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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.

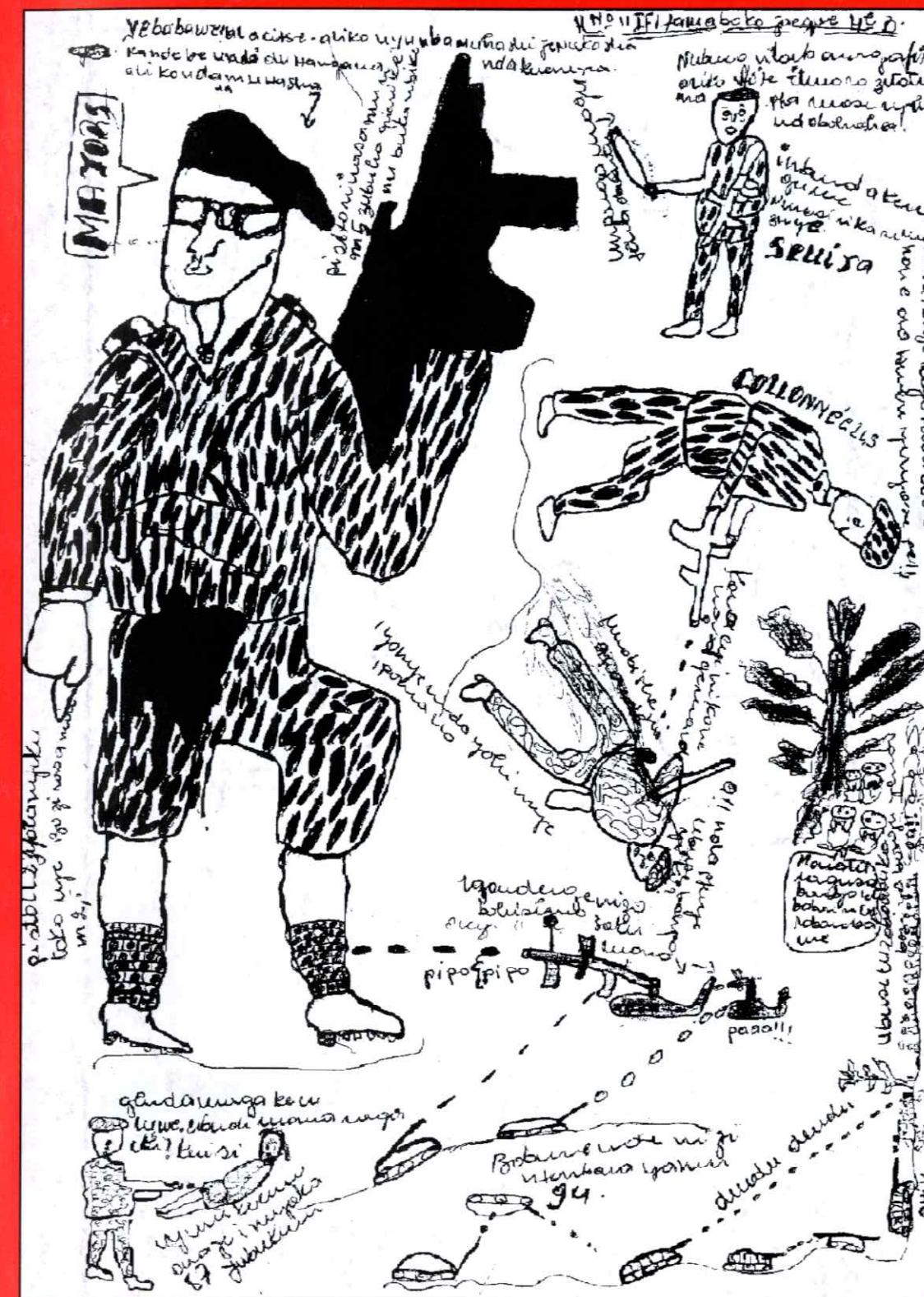
● We work for a socialist solution to the Israel/ Palestine conflict based on equality and self-determination of Israeli and Palestinian Jews and Arabs.

Join the Jewish Socialists' Group.
Write to: Membership Secretary,
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Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 40 • Autumn 1999 • £1.50



women
and
peace

defying
tradition

kosova

workers
circle

lithuania

short
story

poetry

Must children continue
to be the victims of war?

Jewish Socialist

Welcome to issue 40 of *Jewish Socialist*, the last one in our current format. When you next buy *Jewish Socialist* it will look, feel and be different. We are taking a little time out to rethink how it looks, what it says and how it says it, and to make sure that we will be able to publish more regularly, carry more news from campaigns, more features on current debates and controversies, and open up new areas of discussion for Jewish socialists, anti-racists and for the wider radical movement. And we'll look better too! The Times They are a-Changing; we have decided to take stock and identify how our magazine can uniquely contribute to revitalising radical politics within and beyond the Jewish community here and elsewhere.

Jewish Socialist magazine was born in the midst of Thatcherite reaction, mirrored in the internal politics of the Jewish community, where condemnation and censorship of dissenting views and harassment of their purveyors was the order of the day. It was a time of turmoil and sectarianism in anti-racist politics, defensiveness in trade union struggles and the last throes of progressive counter-offensives to central government from local authorities. The Cold War was still in full swing though anti-nuclear protests abounded, but wider environmental issues were yet to make their mark in the campaigns of the Left.

Fourteen years and 39 issues on, we must acknowledge the changes. America has taken advantage of the changes in the world order to assert its political and military supremacy but cannot help but bring into sharper relief the struggles for liberation from imperialism and debt and the economic domination of the multinationals. The organic link between economic and environmental issues daily becomes more stark and people are acting on it in powerful and inspiring ways. The new *Jewish Socialist* will strive to reflect these changes. Thatcher is gone though her spirit lives on. Having a Labour Government abandoning more and more of its founding beliefs is testing not just the patience but also the imagination of the Left. We aim to give free rein to radical and imaginative responses and to the process of rethinking and renewal that must go on.

And what of the Jewish community? Old certainties and orthodoxies are waning. Openness and free-speech seem to be asserting themselves. In the wake of Stephen Lawrence, young Jews are more openly identifying with anti-racist struggles among other communities. And yet there are powerful forces, among them the Chief Rabbi, seeking a voluntary return to the ghetto. The split between those living cocooned but satisfied Jewish lives and those engaging more confidently with the wider world seems to be accentuating. We want to speak to people on either side of that divide. The question is how? Well this is just one area where you can help.

We want you to think with us, to tell us what you would like to see in the new *Jewish Socialist*. What you have liked or disliked in the magazine so far and how you think it could be improved. We want to get it right and be useful to you. We promise you will be pleased with the result. Thank you to all you readers and writers out there for all your support, advice and patience during the first 40 issues of the magazine.

Relaunch appeal

We want the new-look *Jewish Socialist* to be built on a solid financial footing. The magazine is produced on an entirely voluntary basis. We receive no funds from any organisation. We rely on sales and generous donations from our readers. We want to raise £4,000 to help fund the first 4 issues of the new-look *Jewish Socialist*. Please fill in the appeal form on the back cover and send it off today. Thanks!

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

Design: Clifford Singer, Layout: Julia Bard
Cover picture: Children in war zones (see article page 9)

ISRAELI PEACE LINKS

Four Mothers Movement are campaigning for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. Linda Ben-Zvi Tel (00-972) 9 950 8356, fax 9 9561180, email: lindabz@post.tau.ac.il. Also, a new group, Red Line, are taking non-violent direct action for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon: yona@netvision.net.il.

Peace Now in Jerusalem are active in protests against the proposed Har Homa settlement on Abu Ghneim Mountain and the continuation of the Greater Jerusalem plan announced by the defeated Netanyahu government, which includes the expansion of the Ma'ale Adumim settlement. Tel: 00 972 2 566 0648. Email: peacenow@atcom.co.il. See the LAW website (below) for details of the Greater Jerusalem plan. **Gush Shalom** Tel 00 972 3 522 1732. email: info@gush-shalom.org. website (Hebrew and English, with good links to other sites) http://www.gush-shalom.org.

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN), the **Palestinian Human Rights Association** and the **Palestinian Land Defence Committee (LDGC)** are involved in joint Palestinian and Israeli actions against the demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Jeff Halper (ICAHN), Rehov Tivria 37, Jerusalem, Israel. Tel: 00 972 2 824 6252. Email: halper@iol.co.il. Website: www.nct-a.org/hdemol. Issa Samdan (LDGC) The Manara, Ramallah. Tel: 00 972 2 998 0322.

