascism was the central role played by racism, antisemitism in the case of the German Nazis, and also sexuality and the family.

While Mussolini may have aimed at providing a particular form of bourgeois rule, this was not the case for Hitler's Nazis and has not been so for other modern fascist movements. From top to bottom of fascist movements the motivation is for 'white Aryans' to dominate everyone else. Much of what the Nazis did in power was not expedient from a capitalist point of view. Fascism served the bourgeoisie well enough, but they wouldn't have chosen it had it not established a momentum in its mass movement.

Fascism cannot be eradicated without defeating the racism that underlies it. Fascism appeals to the bully and the coward. It plays to people's sense of powerlessness and alienation by saying: 'You can

become powerful relative to that group – Jews, black people, Gypsies, homosexuals. You can smash them up and we will give you a new identity as part of the master race, no longer the little alienated one.'

How can we break this? Self-organisation of the communities under attack is the key. If those groups they target, including women, stand up with pride, this challenges the bullies and the cowards. Women were not faced with being wiped out but the Nazis put them in their place, which was to reproduce the 'Aryan race'. Self-organisation alone is not enough but it has to be a central and leading element of any successful united front movement.

In 1936 Mosley's British Union of Fascists decided to march through the East End of London. It was the Jewish workers who raised the slogan 'They shall not pass'. Many of them were in the Communist and Labour Parties, but the party leaderships were not keen to do anything. They were forced into it by the determined campaign waged by the Jewish East End workers.

Neither was the official Jewish leadership interested. The Jewish Board of Deputies and the *Jewish Chronicle* told the Jews to stay at home. On the day, a quarter of a million turned out to stop Mosley. And who were they? Not just Jewish workers but workers from all over London, especially Irish. And not just workers, either. My grandfather, who owned a small business and voted Tory all his life, ignored the Board of Deputies, followed the working class and turned out to fight on the streets. Working class unity and self-defence won the day, bringing other classes in behind it. This was the united front in action.

The classic Trotskyist writings on the united front refer to the need for a united front from above and below. We need to bring together progressive and militant forces from the labour movement and communities under attack. But we also need to make demands on the trades union bureaucrats, labour leaders and the traditional conservative leaderships of communities, not simply to expose them, but more importantly to bring in greater number of people who would be prepared to act if the traditional leaderships were supporting it.

Some movements sound like classic united fronts but in fact are not. They insist on 'Black leadership' and have a 'labour movement orientation'. But if their orientation is primarily towards the trade union, labour and community bureaucracies they will only be a united front from above whose policies will be dictated by the needs of those traditional leaderships.

This was illustrated starkly in 1993. A Unity demonstration was called to march on the BNP headquarters in Welling in south London in the aftermath of the Steven Lawrence murder. There was a call for TUC support. However another 'Black led' organisation called an alternative action in Downing Street, which got the support of the TUC, Labour Party and traditional community organisations. As a result, a 50,000-strong demo was brutally stopped from going to Welling by the police, while a 6,000-strong rally took place in Downing Street. If there had been one united front action, from above and below, it would have been seen by everyone as an undivided call to effective action. Faced with a united front from above and below, the police might have decided that discretion was the better part of valour and let us through and that might have finished off the HQ two years earlier than actually happened.

Until 1905 Jewish social democrats organised within the Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia, but the leadership of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, of which the PPSD was a part, never took an effective stand against either the imperial Austro-Hungarian state or the nationalisms of its dominant nations. Polish conservatives ruled in Galicia, at the expense of the peasantry and working class as well as the Yiddish speaking and Ukrainian populations in general.

From the late 1890s, the PPSD became increasingly preoccupied with the issue of Polish independence, at the expense of class issues. The party leadership, many of whom, like Emil Hacker, Herman Diamand and Maks Zetterbaum, were assimilated Jews themselves, were increasingly condescending to Yiddish speaking workers, calling instead for their assimilation to 'higher' Polish culture. As a result they neglected agitational and educational work in the Yiddish language.

Jewish workers in the PPSD raised the demand for an autonomous Jewish party in 1899 and 1903 but the party, and especially its leader Ignacy Daszynski, made concessions in order to undermine enthusiasm for this project.

By 1904 it was apparent that the Polish party was still refusing to take Jewish workers seriously. Social Democratic newspapers in Yiddish only appeared around election time and the leadership took no serious interest in training in Yiddish speaking agitators.

A network of Jewish social democratic unions and educational associations sprang up across Galicia after the severe recession of the first years of the century. The militants involved, including Henryk Grossman and Jakob Bross in Krakow and Karol Einaugler in Lemberg, recognised it was essential to co-ordinate this work.

At a meeting in August 1904 in Przemyśl, leading activists decided to work towards an independent Jewish Social Democratic Party. Their determination was confirmed by decisions of the PPSD's 9th congress later in the year. Over considerable opposition, the Party entered into a formal relationship with the nationalist Polish Socialist Party in Congress Poland, to the exclusion of both the Bund and the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (Rosa Luxemburg's organisation). The Congress also decided to abolish the Jewish Agitation Committee, set up as a sop to the Jewish militants in 1903.

The Galicia Trade Union Commission, prompted by the PPSD, moved in March 1905 to dissolve general unions and educational associations. This was a direct attack on basic Jewish working class organisations, the activists moved quickly to set up a new party.

The existence of the Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia was proclaimed on May Day 1905, at rallies of Jewish workers in a number of Galicia cities and towns. As proof of their internationalism the rallies then marched to join the PPSD's may day celebrations.

Galician journey

The JSDPs solidarity was not reciprocated by the PPSD which mounted a campaign of slander and harassment against the new organisation. Eventually in 1911, largely for electoral reasons, the PPSD gave up on its efforts to organise Jewish workers at all. Its Jewish section joined the JSPD.

The Russian revolution of 1905 sent shock waves across Europe and encouraged workers to raise both economic and political demands. Events in Russia, where the Bund was the largest social democratic organisation, encouraged the Jewish activists in Galicia to establish their own organisation and to promote the militancy of Jewish workers in the Austrian Empire. The JSDP led a series of important strikes during 1905 and 1906 and the party joined in the campaign for universal suffrage from November 1905. Together with the PPSD, it convened huge rallies across Galicia.

In October 1905 the Party's weekly, the *Sozial Demokrat*, started to appear. Despite very slender resources publication continued regularly until it was suppressed on the outbreak of war in August 1914. As well as political reports and analyses it published poems, songs and stories. The well known poets Reisen and Gebirtig both published in the *Sozial Demokrat*. The JSDP also published leaflets and pamphlets in Yiddish and Polish.

The priorities for the Jewish socialists were work in unions, political campaigns and cultural and education endeavours. Trade union work was concentrated on building branches of the well-resourced central unions based in Vienna. Despite the obstacles the PPSD created to the recognition of new branches, JSDP tailors successfully fought for equal rights in their unions and gained a Yiddish language union newspaper.

The JSDP's achievements in organising Jewish workers were also

apparent in the failure of Poale Zion to extend its organisation much beyond white collar workers. The Jewish social democrats regarded labour Zionism as a form of class collaboration and justified their organisational independence as necessary for winning Jewish workers to the international class struggle in the face of Zionism's appeals.