LAW, The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, PO Box 20873, Jerusalem, Israel. Tel: 00 972 2 581 2364/582 4559. Fax: 00 972 2 581 1072. Website: www.lawsociety.org.

The Other Israel, POB 2542, Holon, 58125 Israel. Email otherisr@actcom.co.il (bi-weekly email briefings, newsletter available on request). Website http://members.tripod.com/~other_israel/

Alternative Information Center Jerusalem-Bethlehem, email: aicmail@trendline.co.uk. Website http://aic.netgate.net

Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA) in defence of the political, cultural, economic and civil rights of the Palestinian minority in Israel. PO Box Nazareth 16101, Israel. Tel: 00 972 6 656 1923. Fax: 00 972 6 656 4934. Email: hra@g-ol.com. Website: www.arabhra.org

Bat Shalom: Women's peace group with members from Jewish and Arab communities in Israel. Email: batshlo@netvision.il

Israel Feminist Forum: iff-l@research.haifa.ac.il.

EYE ON ZION

I returned from a post-election Israel with the impression that the rest of the world was more euphoric than Israelis. After a night or two of ecstasy at having Bibi taken off their backs, Israelis have settled into a measured and minor optimism. Barak after all is no leftist. He isn't even much of a democrat let alone a nice guy. This man's military history is rife with offensive action in every sense of the word. This is why life-long Likud supporters did not make mayhem after his victory, as they did the night of Rabin's win.

I did enjoy watching all sorts of reactionary fools kissing up to Barak in the hope of getting into the coalition. The noxious Tzachi Hanegbi apologised for his slur on Barak's military pedigree. The foul Rabbi Druckman of the National Religious Party choked on his tongue trying to twist his rabid pro-occupation posi-

tions into coalition principles. Shas's Rabbi Ovadia suddenly remembered he was for peace and compromise all along.

There was wit, too. The Green Leaves (legalise marijuana) party used a trance version of *Hatikva* as their ad soundtrack. They were just under the threshold for entering the Knesset but received three times the votes received by the environmental Greens.

Hadash (New), the only Arab/Jewish list (formerly the Communist Party), despite clever advertising, won only three seats. Part of their campaign was aimed against Meretz (Energy), the left Zionist party. One of their slogans was: 'I went to sleep with Energy and got up New.'

The Likud won only 19 seats, their strength depleted by Bibi's inept machinations. One Israel (Barak's Labour, David Levy's *Gesher* and the tiny *Meimad* religious party for peace) gained 26 seats. *Meretz*, led by the pompous Yossi Sarid, won 10 seats for their position for

human rights and against religious coercion. Their support comes primarily from the kibbutzim and central Tel Aviv. Tommy Lapid's *Shinui* party won six seats on the narrow platform of demanding a strong constitution in order to limit religious powers.

The three Arab parties are still excluded from coalition discussions, despite the press's call for the United Arab List (only) to be included. They won five seats, generally through the support of Muslim voters. No one asked for *Hadash* or *Balad* to be invited. *Balad* was the party created this time by Azmi Bashara, who ran a smooth, high profile campaign, with coverage particularly strong outside of Israel. His party gained two seats. *Balad*, in contrast to *Hadash*, speak of the return of land but not of socialism. This despite my strong memories of Bashara when he and I took a Marxism seminar together at Tel Aviv University in the '80s.

Spike Katz



Get on down at the Jewish Socialists' Group's Red Herring Club! The club runs an exciting and innovative programme of monthly workshops for children focusing on our secular cultural tradition. The events all take place at Jackson's Lane Community Centre in North London. The workshops were funded for a year by the National Lottery through the Arts Council and are now self-financing.

The Red Herring Club is a meeting place for adults too. If you would like to be involved – come along. Each session is designed to be participatory, Jewish-but-secular, stimulating and fun. For contact details and the Red Herring autumn programme, see page 26.

BUY, BUY, BIBI

'Benji' has lost his job. 'Can you honestly believe that, after 17 years in the civil service, I will be leaving the post... with a pension of NIS 6,500 a month? How can I be expected to provide for my family with a monthly income like that?', he asks. I was about to bung a cheque to this member of the deserving poor, till someone told me 'Benji' had bought a \$1.2 million penthouse a block away from the official Prime Minister's residence, so he won't have to move so far.

Going out with a whimper as well as bangs (in Lebanon) Benji, aka Bibi Netanyahu is telling fibs that would shame a dishonest *shnorrer*. Yoel Marcus of *Ha'aretz* newspaper writes that in fact, Bibi's pension 'will be around NIS 16,500 a month, or three times the average monthly salary. The taxpayers will also cover his phone bills and provide him with an office, office manager, secretary, chauffeur and a car to the tune of NIS 1.5 million a year. Bibi ... will now be joining the lecture circuit, being able to charge \$60,000 per lecture' (*Ha'aretz*, 15 September 1999).

Marcus comments unkindly: 'In a country where hundreds of thousands of workers are paid low salaries and live on the edge of poverty, with families that are much larger than his, it seems a little odd that Bibi should remind himself now that it is no easy task to support a family on a

dybbuk's diary

monthly salary of NIS 6,500. How out of touch can a national leader be with the nation?

MELLORDRAMA

Among the highlights of the 1997 election results, as good as Portillo's face at Enfield, was David Mellor's outburst at daft Jimmy Goldsmith in Putney. (Almost as brilliant as his performance in admonishing an Israeli colonel in Gaza, which impressed me at the time.) 'Well, now he'll be able to spend more time with his consultancies,' said my viewing companion.

Though lacking technical or military background, Mellor has an impressive portfolio of positions with companies which export the hardware. Maybe as a former culture secretary he can advise on entertaining out-of-town buyers. Trouble is, with board meetings, football task force, radio programmes, and newspaper columns, Mr Mellor can't be expected to remember everything.

On 24 January as 'Man Of the People' in that Sunday tabloid he raged against the fractious mullah of Finsbury Park, Abu Hamza al-Masri: 'This disgusting fanatic should sling his hook', ... Abu Hamza is a fanatic. He lost both his hands and an eye fighting with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. You'd have thought that would have taught him the futility of extremism and terrorism, but you would be wrong. From the safe haven that we have been daft enough to give him in London he has been spewing out his creed of hatred against the British people.'

The Yemeni government, holding Abu Hamza's son on terrorism charges, accused the controversial cleric of plotting mayhem, and wanted him extradited. Mellor demanded his deportation. Amnesia is an occupational disease among politicians. Those who are in forget what they said when they were out. Those who are out forget what they did when they were in. The most fanatical backer of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan was the USA under Ronald Reagan, and Britain under Margaret Thatcher. David Mellor was at the Home Office in 1985 when Abu Hamza was granted British nationality. Chelsea Dave indignantly denies responsibility: 'As parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office I had no responsibility whatsoever for immigration and nationality issues.' (*Private Eye*, 5 Feb). But surely he knew someone who did?

ALL IN THE MIND

I'm slow on the uptake, sometimes. I thought Chuck Berry's *Dingaling* was harmless nonsense till crusading

Mary Whitehouse explained it was about masturbation. Good job she never got her hands on George Formby's *Ukelele*, or his *Little Stick of Blackpool Rock*... Oh dear, see where it leads?

Now there's controversy about the Teletubbies. I thought this was about the danger of nuclear war. A group of mutants babble unintelligibly, like Whitehall mandarins, and take cover in their underground bunker when an air raid siren pops up. Has nobody else pointed this out?

American preacher Reverend Jerry Falwell has deciphered the character of Mr Tinky Winky, as a homosexual. It's obvious. He wears a purple suit, has a triangle-shaped aerial on his head (pink triangles, orientation... wow!), and carries a *handbag!* (Tinky Winky, that is, not Rev Falwell). *Oy gevalt!* And we are letting our three-year-olds watch this!

What if the Teletubby with the bag is a woman? How do we know he is a he? Come on, when did you last ask a fundamentalist clergyman that? Anyway, don't get smart. Rev Jerry, leader of the Moral Majority, is a 'Good Friend of Israel' and met Mr Netanyahu. He also told a 1,000-strong Tennessee audience that the Anti-Christ 'will probably be male, and Jewish'. (Quite true, I am, I am.) I'm surprised he wasn't offered a partnership with the Bank of Scotland.