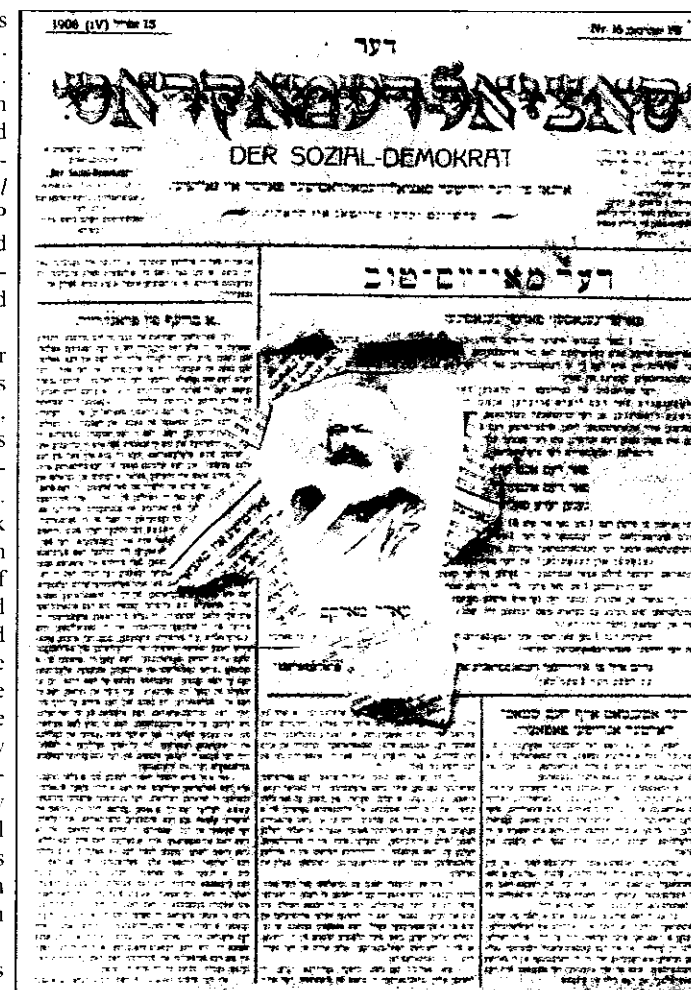
The campaign over the recognition of Yiddish involved both political and cultural issues. In Austria, Yiddish had no legal recognition and was not included in the recognised languages in the 1910 census. With other radical Jewish organisations, the JSDP called on people to identify their vernacular language as Yiddish. Many people responded despite the threat of fines and even jail. Hundreds were fined and some jailed.

Youth, women's and cultural groups were associated with the party as well as Trade unions. JSDP activists organised literary evenings, theatrical performances, libraries and literacy classes. By 1913 membership of the Party had almost doubled to 4,500 in Galicia and Bukowin. As the Eastern front swept back and forth

across Eastern Galicia, martial law was declared throughout the province and men were conscripted, the JSDP disintegrated. But as the situation changed, in the wake of the Russian revolutions of 1917, the JSDP reformed and rapidly regrouped Jewish workers.

The re-emergence of an independent Poland, including Galicia, prompted JSDP activists to adopt a perspective of unification with the Bund. In April 1920, the organisations merged at a Congress in Krakow. As Henryk Grossman said, the JSDP was neither an imitation of the Bund nor the result of any Bund plan. The Galician organisation, however, fulfilled the same essential needs of the Jewish working class that the Bund did in the Russian Empire.

Rick Kuhn looks at how Jewish socialists organised in the Austrian occupied province of Poland before the First world War



Newspaper of the Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia

SARAH'S TRIUMPH

Children, what follows is a parable of unparalleled debate, deception, denunciation, decimation, devouring, deceit and deliverance. Are you sitting uncomfortably? Then I'll begin.

Mrs Sarah Wolf came from a long line of observant, learned and distinguished Wolfs. One of her more distant forebears is reputed to have been Rabbi Isiah Wolf, blessed be his memory. This is the rabbi who led his pack through the forests of Europe at the time of the great anti-Wolf Crusades. These were also the painful years in which certain humanoids began circulating false allegations about the Wolfs which persist even unto this day. Chief amongst these allegations was the infamous blood libel - the lie that the Wolfs murdered and drank the blood of humanoid children. The fact that such bizarre beliefs still exist can be seen, for example, in the manner in which humanoid parents admonish their offsprings for 'wolfing down' their food.

Not all humanoids were responsible for the spreading of these fabrications. Instead this anti-Wolf ideology was deliberately developed by a particular group of aggressive humanoids known in Angloland as Hoodlums. In North America these same humanoids are referred to as Huds and in the great forests of the Northern Europe as Hoods. Commentators believe that the derivation of the word 'hood' may also relate to the strange and disgusting habit, first noted in North America but now spread back to Europe, of humanoid hoodlums slaughtering black and Jewish humanoids whilst wearing white hoods and sheets and carrying fiery crosses. This incidentally is also believed to be the origin of the phrase 'cross dressing'.

In any event let us return to explaining more about Sarah Wolf's rabbinic ancestors and in particular their contribution towards developing a unique social order. Sarah was the daughter of Rabbi Hymie Wolf and great, great, great granddaughter of Rabbi Mordachai Wolf the Elder, better known today perhaps as the sage of Prestwich. It was this rabbi who is believed to have codified the 610 precepts by which the Wolfs are still

obliged to live as the priestly caste of Jewish animals.

Foremost amongst these precepts was a prohibition on the drinking of humanoid blood. Indeed there was a general prohibition on killing humanoids or even showing aggression towards them unless attacked first. Rabbi Moses Wolf, the brother of Rabbi Mordachai Wolf the Elder, interpreted this to mean that there must have been occasions when the Wolfs, though unprovoked and not being first attacked, did indeed slaughter the humanoids. Hence the need to emphasise the prohibition against slaying. However Rabbi Mordachai Wolf the Younger, the grandson of Rabbi Mordachai Wolf the Elder, argued that the deliberate and unprovoked killing had never been part of Wolf culture - whereas the killing of those who themselves attempted to take the life of a Wolf was a defensive measure and had always been considered a blessing and a *mitzvah*.

Two other matters should be noted here. First, the whole debate over the killing of humanoids in self-defence was in a sense only of theocratic or hypothetical concern to Sarah Wolf. Sarah had long ago suffered from a disease of her teeth which left her toothless and therefore quite incapable of either offence or self-defence. This was well-known to the humanoids and left her extremely vulnerable. Second Rabbi Hymie Wolf should not be confused with Rabbi Hymen Wolf who can be credited with devising the original wolf wrap-around-the tail *tefillin*. But it is quite unclear whether it was Rabbi Hymie or Rabbi Hymen who invented the reversible wolf *sheyitel mit* ear-holes.

Now is the time to explain the bloody encounter between Mrs Sarah Wolf and the young woman historically but incorrectly known as Little Red Riding Hood. It is true that she was one of the notorious Hood Klan. However she was neither little nor was it her custom, except on this one occasion, to wear red. She was aged eighteen. Her height was

five foot nine inches. Her usual apparel was a white hood and sheet. Her name was Eva. As a child she was known as Little Eva. However now she was just plain Eva Brown, a notorious anti-Wolfite and the newly appointed leader of YWB - the Young Wolf Baiters. It would appear that at some period in her life she was referred to as Riding or Riding Hood. This was because along with other members of the YWB, all of them clad in white hoods and sheets, she would regularly go riding into the forest in search of Wolfs to taunt and kill.

Well one day Riding Hood decided she would have some fun on her own. She knew Sarah was toothless and could not defend herself. So she decided she would go and terrorise and then kill her. She would disguise herself by wearing a red hood and cloak and thus gain entry to Sarah's house by pretending she was a member of WAFFLE - the Wolf Anti-Fascist Lupine League. She would pretend she was patrolling the woodland against humanoid attack. Red cloaks were the standard WAFFLE uniform. Also Riding Hood had heard it was Sarah Wolf's birthday and to further win the Wolf's trust she decided to pick some flowers and give them to her as a birthday present. Riding Hood found a little wicker basket in which to carry the flowers. However beneath the flowers she hid pistols, hand-grenades and flame-throwers. She had been given these by her own grandmother, Helga Hood, to honour her being chosen as the leader of the Young Wolf Baiters.

Riding Hood then set off into the woods humming to herself a YWB song

Here we go lupine loo
Here we go lupine la
Here we go killing some Wolfs
Cos that's all you Jews are

However deep in the woodland the Wolf Anti-Fascist Lupine League was embarking on an action of its own. The League had discovered that the main supply of the humanoids' weapons was being stored in Helga Hood's house. Far from being a meek, frail old lady she was in fact the armourer to the anti-Wolfite Hood Klan. The discovery had been made on this very night by Sarah Wolf herself. Sarah had gone into the wood to pray that God would save the Wolfs, that God would deliver them into salvation and protect the cubs of Israel. The offering of these prayers was not surprising given that Sarah Wolf descended from a long and illustrious line of orthodox Wolfs.

Sarah had so far been immune from the atheistic propaganda spread by WAFFLE whose members were themselves heavily influenced by other animals such as Lenin the Lion, Karl Barx, the Miao Tse Tung and

even the renegade Katsky - all of whom asserted that religion was the opium of the mammals. Sarah had remained immune from any idea that God did not exist and that only the self-organisation of the Wolfs could offer protection. She was far more influenced by other, reactionary animal agitators. Some of these demagogues still argued that trust should be placed in God. Others argued that the Wolfs and all other Jewish creatures should live apart from humanoids in a wood of their own. As one of them had said 'We demand a wood without animals for animals without a wood.' Yet another group of reactionary animals argued for class collaboration with the humanoids under the slogan of New Labour, New Lupine.

But Sarah Wolf's view of the world was about to change radically. As she was saying her prayers she noticed some lights shining in the distance. She decided to investigate. As she approached the lights she realised that she was also approaching the house of Helga Hood. A gang of humanoids was carrying into the house a massive supply of weapons of destruction - Armalites, Kalashnikovs, submachine guns, poison gas. It was then that Sarah Wolf stopped believing in God. She became a lapsed theist. She understood that if the Wolfs were to be saved then they had to save themselves. WAFFLE was correct. The Wolfs could not rely on some outside mystical force to intervene on their behalf. Nor did it make any sense for the Wolfs to dream of a wood of their own. Every wood was already inhabited by some animals or humanoids. A wood solely for Wolfs would mean displacing, dispossessing, kicking out the creatures already there. It would mean reliance on the North American Wolf lobby. And Sarah Wolf had the foresight to see that this scenario would lead to endless wars, random killings and the eventual partition of any wood that the Wolfs invaded. No, the Wolfs had to fight for freedom wherever they now lived.

The story now switches to the lair of Leon Lupine - the leading theoretician in WAFFLE - who was alone in the lair with his six young wolf cubs. His partner was out at a meeting speaking on the subject of 'Wolves hold up half the world'. Leon, who claimed to be a New Wolf, was left to look after the cubs. What he really wanted to do was complete his very important article polemicising against the theory of socialism in one clearing. He was hoping to submit it to next week's conference of the WRP - the Wolfs Revolutionary Party. However the cubs kept making a racket.

It was then that Leon heard a knock on the door. He gave a curse at this further interruption to his article. He opened the door and

saw his cousin Sarah Wolf standing there. At first he thought that she must be collecting for WIZO - you've guessed it: Wolf International Zionist Organisation.

However Sarah explained that she wanted to join WAFFLE. She emphasised that there needed to be an immediate surprise action to capture the weapons deposited at Helga Hood's - otherwise the arms could be used against the Wolfs the following day. At first Leon was reluctant. After all he was a male Wolf and he still had his theoretical article to complete. In addition, if he had the time and the cubs would stop howling, he wanted to map out another chapter in the pamphlet he was writing on Left-wing Lupinism. However eventually, Sarah Wolf was able to persuade Leon that the task was urgent. There wasn't even enough time to contact the other members of WAFFLE. She and Leon would have to capture the weapons on their own.

Their plan was that Sarah would gain entry to Helga Hood's house by pretending she was a member of WAWB - the Womens Auxiliary Wolf Baiters - and by wearing the white hood and sheet common to all wolf-baiting organisations. Once having entered the house she would kill Helga Hood and then she and Leon (who would be waiting outside) would carry away the weapons. Even Rabbi Mordechai Wolf the Elder would have sanctioned such a killing as being in self-defence in the broadest sense of the term. Not that Sarah Wolf any longer believed in the teachings of the patriarchal Wolfs. She now dismissed the followers of Mordachai the Elder and of the Younger and of Aaron the Compromiser as just a crazy religious sect - the Lupavitchers.

This is where our story reaches a climax. You will remember that Riding Hood has disguised herself in the WAFFLE uniform of red hood and cloak. She is on her way to bait and kill Sarah Wolf and as many other Wolfs as she could. First though she is going to see her grandmother Helga Hood. Helga Hood, herself a leading member of WAWB, will naturally be wearing a white hood and sheet. Leon Lupine is wearing his own WAFFLE uniform of red hood and cloak. At the same time Sarah Wolf is disguised in a white hood and sheet. Are all you readers making sense of this dress sense?

Fortunately the first creatures to arrive at Helga Hood's house were Sarah Wolf and Leon Lupine. Their plan seemed to go quite smoothly. Sarah Wolf easily gained entry to the house. She knocked on the door and told Helga Hood that she had come for some late night tuition on rapid-fire machine gun shooting. Helga gave Sarah the most modern gun in her armoury. Sarah promptly shot her. She was about to call Leon and tell him it

was safe to enter. However before he had time to do this a humanoid voice was heard in the woods. It was Riding Hood singing another favourite ditty of the Young Wolf Baiters.

'Everybody's doin' a brand new dance now

Come on baby, do the Annihilation
I know you'll want to dance it
To create an Ayrian nation
Do the Annihilation with me
Come on baby
One step forwards
Two steps back
Well I think you've killed the pack

Sarah Wolf recognised this as the voice of the dreaded Riding Hood. With quick thinking Sarah jumped into bed and pretended she was the now late, unlamented Helga Hood, Riding Hood's grandma.

Riding Hood knocked on the door and shouted out who she was. 'Come on in my dearie' replied Sarah Wolf smoothing out her white hood and sheet. Riding Hood entered and approached the bed. Sarah Wolf's disguise was perfect. Riding Hood had no doubt this was her grandma. And in order not to frighten her grandma she explained that she was wearing the red uniform of WAFFLE so she could go out later and trick Sarah Wolf and then kill her. Sarah was naturally somewhat startled by this news and drew her hood further over her face. Riding Hood then presented her happy birthday flowers. Sarah could not help noticing the weaponry left in the wicker basket. 'Come closer my dearie,' she said to Riding Hood.

And now Riding Hood was looking right in Sarah's face:

'My, what big eyes you have grandma,' said Riding Hood

'All the better to see through you my dearie,' replied Mrs Wolf

'Grandma, what a big nose you have.'

'All the better to know you my dearie,' said Mrs Wolf in her best woodland accent.

'Grandma, what a big mouth you have.'

'All the better to put my teeth in my dearie,' said Mrs Wolf who immediately slipped on Helga Hood's false teeth and bit right through little Red Riding Hood's face. This was not tongue in cheek. It was cheek in tongue. And it proved once again that self-defence is no offence.

And children this may not be the version of the fable that your mamma tells you before going to sleep. And that's really the moral of the story - never believe anything your mother or grandmother tells you.

And of course for all you Klansmen (and women) out there the other moral is... never trust a Wolf in sheet clothing.

Steve Cohen

Liverpool Jewish ladies

Gone
is Grandma Lillie
as sweet and tender
as her christian name
Gone
Great Aunt Tillie.

Gone
Dollies
Levy and Greenberg
Doris Saloman too
who took tea with Grandma
in an empire fashion
that owed no concession
towards ethnicity
Gone
Bertha Carr.