The ability to discern sexual impurity in the most unsuspected places, the way a Jewish *frummer* uncovers a *treyfe* molecule, remind me of the psychiatric patient who was given a Rorschach test, asked to look at a set of ink blot shapes and say what they resembled. 'Easy', says the patient. 'That's a man's penis. That's a naked woman. That's a couple having sexual intercourse. That's a pair of lesbians...' The psychiatrist decided he'd heard enough. 'Your trouble's easy to diagnose,' he said, 'You have an unhealthy obsession with sex, in fact, you're a sex-maniac!' 'What do you mean?', protested the patient, 'You're the one with the dirty pictures!'

Left unsaid

The Left in Britain has been satirised for its tendency to split at every conceivable opportunity on domestic matters but it has usually found it much easier to unite on international issues. In the 1970s and early '80s, with a few bizarre exceptions, the full Heinz 57 range of left groups rallied around the activities of the Chile Solidarity Campaign, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Palestine Solidarity and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign among others. Although there were differences about tactics, the fundamental nature of the issues at stake was understood and the dividing line between progressive and reactionary positions was very clearly drawn.

The conflicts of the late 1980s and '90s have tested this unity. The Allendes and Mandelas have been replaced by less heroic figures standing up to US imperialism and Western economic domination. For all their anti-Nato and anti-Western rhetoric, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic have been too engaged with oppression of the people under their jurisdiction and too far removed from any concern with democracy and freedom to elicit sympathy from socialists here.

Many activists here supported protests against the West's war with Iraq with a heavy heart, wanting to speak out against the destruction being wreaked on the Iraqi people, but not wanting to give succour to Saddam Hussein, the butcher of the Kurdish people and the scourge of democratic Iraqi forces. Nevertheless the broad Left of the Labour Party joined solidly with other left forces in building a significant and united movement against the war on Iraq. Most left groups beyond the Labour Party worked in unity for an end to the war and managed to maintain a principled support for the Kurdish struggle while at the same time opposing the Western forces at war with the Iraqi regime which was, in turn, oppressing the Kurds.

The recent crisis in Kosova and the war in the Balkans tested left-wing unity even more severely. Although some of the soft-Left and most of the hard-Left in parliament opposed the war, most Labour MPs lined up behind Nato in the war they were not permitted to debate, and some prominent left-wing MPs, such as Ken Livingstone and Harry Cohen, who could normally be counted on as reliable opponents of Nato, supported the war, on the basis that Milosevic represented the return of fascism in Europe and had to be stopped by any means necessary. Some individuals who had been outspoken opponents of the war on Iraq found them-

selves reluctantly supporting action against Milosevic while criticising the means. The demand for ground troops which was adopted by many of the serious mainstream media, was heard first in *Tribune* and while *Tribune* came down on the side of war with Serbia, throughout the conflict it carried minority view articles against the war.

The simple opposition to the war on Serbia, with the most muted criticism of Milosevic came from two unlikely bedfellows - the Communist Party of Britain/Morning Star(CPB) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Both cast doubts on reports of atrocities committed against the Kosovans, had next to nothing to say about the democratic opposition in Serbia, dismissed the KLA simply as a tool of imperialist powers/CIA and rejected calls for support for Kosovan self-defence against ethnic cleansing, as being effectively a

demand for Kosovan independence. The position of the CPB and the SWP were barely distinguishable from those of Serbian nationalist groups in Britain who subscribed to Milosevic's 'Greater Serbia' fantasies.

The public meetings and demonstrations against the war were organised by the 'Committee for Peace in the Balkans', whose mainstays were the Labour Left and the SWP and although they could count on a certain level of support from the peace movement, CND groups, local Green Party groups, and some religious

organisations, they could not find such unity with other parts of the left. Many Trotskyist groups outside the SWP, such as Socialist Action, Workers Power and Socialist Organiser, among others, put aside their internecine warfare and trod a difficult path together, calling for Nato out of the Balkans and Serbian troops out of Kosova. They differed in the extent of their support for the KLA and Kosovan independence but clearly supported the Kosovans against the Serbian regime. On the anti-war demonstrations they marched as a bloc in conflict with the leadership of the committee over their political demands beyond an end to war. And in the other Marxist camp, out of the Communist Party stable, the *Weekly Worker* focused throughout the war period on supporting Kosovan self-defence and self-determination.

Even those thoroughly committed to the anti-war position found it hard to stomach some of the utterances of spokespersons for the committee such as: 'There is no justification for action against Serbia.' Justification, there was plenty. Whether the demolishing of Serbia's

**The formulation
'critical but
unconditional support'
by which the left has
related to a host of
national liberation
movements and opponents
of US imperialism, too
often just meant
unconditional support.**

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mittee for Peace in the Balkans

STOP NATO BOMBING YUGOSLAVIA

**National
Demonstration
Saturday
5th June**
**Assemble 1.30pm
Victoria Embankment
London** (nearest tube Embankment)
Rally 3.30pm
Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, adjacent
Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Rd, SE1
Speakers include
Harold Pinter, Alice Mahon MP

Kosovan self-defence I was opposed to the war, suspicious of Nato's motives and opposed to its methods. 'Solutions' imposed by hi-tech military hardware are not solutions at all. Nor can they be acceptable on any humanitarian basis. In my brand of Marxism I jettisoned long ago the maxim that the ends justified the means. But I found it extremely hard to work up any enthusiasm for the official anti-war movement, many of whose leading lights seemingly wanted to disengage from the realities and complexities of the conflict in Kosova behind generalised pacifist and anti-Nato slogans. Protesters demanding welfare not warfare, asking for money from the military budget to be spent on Britain's NHS seemed to be blissfully unaware of the welfare concerns of the Kosovan people.

While the Jewish Socialists' Group struggled at its annual conference to win a complex majority position that I partially drafted, I tried to intervene personally through my trade union (Islington Teachers' Association) and through debate in the left press. My union branch discussed a very limited and simplistic motion against the war, submitted by the SWP, which made a grudging acknowledgement that the Kosovars had 'suffered oppression'. While opposing Nato's war I put an amendment to replace oppression with 'persecution, massacres and expulsions'. This was rejected. My further amendments in support of Kosovan self-defence from ethnic cleansing and in support of the anti-Milosevic forces in Serbia were also rejected as complicating the matter when we apparently needed a very simple resolution to unite people behind! One amendment was adopted - a set of demands on the government in support of any Kosovan refugees who came to Britain. You see the SWP support Kosovans as refugees; they just don't want to probe too closely on why there have been growing numbers of Kosovan refugees coming to Britain and other countries since the early 1990s, years before Nato's intervention, because here it gets politically

infrastructure, the free use of cluster bombs and uranium-tipped weapons by Nato was the only means, and whether Nato was the appropriate international body to intervene, were other issues altogether. Meanwhile the award for most ironic headline during the conflict goes to *Green Anarchist* who, under their masthead which screamed 'For the destruction of society', carried the headline: 'Stop the bombing!'

I knew at the outset that while I supported

messy. But to demand an end to the war, and nothing else, which was effectively the Balkans Peace Committee's position, meant demanding a return to the status quo - the continued ethnic cleansing of Kosova by Serbian army and police forces. The characteristic response, by SWP members in this case, by other left groups elsewhere, was that we had to identify the 'key question' (Nato's war). I refused to accept that there was only one key question, never mind one solitary answer.

I wrote to *Socialist Worker* in the early part of the war urging them to expand the politics of the anti-war movement. My letter wasn't published. Then just after Milosevic capitulated, *Socialist Worker* ran a feature on the Serbian democratic opposition that they had remained so stubbornly silent about during the war. I wrote a second letter, welcoming this feature but asking why it had not appeared earlier. I suggested it was because they believed that support for Kosovan self-defence and for the Serbian democrats would have weakened the anti-war movement. I argued that the opposite was true: that opposition to oppression could not be a moveable feast and people suffering persecution, massacres and expulsions because of who they are, needed our solidarity, whether or not their oppressors were currently at odds with Nato. I stated that if the anti-war movement had taken a forthright stand for Kosovan self-defence against ethnic cleansing and for Serbia's democratic opposition, alongside its fundamental opposition to Nato's nefarious aims and actions, it could have trebled its strength and impact and given it a stronger base to continue its work for a just peace in the Balkans guaranteeing the human and civil rights of all peoples in the region. The only people who would have been lost to such a principled anti-war movement were Serbian nationalist supporters of Milosevic's attempts at ethnic cleansing in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosova, who have felt completely comfortable within Britain's anti-war movement.