Englanders born
their parents too
not without denial
of a Hitler Jew.

Gone Great Aunt Millie
whom I loved so much
though Grandma Lillie
whom I also loved
did not
Gone
Stella Jacobs.
Great aunt Millie uninvited

to grandma's teas
Stella Jacobs never came
a mixture of undiagnosed
agrophobia
or just
social disdain
Aunt Sadie Graff
remains
Moved to Eastbourne
Great Aunts
Ruby, Truda too.

Gone
only recently
Queenie Epstein
who had particular tragedies of her
own
that whilst others
fought to achieve the same standard
of grief
that unwittingly she had set.

Could not compare
though Doris Saloman lost a son
too
so she would remind
the dwindling few

Gone Tillie Lyons, Etta Marks,
dear Minna Sax
whose pleasure

taking trips to Blackpool
with her sister
also gone.

Gone
their painted faces
coiffed grey set hair
Hermes scarves, diamonds
crocodile handbags in which
were their own lost years.

Gone of course
the husbands
affording them their lives
successful businesses that took
them on
cruise lines
The Promenade Des Anglais
dinner dance sound.

All that remains
is the memory
undiminished, nor forgot
an easy candid picture, reborn,
held up
their faces, their entitled fuss
overwhelming, ineluctable
sense of loss.

Jeremy Rosenblatt

You don't
have to be
weird to
subscribe
to Jewish
Socialist!
Complete
the form on
the back
cover today



Continental drift

Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century

Mark Mazower
Allen Lane, £20.

Mark Mazower's study of 20th century Europe is an intelligent centre-left book which is well written and worth reading. The *Jewish Chronicle* critic dismissed the book as 'intellectually misconceived and politically dangerous', which makes it instantly attractive. Norman Stone, the self-appointed champion of the Turkish government, found the book far too left wing, another point in its favour (why does *The Guardian* give space to such buffoons?). On the other hand, the *Observer* reviewer liked it, which should ring alarm bells: she saw the book as 'an elegant plea for the best in the European tradition ... a stable, secure collection of liberal capitalist democracies embodying that remarkable combination of individual liberty, social solidarity and peace'. What should socialists make of it?

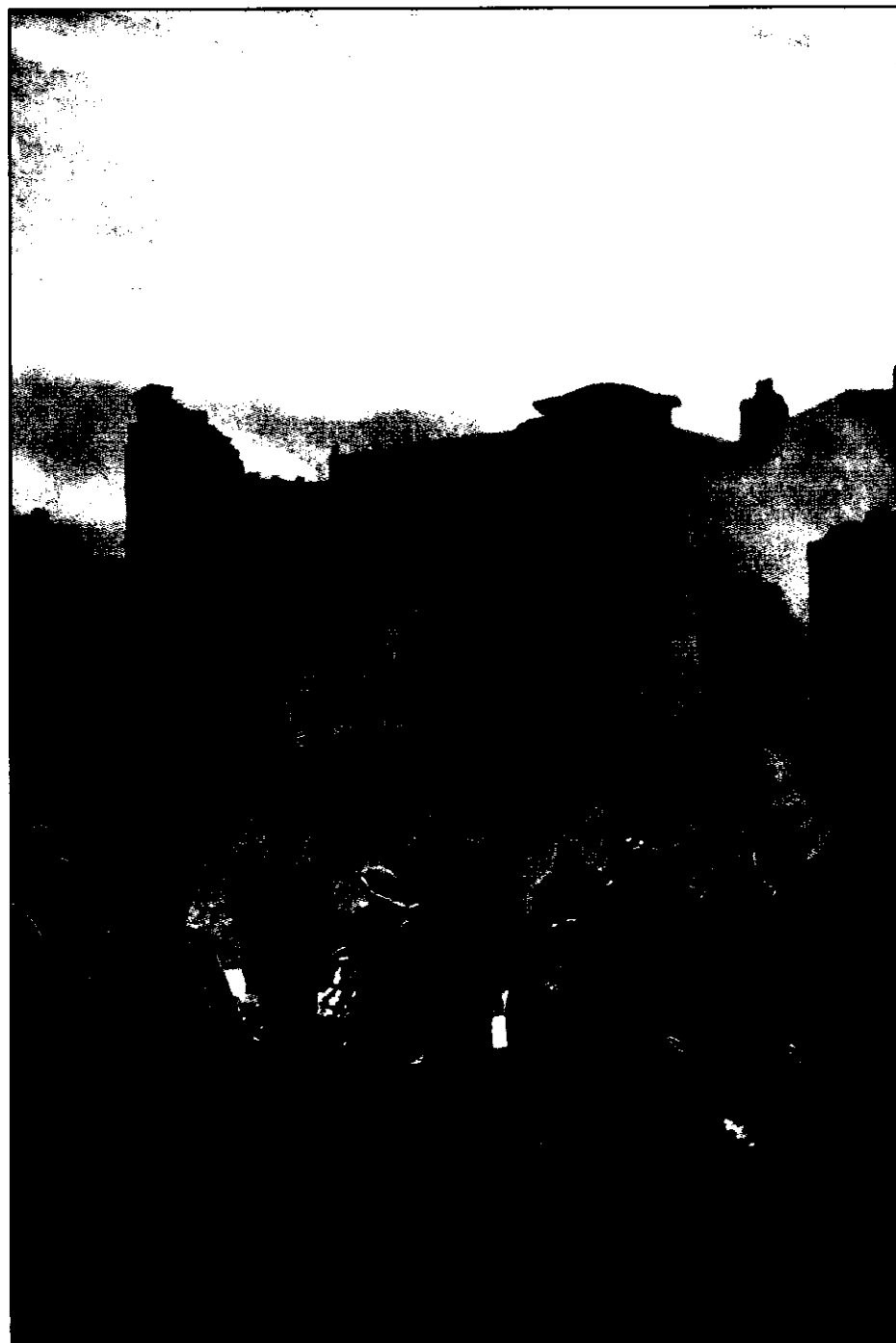
The best thing about the book is the way Mazower challenges the popular view of Europe as the natural home of freedom and democracy. He argues that democracy is a delicate recent flower in Europe, which could easily have withered and died completely during the conflicts – military, political, economic and ethnic – that have cost millions of lives during so much of this century. This is a correct and important argument and one that is worth stating: there is a widespread assumption in mainstream political and media circles in Western Europe that we have the moral right to lecture the rest of the world about liberty, human rights and democracy. It is arrogant and ignorant to swallow this assumption, and Mazower's book demolishes it completely.

Further interesting food for thought comes from Mazower's clever use of dates. You would expect a book of this kind to have a chapter dealing with Hitler and the War dated 1933 to 1945, and a chapter on the cold war starting in 1945. Instead, we get a chapter on 'Hitler's New Order, 1938-1945', one called 'A brutal peace, 1943-49', and one called 'Democracy transformed: Western Europe, 1950-75'. The second of these is particularly interesting as Mazower charts the population transfers which took place during this period. The Versailles peace treaty of 1918 had left large minorities in many countries. Poland was a classic example, having seized territory to the south

and east which meant that a third of its population was not Polish from an ethnic point of view – four million were Ukrainians, three million were Jews and one million were Germans. By 1949 the picture had changed dramatically. The Jews had been wiped out and millions of ethnic Germans had fled, been killed out of revenge or been expelled to Germany:

'The disappearance through expulsion or

killing of east Europe's Germans and Jews formed part of a still vaster process of demographic turbulence and instability in the wake of the war. More than seven million refugees from other ethnic groups (mostly Poles, Czechs and Slovaks, Ukrainians and Balts) were evicted from their homes and resettled. The result was the virtual elimination of many minorities in eastern Europe – falling from 32% to 3% of the



population in Poland...

An obvious consequence of these massive population movements – obvious once you think about it, that is, but I've never seen it stated so clearly – is that many people now live in stolen homes: 'Put simply, across much of central and eastern Europe a lot of people ended up living in other people's homes and enjoying their goods.'

Situations like these help to explain why it has taken so long for Holocaust survivors to get compensation for losing their possessions. The fact is that across much of Europe there are millions of people enjoying other people's property.

This excellent, and in many respects pioneering, account of ethnic conflict is one of the book's main strengths. Its main weakness – as you would expect from a centre-left writer – is its analysis of class conflict. By taking 'democracy' as his central concern, Mazower creates the wrong heroes. He says that both communists and fascists opposed democracy after 1918, and though he does not place these two remotely on the same moral level, he is quite clear about

who enabled democracy to survive: 'Only where Social Democrats forged a secure alliance with rural populations – as most notably in Scandinavia – or with conservatives – as in Belgium and Britain – did democracy survive.'

If the left had united, Mazower argues, democracy might have been saved in Germany, Austria and Spain between the wars. Of course, by 'united' he means what the right of the British Labour Party always mean – united round their policies of compromising with business, leaving inherited wealth and privilege virtually intact, supporting the monarchy, betraying the poor, feathering their own nests, and all the other features of social democracy that we have come to know and love.

This is cock-eyed. It is instructive to compare these views with the picture Eric Hobsbawm presents in *Age of Extremes*, the book with which *Dark Continent* should most clearly be compared. Hobsbawm argues that between the wars the threat to liberal institutions came exclusively from the right. Of 35 democratic regimes in Europe in

1918, 17 were overthrown by 1939 and another five by Nazi occupation during the war. In every case it was the right that was responsible.

The picture of democracy that these facts suggest is rather different from Mazower's. The conclusion has to be that ruling elites in Europe were happy with political democracy as long as their wealth and power were not in genuine danger. Whenever socialist movements seriously threatened to shift economic power away from these elites, they abandoned liberal democracy quicker than you could say 'Burn down the Reichstag'. The mistake that the left made, if you can call it that, was to naively believe that the right was as committed to constitutional democracy as they were. That wasn't true then, and it isn't true now.

Mazower has written an important book which elegantly demolishes some right-wing idiocies and paints an outstanding picture of the ethnic dimension of 20th century Europe. An adequate socialist history, though, still waits to be written.

Chana Moshenska

Losing the plot

Unequal Conflict – the Palestinians and Israel

John Gee

Pluto Press, £11.99

This book is written by a supporter of the Palestinian's cause who is critical of the way they fought the Zionist settlers, particularly before 1948. Gee's 'central aim is to examine why Zionism and the state of Israel triumphed in their struggle with the Palestinians'. The Palestinians were facing settlers from industrialised societies. 'Pre-industrial' societies found it very difficult to 'face the onslaught of a determined movement of colonisation from the modern capitalist world', Japan being one of the few which successfully resisted.

The Palestinians faced an even harder task in that the Jews were not ordinary settlers like the British or Portuguese who had a mother country to retreat to, and whose aim was to exploit the natives. In these cases the indigenous people would remain the majority; nor were the colonisers fully committed to denying them statehood – as we have seen with the withdrawal of the French and British from their empires – sometimes, but not always, after a fierce struggle. The Zionists excluded and expelled the

Palestinians, rather than exploited them.

The author describes how, before the establishment of the state of Israel, and certainly before the 1936 uprising, the Palestinians were led by clan chiefs whose loyalty was more to themselves than to the Palestinian people. Gee argues that, while the Zionists promoted able men and women in a fairly meritocratic way, in traditional Arab society, family pedigree was more important than ability, frustrating many of the most talented and committed. There was rarely a united opposition to the Zionist settlers. The result was that, while the Zionists, in the 30 years before 1948, were establishing all the institutions of a state including an army, trade union movement and education system, the Palestinians did none of that groundwork.

The uprising of 1936 was the strongest expression of Palestinian unity, but the strike by Palestinian workers failed because it enabled employers to replace Palestinians with Jews.

Were the Palestinians a nation in themselves or part of the wider Arab nation which, before 1945, was mostly dominated by France and Britain, and before that, by Turkey? The Palestinians certainly looked on the Egyptians, Jordanians and Syrians as allies. What Gee does not make explicit is that while the Zionists colonised about half

of Palestine by 1948, Jordan and Egypt took over the rest. The Jordanians and Egyptians did not encourage the Palestinians to administer the West Bank and the Gaza Strip so that they could prepare themselves for statehood in the same way the Jews had done before 1948.

In the 1960s many organisations were formed which were far more committed to Palestinian statehood than the old chiefs. Some were part of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, but not all. He does not stress just how counterproductive PLO and other terrorist acts were – how effective in mobilising the enemy against them. The tremendous strength of the Intifada was in its relative non-violence, convincing many Israelis of the injustice of the occupation.

Gee believes that Arafat blundered by supporting Saddam during the Gulf War. He hardly covers the last few years when Israel did pull out of Gaza and some West Bank towns. He ends pessimistically, declaring not only that the peace process is dead, but also the waves of struggle that led to it. Nevertheless, he is confident that the Palestinians will rise up again.

This book is worth reading, mainly for its detailed history of the Palestinian struggle, especially the period before the PLO, and also for its constructive criticism.

Bernard Misrahi

Rising in the east

The East End Years: A Stepney Childhood
Fermin Rocker
 (Freedom Press, £7.95)

Fermin Rocker, growing up in London's East End in the early decades of the century, found a unique way of showing solidarity with his parents' anarchist principles. He weeded on passing policemen.

This story, which made me chuckle aloud, is related in Rocker's memoir, *The East End Years: A Stepney Childhood*, published for the first time in the original English. A German version appeared a few years ago.

In the incident, the two beshowered lawmen booted it up to the top floor of the tenement where Rocker lived and rapped in rage on his door. To find out if he got a constabulary comeuppance, you'll have to read the book, a worthwhile addition to any socialist's library.

The dominant figure, lovingly recreated, is the author's father, the famous activist, writer and theorist Rudolph Rocker. A non-Jew, Rudolph Rocker learnt Yiddish in solidarity with east London's Jewish workers. Exiled from his native Germany, he had settled in London with his Jewish wife, Charlotte.

Through the eyes of a doting son, Rocker emerges as an extraordinary character who won over the radical Jewish community and was entrusted with the editorship of *Arbeter Fraynd*, the Yiddish anarchist weekly.

Another memorable portrait is of the anarchist legend, Emilio Malatesta, a scarlet pimpernel somehow always one step ahead of the secret service agents tailing him.

Although Rudolph Rocker, Malatesta and Peter Kropotkin, whom young Fermin also met, were highly influential in the anarchist movement, it refused to view them as icons.

As Fermin Rocker records: 'In contrast to their Social Democratic rivals, the anarchists tended to be rather a loosely knit conglomeration whose agreement on certain fundamental principles did not preclude strong divisions of opinion on other issues. The rigid discipline practised by the Social Democrats was abhorrent to them. No anarchist ever wielded the authoritarian power of a Bebel or Liebknecht, or for that matter a Lenin or Stalin in the communist hierarchy.'

Elsewhere, the author writes: 'The communistic branch of the movement, to which my father belonged, envisaged an economic system based on a network of communes of producers and consumers that would organise the production and distribution of goods on the basis of need rather than profit. This system of anarcho-communism had nothing at all in common with that practised in the communist empires.'

After the mistakes of the Soviet era, that sounds like a fair prescription for socialism in the new millennium, never mind the early 20th century.