And would you believe it? It wasn't published. In its place that week were three letters completely supporting the SWP's position on the war. While it is of course important that different Left groups propound their positions clearly, no group can afford to disallow debate. At the end of May the Jewish Socialists' Group held a meeting on the war at which voices for and against NATO, and the Kosovan demands, were exchanged in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

We have to recognise that we are entering some new territory here, where the new opponents of US hegemony are more likely to be dictators than democrats. But we must also acknowledge that some of our current problems of analysis stem from the Left's failure to apply sufficient critical thinking on international issues before now. The usual formulation 'critical but unconditional support' by which the left has related to a host of national liberation movements and opponents of US imperialism, too often just meant unconditional support. We do no service to the people engaged in these conflicts if we ignore their internal politics and contradictions. Socialists need to unpick the content of nationalist movements, delineating their progressive and reactionary character, being aware of forces against democracy and human rights as well as those that have a democratic and liberatory potential. We need to question what self-determination means and liberate it from a purely territorial goal. At this stage it is hard to say where the next flashpoint will arise, but wherever it is we need to be ready to explore the situation in all its dimensions and build oppositional movements with complex politics if we are to mount any effective challenge to the new world order.

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Lithuanian leftovers

Scrawled on the wall of the dingy staircase to the offices of the Lithuania refugee Board - the body which decides who should be granted asylum - was a graffiti of a Jew hanging from a scaffold. It was still there when we returned two weeks later. This was a foretaste of the left-over pre-war racism (principally antisemitism) and post-war racism; the state racism and street racism and fascism, which were to haunt our trip to this country which had murdered or expelled almost all its Jews and where we saw no black people outside a prison camp.

The Tempus project is working to develop links between universities in eastern and western Europe. The metropolitan University of Manchester is linked through the Tempus project to the Universities of Liaulia and Klaipeda in Lithuania. Under these auspices Steve Cohen of the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit went to Lithuania to look at asylum and immigration law there and to lecture at the universities. I went with him.

Our work took us to the United Nations, The Red Cross, the Refugee Integration Centre and Probrada, a refugee prison camp. Lithuanians deny that Probrada is a prison but an asylum seeker in Rukla, a centre where refugees are prepared for integration into Lithuanian society, described being sent to Probrada as 'going from heaven to hell'.

Lithuania does not actually deport people, though it is now legal to do so. If the immigration department decides not to let a person stay, it will leave them in Probrada indefinitely in the hope that they will beg to

go home. And when they do, the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) kindly pays their fare.

Hardly any immigrants or refugees actually want to go to Lithuania. Most of them have probably never heard of it but are caught or abandoned on their way west. The largest number are from Afghanistan; others are from Vietnam, Somalia, Bangladesh and the other CIS countries. Interestingly, 12 Israelis have settled in Lithuania since it became independent - among the few immigrants who have actually chosen to come to the country.

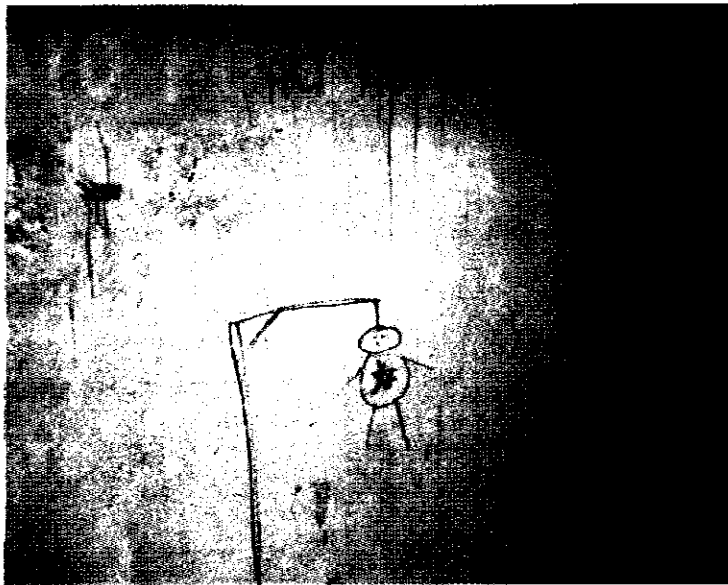
Lithuania has only recently enacted immigration laws backed up by the draconian regime in Probrada. This is because the western European states want Lithuania to police the borders and stop migrants and refugees from getting through. The pay-off will be acceptance into the European Community: the Lithuanian government will sign up to human rights conventions at the same time as adopting punishing immigration controls.

The people who looked after us in Vilna run Vilna's centre for abandoned children. The accompanied us to Probrada, bringing two Slovakian Roma children to visit their mother in the camp. Steve Cohen told these children's story to the students he was lecturing at the universities. They were 'social pedagogues' who will work with children but they knew nothing about immigration controls in Lithuania or anywhere else and it had not really occurred to them before that the issue of immigration had any relevance to their work. In the main they were sympathetic, despite having no experience of other

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The common view is that the Soviets were a greater evil than the Nazis. One person said: 'The Jews hate the Lithuanians but I refuse to feel guilty.'



writing on the wall

peoples or of the racist history of their own country. One of the more right-wing students raised a laugh, though, with: 'Send them to Latvia!'

These students thought that because Lithuania had become an independent country, immigration laws must naturally follow. They were surprised to learn that Britain had only established immigration controls in 1905 and were amazed that these were aimed at Jews coming from an area which included Lithuania.

This relates to the second reason for our visit. Steve's family had left Svencionys in Lithuania in 1882 and he wanted to find out more about his roots. There is only one Jew left in Svencionys now – the wonder Blooma Katz. Something of a celebrity amongst Lithuanian Jews, she was invited to Oxford to speak at a seminar alongside the Bundist, Majer Bogdanski, who is a member of the Jewish Socialists' Group. Blooma showed us what had happened to the Jews in the area. She took us to the woods at Scencioneliai where 8,000 were murdered. Ironically the Jews were marched the 40km from Probrada, where today's prison camp stands, to this killing site. This history and the history of similar murders throughout Lithuania, is not just about Nazis but about Lithuanian antisemitism and Stalinism. The Hitler-Stalin pact handed most of Lithuania to the Soviet Union. In Vilna and Koven there were actually armed uprisings against the Soviets which are commemorated in Lithuania today. The Soviets banned all non-party organisations including Jewish ones, deporting many people, Jews and non-Jews. When the Nazis broke the pact and invaded, the Red Army did not wait to engage them but retreated. In the few days in between the Red Army leaving and the Nazis arriving, there was mob violence against the Jews throughout the country, including Vilna and the Jews of many *shetlekh* were wiped out by their Lithuanian neighbours. Strong antisemitic traditions in Lithuania combined with hostility to the Soviets who were somehow associated with Jews despite Soviet repression of Lithuanian Jews.

Blooma Katz's own story needs to be told on the

60th anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin pact. In 1937 she was arrested on a visit into Soviet territory and was kept in a Siberian gulag until she was released in 1949 only to discover that the rest of her family had perished in the Holocaust. She was 'rehabilitated' in 1958 and finally received her certificate of rehabilitation in 1992!

Many people escaped to the Soviet Union but many more were turned back at the border if they weren't Communist Party members. Another tale of immigration control.

There were no death camps in Lithuania but hundreds of thousands were murdered and thrown into pits in the forest – 70,000 in Paneriu (outside Vilna) alone. Yet more were transported to the concentration camps. We met a woman living in Vilna who had been hidden by Lithuanians. Thirty years after the war she was reunited with her cousin who had been transported to Dachau but survived. He now lives in England (and, incidentally, gave the second Reuben Goldberg memorial Lecture in Bradford).

Surprisingly, perhaps, there is quite a large number of Jews in Lithuania and since independence in 1991 a number of Jewish community organisations have grown up. Only around 6% of Jews are survivors or returnees. The majority came to Lithuania from Russia and the Ukraine during the Soviet years and have 'come out' as Jews since independence. Under the new immigration laws they wouldn't have been allowed in. In Vilna the community is very poor and there are soup kitchens, made financially possible by British Wizo.

The Jewish community organisation in the town of Siaulia calls itself secular and its very popular café, called Shalom, has pork on the menu. Inside it's a different story. Their building has a prayer hall with a *sefer torah* and they get kosher food from the Lubavitch in Vilna. Unlike Siaulia, they have suffered antisemitic graffiti. Klaipedia used to be a German-speaking town and is now a resort for German tourists. We saw several swastikas daubed around the town which we suspected were the work of German neo-Nazis on holiday.

Antisemitism is certainly cause for concern in Vilna. Last year, the city's Jewish community newspaper reported that leaflets were distributed in Gedimino Grave, Vilna's main shopping street, blaming the Jews for the Second World War and the German occupation. The Green House, one of the buildings which constitutes Vilna's Jewish museum, is devoted to the Holocaust. Rachel Kostanian, the curator, gave us a fascinating tour of the exhibition, giving us information about the resistance, including the Bund. The museum has produced important publications but sadly, they have not had a wide circulation.

Among non-Jewish Lithuanians the common view is that the Soviets were a greater evil than the Nazis. One person I became friendly with said: 'The Jews hate the Lithuanians but I refuse to feel guilty. I have not done anything and my mother's family suffered in Stalin's gulags.' An ocean of non sequiturs and misunderstandings with an undercurrent of unconscious antisemitism. There is a great deal of educational work to be done.

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In front of the children

I woke up wiping my cheeks again. I knew why the tears were there. It was another child, this time the girl with the head wound. I remember her staring at me and my colleagues. She hardly spoke. After four years she is still in shock about what happened. She is the only survivor of the killings that wiped out her whole family.

I left for the Great Lakes region of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda with all the enthusiasm one has for undertaking a new project. I would meet children in the conflict areas who would tell me their stories and pass it on to our audience. After a month I left wondering how adults could do what they do to children.

I know being an orphan is sad, killing is bad, abduction is bad. Everyone knows that. In the Great Lakes I came face to face with all of these. The results of conflict on our children. They miss their parents; they have been involved in killings; they are abducted and raped and they have children while they are still children.

What happened in Rwanda in 1994 shocked the world. It is hard to comprehend how one could kill a neighbour, his wife and children because they were another tribe. It is unimaginable. And, believe me it is better heard than seen. Just walking along and seeing children playing sets off my tears.

I met the children who participated in the killings of 1994. Five years ago they were 10 or 11. The rehabilitation centre I visited was for children who, at the time of the genocide were 14 or younger. Children, like yours or mine, no different from the children in your street.

Why? I asked them. How could you kill a fellow human being? The same answers came: 'I was forced to do it.' 'I had refused and was beaten, so I did it.' I found it hard to believe that a parent could force a child to do such things but that is what happened. Did they think they had done wrong? 'Yes I have and I hope people will forgive me.' They have to live with their crimes for the rest of their lives, lives that have just begun. I cried, they are so young, why involve them in our problems? Then I cried some more when I went to pay my respects to the genocide victims. To look at the skulls and bones and know some of those dead are dead because of those kids I have seen. What would you do?

There are other victims, the 400,000 orphans in Rwanda, in homes or foster care or living as street children who look after themselves. Odetta has cuts to her head and still limps from leg cuts. She is crying when she tells me how her parents and younger sister were killed and when she tells me she has nowhere to go except the orphanage. I cry with her.

Mary doesn't want to open her eyes or talk. She is scared that if she opens her eyes, she might see the killings again. She has been like that for three years. Sarah talks a bit. Her head wound has not healed properly. I cannot face any more. What do you say to this child whose family was killed before her eyes.

Burundi too has tribal killings. That is where I met Sidonee. She was nine when her parents died. She is

lame and was picked up on the streets of the capital Bujumbara and taken into foster care. She is among the lucky few of the estimated 2,000 orphans in Burundi. What does she miss most? 'When my parents were alive they sometimes carried me when I was tired. They bought me clothes, they were there for me.' I offered a piggyback. She laughed and said she was a big girl now. She is 11 and alone in the world. What would she do if she were the president? 'Tell them to lay down their arms and talk peace otherwise all Burundians will get killed.' If we listened to children, we might have a better world.

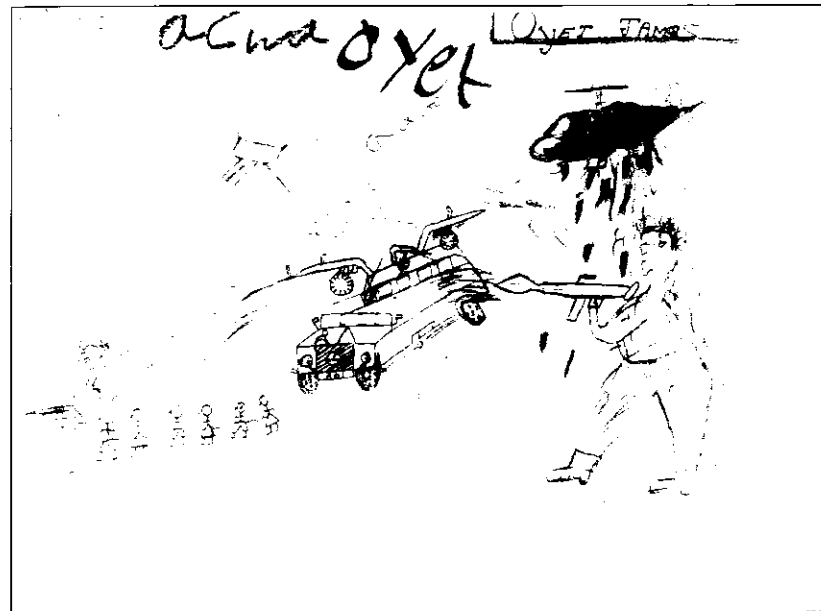
Back in Rwanda I met Hannah who was raped so that she could give birth to more children who would later grow to attack Rwanda. With her remaining two siblings, two orphaned cousins and her son they live six together. She is the head of the household. One cousin looks after the three-year-old baby while Hannah goes to school. They get help from a local NGO with food and clothing but a mattress or bedsheets are beyond the NGO's means, so are beds. So it is five of them on one bed and the baby on another small one. She says she likes singing. I ask if she can remember a song she might have sung with her mother. 'I can try,' she answers. She only does one line and we both end up crying.

Who is in a worse position – the one who knows he or she is an orphan or one who doesn't? The children in Goma, Eastern Congo made me ask myself the question. Because of the war, everyone ran in different directions and some finally arrived in Goma. What did you eat on the way? 'Even grass. Getting away from the fighting was more important.' They live with the help of the people of Goma. What little they have is shared. What do you hope for? 'For the war to finish so that I can go home and see if my prarents are alive and also be able to grow old in the place of my ancestors.' Not much is it?

I fly to Northern Uganda, an area where even the

BBC reporters have visited war zones to investigate what is happening to children in 1999, the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Valerie Msoka, a senior radio producer, visited central Africa and interviewed young survivors





citizens fear to go. I meet nine-year-olds, former abductees of the rebel Lord Resistance Army, who have fought in a war of which they don't even know the cause. My burning question to one of the counsellors was: why children? 'Because they are easy to control, manipulate and instil fear into.'

After two-and-a-half years of captivity, David escaped. I asked him what he remembered most. 'The beatings. I was once beaten till I fainted. I had forgotten my commander's radio.' Who is immune to forgetting? This is a child who after being abducted received four months military training and was taken to the frontline. 'You had to make sure you shot in the head to avoid making the uniform dirty,' said 11-year-old Dora. They needed the uniforms for themselves, though usually it was the soldiers who got to them first while these children were fighting for them.

Nobody can imagine the lives children led during their captivity. David says: 'If it were possible I would wish for child abduction to end with me. I should be the last one to suffer.' Sadly he is not.

But he is lucky. With counselling he will hopefully go back to his parents and be the lorry driver that he wants to be. But what about Frida. She had to become another wife to one of the commanders. The commander has died of Aids. Frida does not understand why she was rescued. At 15 her life is beginning to end. I don't know what hope to give her, so I wipe away her tears and then wipe mine.

I wipe away the tears on my cheeks. I am remembering Frida. It is her turn today. I don't know whose turn it will be tomorrow. They say time is the greatest healer but what will time deal these children? Their cries are endless, as endless as the fighting and wars that are taking place in their part of the world. And while they wait for their leaders to have peace negotiations instead of wars, I wait for time to take care of my tears.