The grown Fermin Rocker went on to settle in New York where from 1929 he worked as a commercial artist, illustrator and print-maker. His drawings of growing up in

Despite their own poverty, Jews tended to be a shade better off than the denizens of the dockside areas. The gentile poor needed little excuse to turn on their Jewish neighbours. Rocker recalls: 'The social inequalities of the day were very much taken for granted and there was a distinct distrust of radicals and trouble-makers who attempted to spread their foreign ideologies among good, law abiding Englishmen. It was rather an irony that those with the smallest stake in the system were among its staunchest supporters. At the slightest provocation they would start waving their Union Jacks and denouncing the "dirty foreigner".'

Racial tensions peaked in the needle trades along an East End, West End divide.

But workers' struggle with their bosses eventually brought the two communities closer together. Rocker's father, in his work with Jewish sweatshop workers, played a key role, Rocker writes:

'One of the main goals of the Jewish trade unionists was the elimination of the sweating system with its long hours and starvation wages. It was a long and difficult struggle, for the sweatshop was a firmly entrenched institution. A constant stream of refugees arriving from Russia and Poland provided it with a cheap pool of labour and ensured its continuance. Evil as the system was, it also posed a threat to the better-paid workers in the West End tailoring establishments. These, mostly Gentiles, were none too well disposed towards their Jewish competitors to begin with, and employers lost no time in exploiting the existing animosities. The dangers of this situation were not lost on my father and his friends, who did everything possible to promote a better understanding between the workers of the ghetto and their West End colleagues.'

The year 1912, made memorable by the two great strikes of the London dockers and the garment workers, also marked the beginning of a new relationship between Jewish and Gentile workers. The walk-out of the East End clothing workers was a sympathy strike taken to support the tailors of the West End, who had gone out on strike earlier. It was the first time that the two sides of the industry had taken joint action. Throughout the strike the anarchist group played a leading part.

England, before and during the first world war, are a delightful feature of the book, a compliment to the evocative mind-pictures he conjures up in the narrative.

Though no prose stylist, Rocker, with vivid recollection, brings the Edwardian East End, its streets and characters, springing to life. He describes how, at the height of Britain's power, there was unbelievable poverty at the hub of empire. 'Visitors from abroad, who were shown the sites of the East End by my father, were often appalled by what they saw. Nothing they saw in other capitals equalled the squalor and misery that confronted them here.'



"Geschichte"

The solidarity shown by Jewish workers was also evident in the support given to the East End dockers during their walkout. Jewish families even looked after the dockworkers' children. This support was too modest in scope to influence the course of the strike and avert its eventual collapse, says Rocker, but he adds 'the general appreciation and goodwill it generated were to have lasting consequences'.

The first world war brought jingoistic tendencies rudely to the fore again. When Fermin, at school, refused to salute the British flag on Empire Day, a teacher, the fearsome

Mr Gilbert, gripped him round the neck. 'March around again,' he roared, 'and salute!'

Few children could have had such a harrowing time of it as Fermin Rocker. His father was interned as a German national, and later his brother was arrested and his mother indefinitely detained because of their anti-war propaganda. The family is eventually reunited in Amsterdam amid moving scenes. The book ends with Fermin in his father's arms again, on the threshold of a new and productive life.

Yet memories of his East End boyhood haunted him and he revisited the area in

1966, gaining entrance to the old, tiny flat where he grew up. He notes, wistfully: 'The elements that had given our home its special stamp - the books and pictures, the desk with its piles of manuscripts, the flow of visitors and the animated discussions in half a dozen languages - all were gone.'

Of his early years, the author says: 'What I can say in looking back is that despite their inevitable quota of frustrations, disappointments and sorrows, they were the happiest of my childhood. That is perhaps the reason I chose them for my subject.'

Mike Gerber

Plucking awful

Day of Atonement

Jay Rayner

Black Swan

reviewed by Paul Collins

Dear Mum - er, Claire

For years, millions of people, including me, have admired the way you try to ease the agony for all correspondents - from the hapless compelled to clean the oven wearing the period costume described in your novels to those who only get turned on by fondling the sanitary towels which you once advertised. Now I write to you on a wing and a prayer. It concerns the latest fiction penned by myself - no, a close friend. This book uses the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, observed in repentance, as a metaphor for the redemption of Mal, a suburban chicken soup machine salesman turned global tycoon swindler. Some pundits have been unkind enough to shout foul play. It seems to them better than the soup as penicillin against insomnia. 'Featherweight characters!' they nibble. 'Marshmelo drama,' they peck. 'The author?' they gnaw. 'Put him up in front of the beak.' 'More soap than substance', they bite. 'Take Barney, the Israeli smuggling drugs into Germany with Mal's partner, Solly, to avenge the Holocaust and aid needy Jews. He loses his head to a jet's propeller when customs look set to rumble him. Mal goes to prison for fraud. His father-in-law falls dead from shock. The daughter of the porridged associate turns out to be the child of her 'uncle'. Mal's wife divorces him. Solly had left a suicide note and £2.5 million to Mal, who, unaware, kills him... Slim drum shtick! Others have clucked with enthusiasm for a moral tale about how Jews have traded religion for riches. Though some label both malign forces. The trouble is even the back slappers believe I - he must be racked by guilt. They warn that with racism on the rise, many Jews will grouse. Cook up food for fascists who feasted on the Maxwell and Guinness scandals? Why a gay Jewish man blackmailed for his sexuality by the partners? Already, they say, we're too big for the bigots' jackboots. So Black Swan prints the scribe's name larger than the title. Should he pound his paltry (sic) breast for personal forgiveness or beat his way to Groucho's for champagne toasts? Your loving son - I mean, Julian

Darling Jay - sorry, Julian

Thank you for sending me your story. Some may not stomach this stuff with their predictable jibes. 'Taller than the Chief Rabbi's claim to speak for most Jews. Well enough constructed and seasoned with small portions of wit - but reads like a recipe for literary convenience food. Another triumph for so much nineties culture which fills the time, though not the mind. Having his cheesecake and eating it with Mal, the atheist who observes the Yom Kippur fast and the Thatcher-ally whose business cheat leaves him with £2.5 million and a shorter jail sentence than single mothers who steal to feed their children. Which brings me to the way that women are portrayed as low-job mean or blow job queen. Stereotypes you want? Pile them high. Send them to sleep. This fiction eschews friction for cynicism. Like a cursory reference to cheap Asian labour used in secret to boost factory production.

And Zionist critique you crave? Sorry. Will chopped liver shaped like Golda Meir do? Maybe two pages falling out less than halfway through is self-deprecating satire for the plot unravelling? Too violent? Try obscenity. As Solly weeps from his diet Coke (cocaine) habit, Mal recalls the song 'I wonder what the poor people are doing tonight.' But lovie, whatever the notices, you - your friend can rely on unconditional affection from his family and community. Who-cares characters? So what? Listen, trust me, I am the Patients' Association leader. Read the papers? They all quoted me. 'No-one ever suggested nurses who come off duty with black eyes suffered in casualty should sue.' Look, theirs is a vocation. You - he... There's a career to consider.

Bubbeleh! Remember your favourite proverb? Sticks and stones... Critics, shmitics. Just ignore the snipers. The ones who say the book reminds them of the tired man in the restaurant. You know... He asks a waiter for a piece of chicken and a kind word. The waiter serves him and turns to go. 'What about the kind word?' says the diner. 'The chicken's off,' the waiter advises. Ugh! One person's meat is another's miasma.

Your devoted mother - rather, Claire

A brush with the commissars

Chagall: Love and the Stage, Royal Academy, London

In 1937 the Russian Jewish artist Marc Chagall had the dubious honour of having three paintings displayed in an exhibition of 'Degenerate Art' organised in Munich by the Nazi Party. One of these works was entitled 'The Revolution'. Amid scenes of insurrection and the swirl of red flags, Lenin stands on his head, portrayed as a clown, an irony lost on Hitler's aesthetic stormtroopers.