Odetta's story

'We use to live in Kikondo-Nyenyeri. My father, mother and younger sister were all killed during the war. I was taken to Zaire by the people who killed my parents. I was with one of the children whom I did not know, but I was told that she was found near my mother when she died. We were on our way to Kyangugu when soldiers of the former Rwandan Army arrested us at Bukavu and

attacked us with machetes leaving me with severe head injuries and wounding my feet.

We stayed there for a while then went to Gitarama trying to locate my relatives but found they were all dead. So we ended up here. I don't know if I will ever get out of this place. Whether I will die here I don't know.

This place is not bad. There are some girls here who have suffered just like me. We used to talk and they would try to console me, telling me I was not the only one. They would tell me to persevere because it was the will of God.

Interviewer: 'How long will she stay here?'

Sister: 'We don't know, because she has no brothers or sisters. It is very difficult. She suffers from recurring nightmares of the trauma she went through. What she witnessed. It's very difficult. Everytime they recall those events they just break down'

Interviewer: 'What do you think will be able to help you?'

'The Sisters are not bad, but the other girls tell me horror stories.'

Sister: 'You know there are those who are affected psychologically. They keep on reminding the others about the trauma they went through. It is not easy. Some of them are undergoing treatment. We take them to hospital. It is not easy because what they experienced is something that they can never forget.

Another problem is they know they have no brothers or sisters. So even if they leave this place where will they go? They have nobody to turn to. They can't say out there is our home, we can go back after recovery. It is not there!'

Interviewer: 'Are you absolutely sure you don't have any brothers or sisters left behind?'

'No. Not at all. I asked one of the kids who was with my mum during the war. He told me all my relations have died. They were burnt to death when they (the killers) set our house on fire. When we went back we found the house demolished. Nothing was there. No house! Nothing.'

Mapendano, foster mother, Rwanda

'It is six months since these children arrived from Masisi. They told me how they suffered, how they were attacked. They are scared of the bombings and do not want to go on travelling.'

Interviewer: 'What made you take them?'

'When Save the Children completed their work here they told us to expect many orphans who would need looking after. They asked for volunteers amongst those who worked for Save the Children. So I decided to volunteer my services. I just wanted to help. It was not a question of having the means.'

Interviewer: 'When they arrived what did they tell you?'

'They told us their parents got killed. Later on it was decided those with brothers or sisters could go and join them. But for these here, up to now, nobody has come for them. So I have to look after them until they grow up.'

Interviewer: 'Do you get any help?'

'Not much, we used to get some, but not now.'

Interviewer: 'How do you manage?'

'We share whatever we have and they will not starve. I already have six children of my own and am expecting another. Then we have these two girls, one of them is also expecting. We cope all right'

Today in Rwanda, there are at least 60,000 house-

holds run by children. These are families which were left without parents after the genocide five years ago. Here these children reflect on the genocide and talk about how they are rebuilding and raising their families.

Tribal fighting between the Hutus and Tutsis led to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. An estimated one million people died in the violence. Of the children who survived, many fled to the refugee camps situated on the borders of Rwanda. Disease was rife and both adults and children died in the camps. Some of the surviving children have now returned to Rwanda and are living in child-headed households. These are homes where there are no resident adults.

Nyira's story:

'I was raped by a soldier when I went to the field to search for food. The soldier told me that he would make me his wife. I had gone with a small child. The soldier threatened to shoot us with his gun if we made any noise. So I told him to do whatever he wanted. So he grabbed me by force.'

When we got back to the camp we did not say anything because we were afraid. When we got to Goma we were placed with the family of Mapendano. After a while Mapendano called me because she noticed my body was changing. She asked me if I had slept with a soldier. I said yes. She told me not to abort my pregnancy.'

Habasa's story: Part One

'I cannot go to school today because the baby is ill with malaria and diarrhoea. This is what happens every time he falls ill. I want to go to school. It's not easy looking after the baby as well as my young brothers and sisters. We get some help from the neigh-

bours and the government but it's not enough. Sometimes it is available, sometimes not.

Interviewer: 'As the oldest in your family, what do you worry about most?'

'Looking after the children. You know I am still very young and I cannot manage. But I have no alternative. I have got to do what I am supposed to do.'

Interviewer: 'When you remember life before losing your parents what was it like?'

'It's enough to drive you mad but then what do you do except pray to God. You learn to cope.'

Habasa's story: Part Two

Interviewer: 'What do you miss most in life?'

'Now that I have this baby, I don't think much about it. But I pray it does not happen to others. If there is anything I would like to have most now it is to have some help to lead a better life, maybe build a house for us to let and provide us with some income instead of begging all the time.'

Interviewer: 'Habasa, you are a family of five, how do you share the workload?'

'We take turns, cooking, fetching water, cleaning etc. The little boy lives with us, he helps whenever he can mending broken things and fetching water. The younger ones don't do much. We teach them a few tasks. At weekends we go to church and my sisters earn a bit of pocket money performing dances and songs at various places, for example at weddings.'

The pictures on these pages and on the front cover were drawn by children who have survived situations like those described on these pages.

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture works with children who have come to Britain from war zones. They can be contacted at Star House, 104-108 Grafton Road, London NW5.

After the genocide

The civil war in Rwanda in 1994 resulted in a million deaths in a country with a total population of some six and a half million inhabitants. The country was in chaos. The civil and judicial administration had ceased to exist and there were neither courts nor practising lawyers.

Since 1995, the Rule of Law has gradually been re-established. New courts have been set up, the Bar reconstituted and the colossal task of trying more than 130,000 people accused of genocide has begun. Our mission of enquiry, under the auspices of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA), was part of this process.

Contrary to the impression given by much of the press, this was not a typical tribal conflict. Tutsis and Hutus (and the minority Twa) had lived together for decades (if not centuries) in relative calm before the colonialists, first German and then Belgian arrived. Until 1959, there was very little trouble, but the Belgian policy of favouring the Tutsis, whom they believed to be more intelligent and able (a policy which was suddenly put into reverse just before independence when they realised the problems it was causing) resulted in considerable jealousies.

Although originally there were some physical differ-

ences, there has been so much intermarriage and mixing between the different groups that it is frequently impossible even for locals to distinguish Tutsis from Hutus. The names are indistinguishable; the language is the same. The only way of determining a person's racial origins is by looking at their identity card or knowing their family background.

The war in 1994, like the earlier conflict in 1959, resulted from the manipulation of whole sectors of the population by certain leaders who wanted to take advantage of racial differences for their own personal advantage. Large numbers of moderate Hutus were killed (often protecting Tutsi neighbours), as well as hundreds of thousands of Tutsis. These leaders are being sought by the International Criminal Tribunal set up at Arusha in Tanzania and some 38 of them have been arrested and three or four trials completed, resulting in one acquittal and two or three convictions (including one on a guilty plea).

Meanwhile, over 130,000 people have been arrested and detained in Rwanda itself to be tried by the Rwandan courts and they are kept in indescribable conditions. We visited the Central Prison at Kigali which holds some 9,500 prisoners (including 815 women and

Michael Ellman went as part of a lawyers' mission of enquiry to Rwanda and the International Criminal Court in Arusha, Tanzania, to investigate the rights of defendants and their lawyers in the genocide trials.

The central prison in Kigali holds some 9,500 prisoners in a space less than half the size of a football pitch

several children), in a space less than half the size of a football pitch. The lucky ones have a bed between two people, stacked up against the wall like couchettes in trains, but many of the prisoners have to sleep outside, even in the rain, because there is no room inside. There is hardly room to move around and food is limited - though apparently sufficient - but the prison is relatively clean considering the extraordinary overcrowding.

What is particularly surprising is the way that the prisoners accept the situation and do not complain. To go in, there was merely one large gate not the series of heavy locked doors normal in Western prisons - and inside we saw only two or three prison guards, discipline being ensured by the prisoners themselves, some designated 'heads of cells' (not cells in the traditional sense of a prison, but groups of prisoners). No one complained about the situation and when we asked whether there were attempts to escape, the prisoners replied that there was no point, because there was nowhere they could go. In fact, many of them find it safer inside the prison than outside - and when an attack from outside last year resulted in the release of several hundred prisoners, most of them came back on their own accord within a few hours. Nevertheless, it has to be said that Rwanda is now a very safe country to move around, and locals and tourists can travel even at night in the main areas.

There is no room for physical exercise or for work inside the prison, though some teams go out to work: we were told that sometimes 100 or more prisoners go out to work with only one warden to supervise them. Prisoners wear pink jackets and pink shorts, which are rather obvious, even in the varied clothing worn by Rwandans. Women are in a separate section, with barely more space than the men.