Chagall had mixed feelings about the October Revolution: a moment of equal civil rights for Jews and an opportunity for cultural creativity to surface in a society where art and literature had been the preserve of a repressive ruling class. In 1918 Chagall was elevated to the post of 'Commissar of Fine Arts' in the province of Vitebsk, his birthplace. Two years later he came to Moscow to undertake work for the newly flourishing State Jewish Chamber Theatre. His exuberant

paintings for its auditorium form the centrepiece of 60 works, never previously shown in Britain, that comprise this exhibition.

The most striking work, 'Introduction to the Jewish theatre' is more than eight metres long. At its edges are glimpses of the *shtetl* (village) life, but its centre provides more modern spectacle. To emphasise the revolution in Russian Jewish life, an orthodox Jew is turned upside down. Chagall was optimistic enough in the Jewish future in the Soviet Union to sign many of these works in Yiddish.

In the second part of the exhibition, there are many tiny but characterful sketches; costume and set designs for the actors, which influenced how they played their roles. The final pictures return to Chagall's hometown - Vitebsk. Images of his uncle's barber shop; familiar streets and houses painted with devotion; simple romantic paintings where he is entwined with his first love Bella Rosenfeld, floating above a landscape, soon to be irrevocably changed. In 'Promenade'

the houses are painted green to blend in with an idyllic rural landscape, with only the church standing out in pink. Although these paintings celebrate a joyful period in Chagall's life the worried glance on both his and Bella's face, especially in 'Over the Town', tell us that they foresaw stormy times ahead for themselves and their community.

The wildly intense and dreamlike extremes of his art could only flourish in a free environment. The revolution's potential would be fulfilled, Chagall wrote, 'if it retained its respect for what is other and different.' But the promise of liberation quickly surrendered to new aesthetic orthodoxies. Fellow artists Kandinsky, Malevich and Rodchenko joined forces with Lenin and the political elite to denounce Chagall's paintings. In 1922 he went into exile stating 'I did not leave Russia for political reasons but for artistic ones'. As Stalin assumed power, hoisting the flag of 'socialist realism', and incorporating an increasingly paranoid anti-semitism, the fate of Chagall's paintings in the Soviet Union looked grim.

At the height of Stalin's purges in 1937, in the same year that the Nazis had denounced Chagall's 'degenerate art', Chagall's designs for the Moscow Jewish Theatre were saved by being hidden, first under the theatre stage, and later at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

In 1973 Chagall fulfilled a long-standing desire to return to Russia. He was invited to sign and date some of his theatre paintings, under KGB escort, but they remained hidden from public view until 1991. Art with such a troubled history makes for both sad and very rewarding viewing.

David Rosenberg



Over Vitebsk, 1915-1920

Narrow lines

Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland: An Anthology edited by Bryan Cheyette Peter Halban, £10.99

Recently Radio 4 has been running a weekly slot in which a prominent maverick figure advances their position for an establishment post such as Director General of the BBC or Lord Chief Justice. One of these posts was Chief Rabbi and the applicant was not Shmuel Boteach nor a member of the progressive clergy but the writer Howard Jacobson, author of many well-known novels in the contemporary literary canon, including *Coming from Behind*. Unlike Jonathan Sacks who is supposed to represent a large section of British Jewry but appears to have no constituency, Jacobson spurned the idea of a commonality of Jewish interest. We would then have the curiously appealing prospect of a post-modern Chief Rabbi.

This lack of commonality underlies a sense of dislocation, of dealing with fragmented identities which revolve around the notion of contemporary Jewishness. If this dilemma is not faced by the Chief Rabbi, it is faced by writers focusing on the Jewish experience (including Howard Jacobson whose work has been selected for this anthology). In post-colonial Europe the notion of 'Britishness' is problematic. This problem becomes knotty and paradoxical in a marginal community with a diminishing sense of identity.

Each piece in this anthology reflects the existential state of not-belonging, touched with poignancy by the undefined nature of what it is they do not belong to. With some of the writers - Praver Jhabvala, Micheline Wandor, Gabriel Josipovici - the crisis in

the narrative is submerged beneath fragile and disturbing encounters; in others, such as Pinter it is absorbed in modernist prose.

The process of acculturation has not always been perceived by Jewish writers in its profound complexity. Israel Zangwill's turn of the century writing was distinctly assimilatory describing the uniqueness of East European immigrants in the East End and the potential for absorption in British society. Maisie Mosco and Rosemary Friedman's more recent writings on the Jewish family have ameliorated stereotypes rather than questioning the 'host' nation's version of Jewishness. It is disturbingly reassuring that the authors selected for this anthology feel closer to Isaac Rosenberg's wonderful metaphor of the 'droll rat', an evocative self-image of the Jewish working-class artist - free, cosmopolitan, subversive - foreshadowing T. S. Eliot's 'rats (are) underneath the piles' with exquisite irony.

The authors approach this crisis of contemporary Jewishness from various perspectives - feminist, universalist, personal, biblical, modernist. This volume will form part of a series of *Jewish Writing in the Contemporary World*. The British version is, perhaps rightly, un-British. Half the writers in this volume spent their formative years outside Britain. Indeed, Dan Jacobson has written in a strikingly unique voice about South Africa, the country of his birth, and should be included in the volume on South Africa. I cannot see why George Steiner appears in the British volume, since his extract does not particularly reveal his well-known feelings of being an outsider in Britain.

Any editor worth his or her salt takes risks. This volume has a feeling of matiness. These writers are all well-established. Although recent collections of new Jewish writing have contained a good deal of self-

Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland EDITED BY BRYAN CHEYETTE An Anthology

indulgent rubbish, there are some genuinely radical and inventive pieces. This anthology should have gone out on a limb while retaining secure pieces which reflect the editor's viewpoint. Finally, there is no writing by Sephardis (Josipovici is hardly representative). What is wrong with Morris Farhi, a Turkish writer who works outside the Ashkenazic tradition, who lives in Britain, but writes against the backcloth of a Turkish background? Though it is rather predictable, this is a worthwhile anthology.

Ralph Levinson

Is there something you would like *Jewish Socialist* to cover? Or do you want to write something yourself?

Tell us about the issues that matter most to you in the Jewish community and on the left.

Contact us by writing to Jewish Socialist, BM 3725 London WC1N 3XX or email jsg@bardrose.dircon.co.uk.

In the grip of the solstice

Feels like a train roaring into night,
the journey into fierce cold just beginning.
The ground is newly frozen, the crust
brittle and fancy with striations,
steeple and nipples we break
under our feet.

Every day we are shortchanged a bit more,
night pressing down on the afternoon
throttling it. Wan sunrise later
and later, every day trimmed
like an old candle you beg to give
an hour's more light.

Feels like hurtling into vast darkness,
the sky itself whistling of space
the black matter between stars
the red shift as the light dies,
warmth a temporary aberration,
entropy as a season.

Our ancestors understood the brute
fear that grips us as the cold

settles around us, closing in.
Light the logs in the fireplace tonight,
light the candles, first one, then two,
the full chanikiya.

Light the fire in the belly.
Eat hot soup, cabbage and beef
borscht, chicken soup, lamb
and barley, stoke the marrow.
Put down the white wine and pour
whiskey instead.

We reach for each other in our bed,
the night vaulted above us
like a cave. Night in the afternoon,
cold frosting the glass so it hurts
to touch it, only flesh still
welcoming to flesh.

Marge Piercy

*From The Art of Blessing the Day, poems on Jewish
themes published by Five Leaves Publications, PO Box
81, Nottingham NG5 4ER. Price £7.99.*

Merrily we roll along?

My lunchtime break from below-par wage slave
A daily walk from concrete hell to grassy haven
The usual route amid City sharks jawing the old
poor for new riches
Outside Merrill Lynch media cameras pan and
click
Inside hundreds face disinvestment and departure
Earnings have 'slumped' to 200 million dollars in
the 'market turmoil'
Merrill's glass frontage heralds the first
investment bank crash
Global capitalism's worst crisis since...?
Sixty years on from Kristallnacht,
When Deutschlanders 'opened' different windows
The final solution to that money madness
Now time's bloodiest century nears its end
Forward into the next millennium
Beyond ethnic cleansing
German children pass the Lynch mob without
stopping to stare
Their grandparents' shattering deeds shards in
school history books
Never again!
This howl's conviction less clear than crystal
But vigilance may let some light shine through
the panes
There's one thing I need to know
Goes Paul Simon's Paranoia Blues
Whose side are you on?

Paul Collins



On his album, *Leaves From a Tree* (Fuse Records CF 394), Roy Bailey sings Barry Gilder's 'Song of the exile', which never fails to send a shiver down my spine. The words are addressed to a nameless refugee from apartheid who has endured torture and imprisonment in South Africa. The last verse begins:

*We understand by the tremble of your
hands,*

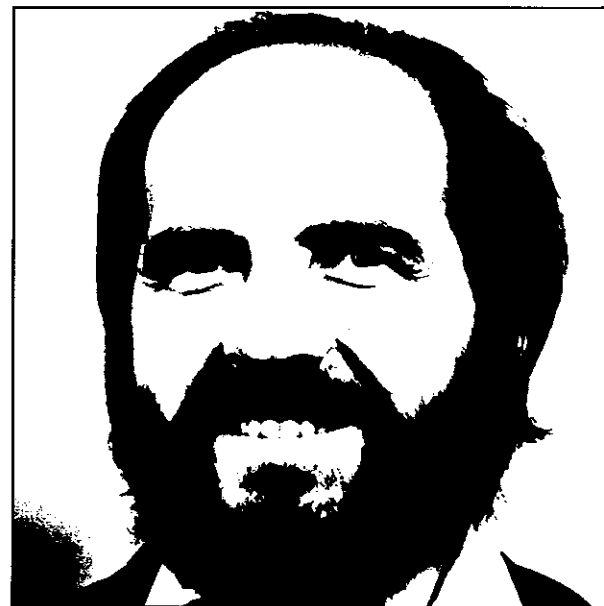
And the quietness of your voice,

*That you'd rather face the enemy on the
ground that you know,*

If you were given half the choice.

The books on the shelf this time are about people fighting battles that they didn't want to fight, on terrain that was not of their choosing. Edward Blishen's *A Cack-handed War* (Hamish Hamilton, £3.95) is an autobiographical account by a conscientious objector during the Second World War. The story is often very funny: Blishen did forced labour on farms where he was insulted, ordered about, and occasionally befriended by a variety of bizarre rural lunatics. Alongside colourful accounts of haymaking, digging drainage ditches and potato riddling, Blishen describes the agonies of self-doubt and guilt that he suffered over his refusal to fight in the war. The other 'conchies' included socialists, Quakers and members of obscure Christian sects. Some of the conversations between these different people are fascinating.

Still with the war, David Guterson's compelling murder mystery, *Snow Falling on Cedars* (Bloomsbury, £6.99) is set against a background of Japanese immigration to America from the 1920s to the 1950s. Once again, many lives were wrecked in irrelevant battles chosen by others. Japanese people were not allowed to own land in the United States at the time and, after Pearl Harbour, the racism behind this economic



Young Roy Bailey

the shelf

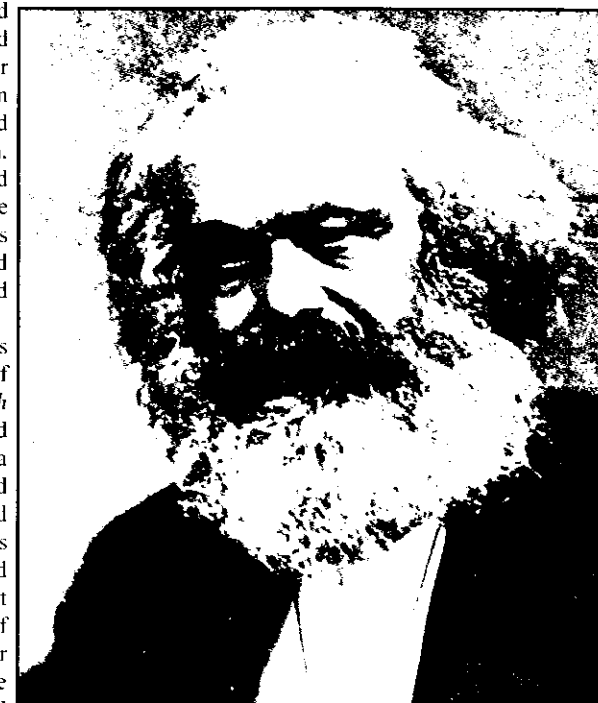
discrimination erupted into mob violence. Many thousands of Japanese families were uprooted from their homes and interned as 'enemy aliens' in old army bases in the desert. After the war a Japanese fisherman on an island near Seattle is accused of murdering a white American, and the trial brings all the old bitterness and divisions to the surface again. Like Blishen's book, this one offers a new and important angle on the war and its consequences.

Responses to different forms of antisemitism are at the heart of *The Babel Guide to Jewish Fiction* (Boulevard, £9.95) edited by Ray Keenoy and Saskia Brown. We get synopses and appreciations of novels and anthologies by Jewish writers from round the world, followed each time by a short extract. It was good to see a mention of Albert Memmi, a French writer of North African origin whose works, like those of Camus, deal with colonialism and its corrupting effects.

I was puzzled by the inclusion of Proust, Kafka and George Steiner and the exclusion of Potok, Schwarz-Bart and Wiesel - but no selection will please everyone. Among the writers I would now like to read, though, are the Israeli David Grossman and the Brazilian Clarice Lispector. The book also exudes enthusiasm about Malamud's *The Assistant*. I have never warmed to Malamud before, but maybe I'll give his books another try now.

It is 150 years since Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, and the 1998 *Socialist Register*, edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (Merlin, £12.95) is devoted to the current relevance of this socialist classic. Several writers comment on the current weakness of the left, with no mass organisations committed to fundamental change and with many individual socialists feeling frustrated and demoralised. There are some positive signs: a remarkably successful

strike at the US United Parcel Service in 1997 is described in inspiring detail, and I was impressed by an account of the educational programme set in place by Canadian Auto Workers, which challenges the need for 'globalisation' and the right-wing ideologies that accompany it. One chapter gives a useful outline of socialist and trade union organisations in post-communist Russia and Eastern Europe. Several writers note that global capitalism is failing to deliver the



Old Karl Marx

goods, and the recent problems in East Asia seem to confirm that view.

I don't think, though, that mass disappointment with the consumer society will ever lead to socialism. It isn't the material failures of capitalism that make people revolt: it's the way the oppressive system demeans us all as human beings and wrecks our lives.

The system says that we have to do stupid work mapped out for us by elite business groups, with choice and fulfilment only available to us as consumers. Our basic human desire to work together for the common good is ridiculed and marginalised. In this sense we are all exiles - it's just that some of us can see it more clearly. Pacifists, immigrants, Jews and socialists - all of us are fighting the same battle to preserve our humanity. We are fighting on terrain chosen by the enemy, so no one can remain untainted and undamaged. We need to remember that the struggle for socialism is simply the struggle to stay human in a corrupt world. As Roy Bailey puts it:

*They tear down our comrades like leaves
from a tree.*

But the tree still stands.

Its roots are locked in the land.

Raphael Salkie