Many of the prisoners have been there since 1994-1995 and trials only began in 1997. In that year, 304 were tried and 864 in 1998. Even with an increase

each year, it will take over 60 years to try all the 130,000 prisoners currently detained! The reasons for this delay are various: there is a great shortage of magistrates and prosecutors and a lack of courtrooms. The magistrates are poorly paid (less than a doorman) - so that they seek any excuse for not turning up for work. This results in constant adjournments of the cases. Many magistrates have resigned and even those who haven't are seeking better-paid work. The Netherlands Government gave a subsidy which enabled judicial salaries to be increased by 50%, but this was only for one year.

In addition to this, the Bar of Rwanda, which was completely destroyed at the time of the war, has now risen to only 68 members. Half of these do not undertake criminal work, and even of those who do, very few have been prepared to accept genocide cases, both out of a personal feeling and because of the social stigma that may be attached.

Fortunately, *Avocats Sans Frontières* (Lawyers without Frontiers, an organisation similar to *Médecins Sans Frontières*) has stepped in and provided a number of foreign lawyers (some are European, but increasing numbers are African) to undertake the defence of those being prosecuted.

The government has taken steps to accelerate the process. First, a procedure of guilty pleas (which do not exist in the Continental European system which Rwanda inherited) has resulted in some speeding up of the system. There have also been 'maxi-trials' where up to 200 defendants have been tried at once. Nevertheless, the backlog may go on for several decades.

The government has therefore suggested using the traditional system of *Gachacha*. Under this system accused people will be tried in their villages or communes by representatives 'of good behaviour' selected by the people. These 'honest people' have to be 'of good behaviour, motivated by a spirit of truth, loyal, open to dialogue and not of a divisive or discriminatory spirit'. One has to note that these requirements are not far from those which might be suggested by an authoritarian state and they permit the authorities to exclude anyone who does not accept the official line.

These representatives would hear cases in an informal set-up without lawyers, prosecutors or anyone else apart from the accused and his or her witnesses. The system therefore has a number of dangers, especially for simple uneducated defendants who are not allowed lawyers, but it has to be noted that the defendants themselves are very much in favour of this procedure, which should speed up the prosecuting process.

On the other hand, the survivors and the relatives of victims are substantially against the system. So it has to be seen whether the Parliamentary Commission which is currently looking into the matter will produce an acceptable version of the system. It also has to be added that the system of *Gachacha* would not be used for the major crimes, certainly for none involving the death penalty.

The death penalty is the big difference between the International Tribunal at Arusha, where the 'big

The essential point is to ensure that there is no impunity for those involved in the genocide



After the destruction, peace returns, on the surface at least

fish' are tried and where there is no question of the death penalty. In Rwanda where all the other defendants are awaiting trial, the death penalty exists and a number were executed at the beginning. Although we in *Avocats Sans Frontières* are totally opposed to the death penalty, it has to be said that it might have been necessary after the scale of the war with over a million deaths, for a few death penalties to be carried out as part of the healing process with a view to reconciliation and to avoid public lynchings and other horrors. However, the number of death penalties has now been dramatically reduced and those in power appeared to accept that sooner or later it might be possible to abolish it.

In Arusha in Tanzania (nearly 1,000 kilometers from Rwanda) the International Tribunal has been set up with judges from all over the world (African, European and Asian) in a beautiful modern conference centre with the latest electronic equipment and three spacious and well-equipped courtrooms. Apart from the courts and the prosecutors, there is a well-developed system for witness protection, witnesses being heard anonymously where necessary. Witnesses are brought by the United Nations from Rwanda or other countries and their tickets, visas and all the arrangements are dealt with by the UN. Contrary to the situation in Rwanda, they are offered a list of international lawyers from all over the world who are anxious to undertake their defence (remunerated by the UN) - and there have been so many French and Canadians that the Registry has put a much disputed temporary moratorium on granting legal aid to cover French or Canadian lawyers, in an attempt to broaden the source of defence counsel,

particularly to encourage more African lawyers.

The International Tribunal is regarded with considerable suspicion from Rwanda itself (although the Rwandan government reluctantly agreed to its setting up), partly because of the absence of the death penalty but also because little is known about its workings. However, an English barrister, Tom Kennedy, has now been appointed as public relations officer and has set about a major campaign for spreading news about the Tribunal in Rwanda, supplying copies of its judgments and regulations to the press and to the courts in Rwanda.

We also visited the detention centre at the Tribunal - which is light years away from the prisons in Rwanda: it is spacious with relatively comfortable cells and the highest standard that anyone could find anywhere in Europe. There is room for exercise, television, courses in English and other facilities. There are rooms for interviews with lawyers and a staff averaging three per detainee.

However, in Rwanda the essential point is to ensure that there is no impunity for those involved in the genocide. With the breakdown in the rule of law, a culture of impunity which has existed for decades (at least since 1959) has led ordinary people in Rwanda to think that strong men can get away with anything.

This is now beginning to be reversed and anything that can be done by the Rwandan government and the international community to this end would be particularly welcome to convince people that democracy and law exist and can work, and to complete the process of healing and reconciliation.

Michael Ellman, is a solicitor and Vice-President of the Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH).



The victims' remains, thrown in a heap

Women activists in Northern Ireland and Israel visited the sites of each others' struggles and shared experiences. Cynthia Cockburn reports

To have lived in Belfast these last 30 years is to have survived civil unrest, militarization, heavy-handed policing and sporadic war. The same can be said of a parallel life lived in Israel/Palestine – though there the scale of the militarisation has been very much greater and the wars have been fought with supersonic aircraft and missiles, rather than rifles and mortars.

In both places women have experienced the strife in a way specific to them. A few (more in Israel than in Northern Ireland) have shared in the political and military roles that are mainly filled by men. But in the main women have been the ones struggling to keep their children safe, sustain them while in action or in prison, and mitigate the deforming effects on everyday life of sectarianism, racism and violence. In both countries too women have been in the forefront of movements for justice, and ultimately for peace. They have often been the ones to take the risk of 'talking to the other side'.

One of the most active women's organisations in Northern Ireland is the Women's Support Network – an umbrella organisation made up of seven women's community centres and other women's projects. Since the working class areas of the inner city are deeply fragmented territories, with mainly Catholic or mainly Protestant populations in which Republican and Loyalist feelings run high, the Network is necessarily an alliance across difficult differences.

These last few years, through their shared participation in a research project on women in conflict, the Women's Support Network have been in touch with Bat Shalom, an Israeli women's peace group. The northern branch of Bat Shalom in the area of Megiddo, Nazareth and The Valleys in northern Israel was involved in this research. Their area contains Jewish kibbutzim and densely populated Palestinian Arab towns and villages. More than a fifth of Israelis today are Arabs and most are clustered in this area. This demographic pattern has made it particularly apposite for northern Bat Shalom to be a working alliance of Jewish and Palestinian Arab Israelis, both Christian and Moslem.

Two women's cross-community alliances, both with a strong, if not always explicit, feminist consciousness within them, both in situations of violence – could they learn anything from each other? In the autumn of 1998 exchange visits were arranged. Four women from Bat Shalom visited Belfast for two weeks and, in return, four members of the Women's Support



Rosette Abu Rahmon braving the weather on the Antrim coast

Green lines

Network spent a fortnight in northern Israel.

In Belfast, Nahla Shedadni, Rosette Abu Rahmon, Lily Traubman and Vera Jordan were accommodated in Network women's homes. They visited women's centres, finding out how women make good for lack of formal resources, running training courses, giving skilled support, organizing drop-in facilities and nurseries. They were taken to Protestant Portadown and saw demonstrators of the Loyalist Orange Order. In Catholic South Armagh, a border area that has known a great deal of violence, they made contact with a network of women's organisations. In Belfast they had a meeting with a woman politician at Stormont, the seat of Northern Ireland's new representative assembly.

In Israel, Julie Murray, Joanne Vance, Amanda Verlaque and May McCann stayed one week on kibbutzim and the second as the guests of Arab women in Nazareth. They visited women's projects in Akko, Haifa, and Nazareth, and were taken by the Organisation of the Forty to visit one of the illegalised Arab villages. They were hosted by Bat Shalom members in Jerusalem, met women MKs in the Knesset, and visited the Holocaust Museum. They also crossed the Green Line to visit Palestinian groups in Jenin.

The first difference that became strikingly clear to everyone was in the peace processes. The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement of 1998 and Israel/Palestine's Oslo Accords, renewed at last year's Wye Plantation talks, do not bear on the two regions with anything like the same effect.

Of course in Northern Ireland the British military still patrol the roads. The arsenals have not been dismantled. Sectarian attacks and 'punishment' beatings still strike fear into the communities. But at least something is moving. In recent years discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland has been seriously addressed. And now under the Agreement, new cross-border institutions are coming into existence, a representative body has been constitutionalized, elections have been held, and 'peace and reconciliation' budgets have released a flow of funds.

In Israel/Palestine by contrast the word 'accord' had a hollow ring to it. The Netanyahu government was dragging its feet over handing over the Occupied Territories to Palestinian rule. They did not curb, but encouraged, the encroachment of Jewish settlers into the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel's economic and military power relative to the Palestinian areas is brutally clear. And with the Iraqi affair unsettled, and the Lebanon border a site of continual incidents, Israel cannot forget its security problem. As May McCann saw, 'The war here is still totally raw and open, and near, and potentially going to happen again. They're nowhere near real peace.' It

made her feel these Bat Shalom friends, on both sides of the Israel's ethnic divide, and on both sides of the Green Line, were extremely brave women.

But the most intricate difference between the Women's Support Network and Bat Shalom, gradually unravelled over their weeks together, lies in their choices of organisation and strategy. Bat Shalom has a constitutional manifesto: end the occupation, enable the creation of a Palestinian state, share Jerusalem. In short, peace with justice. Around this sharply focused agenda their alliance is necessarily rather narrow. It is mainly, on the Jewish side, Ashkenazi kibbutzniks of the *Ha-Artzi* movement, and on the Arab side Christians and Muslims, many of whom are active in local municipal affairs. Its membership includes many supporters and activists of two left wing parties, the predominantly Jewish *Meretz* alliance and *Hadash*, the Democratic Front, that has many Arab members. So Bat Shalom is quite deeply involved in 'normal' party politics, and values those women Knesset Members who are members and supporters of the organisation.

When they were in Belfast the Israeli women were shocked by the legacy of segregation that looks like taking decades to undo, and by the persistence of mistrust that makes Catholics and Protestants cautious when moving around their home town, uncomfortable in many pubs or clubs that have a specific political colouring. They were surprised by the Belfast women's hesitation about stating their identity, or that of other people, as Catholic or Protestant. Of themselves the Israelis say baldly 'I am an Arab', 'I am a Jew'. After all, everyone can read the cultural signs for themselves. They also wondered why the Network says nothing about peace. Why, they asked, do you not campaign for an end to violence? Why are you not more involved in party politics?

The Network has, in fact, another, but no less political, strategy. Like Bat Shalom it is women organizing as women. It is anti-sectarian in spirit, cross-community in structure. But Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine are different and call for a different relationship to the issue of 'peace' and to party politics. In Northern Ireland, the 'peace people' have been seen as middle class dogooders, remote from community realities, focusing on paramilitary while ignoring state violence. As May

McCann put it, 'peace has been nearly, slightly like a dirty word here. OK. That doesn't mean we don't want peace... But we're now in a process, very long, of conflict resolution. It's not 'peace' like that! (She clapped her hands.) A cut off. There it is. It's long, hard work.'

That is why the Network do not call for 'peace'. In fact, they do not have a manifesto on constitutional issues but a mission statement and a strategic plan. Their chosen constituency is all working class women in Belfast. They want no woman to feel she is unable to find a home in the projects that make up the Network. They know that, right now, these women live in families and communities that are deeply, bitterly, opposed on constitutional issues. And they hope, through confidence building, gradually to draw them into co-operation around concrete matters of everyday life in which, as women, they share an interest.

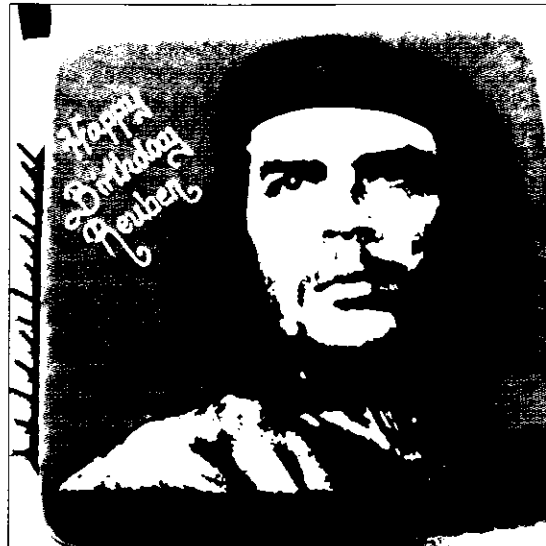
As to party politics, in Israel there is a Left, and it stands in the political system for peace and justice. The parties in Northern Ireland do not afford the voter a Left/Right choice. The major parties define themselves in relation to constitutional issues, on a spectrum from nationalist or republican to unionist or loyalist. They have served women badly. They have no women members of Parliament either at Westminster or in the European Parliament, and social issues have been neglected in their platforms. They are, besides, scarcely models of participatory democracy.

So the Network does not support one party or another. Instead it has encouraged women gradually to extend the agenda on which they will engage with each other and with politicians. They give a lot of attention to process - inclusion and the appreciation of difference. And, through campaigning, they have had some success in introducing those principles into the Peace Agreement.

So while Bat Shalom put their emphasis on peace making, the Network put theirs on peace building. Different approaches dictated by different circumstances. Returning home, the travelling groups saw their own choices in a new perspective.

Nahla Shedadni, a community organiser from Iskal village near Nazareth





We did it our way

What do secular Jews do when their children reach the age of 13? Julia Bard writes about a barmitzvah with a difference

God knows what our more orthodox relatives thought of it but, after months of discussion and preparation, resisting all pressures to bow to convention, our twin sons celebrated their 13th birthday with a radical, secular barmitzvah. Up until then I found the very word 'barmitzvah' chilling. As a child, the only time I ever thanked God was for making me a girl so I didn't have to have a barmitzvah. Coming from an observant family, my father's relatives very orthodox, my mother's large family less so but still traditional, I went to many barmitzvahs and weddings. Most of them were preceded in our house by an ear-splitting row. Ostensibly it was about clothes. In fact it was about respectability and acceptability. My sister's style of dress and outlook on life was strongly influenced by the Aldermaston marches. My father, despite being considered a bit of a rebel by his family, was determined not to be accompanied by a sullen beatnik who thought religion was shit and his behaviour the grossest hypocrisy. My mother took my father's side. I kept my head down and tried to contain my dread at the prospect of hours in synagogue looking down on the men's heads followed by the scrum of the kiddush in the cheerless shul hall – cherry brandy and advocaat; cardboard biscuits stained pink and green by a glacé cherry and angelica leaves. Worst of all, the reception and dinner where I would be sat at the 'children's table'. The only saving grace as I entered my teens were two older relatives. One was a first cousin who treated me like an adult but behaved like an adolescent and, although they don't see him very often, is now a favourite of my children. The other was a long-haired *shlokh* of a distant cousin from a rabbinic dynasty who would turn up in crumpled trousers and walking boots. He is now an influential orthodox rabbi. I haven't seen him for decades. So by the time Jacob and Reuben approached 13 I was delighted to be able to offer them the option of not having a barmitzvah.

They thought that was a crap idea. They feel very strongly Jewish and though they didn't want a religious barmitzvah, they did want a barmitzvah: a ceremony

and a party – and not just for the presents. Jacob and Reuben have a much clearer view of the Jewish condition than either Dave or I did at their age, for all the years I spent in Hebrew classes and for all the efforts of his Jewish primary school. Nevertheless, we all felt that the transition to adult responsibilities which their 13th birthday would bring, meant looking more deeply into the millennia of Jewish life. We toyed, for a minute or two, with the idea of *kheder* – synagogue Hebrew classes. I am told that Hebrew classes have changed since I was an inmate but Dave and I would only have sent them near such a place in order to immunise them against religion. I recently saw a mention in the *Jewish Chronicle* of one of my Hebrew teachers, a woman in a lopsided scraggy wig who used to translate biblical Hebrew into what sounded to us like Polish. Reading about her brought back to me the stifling, soporific, infinitely long hours – our precious Sunday mornings and two evenings a week after school – we spent translating off by heart chapters from the Bible: 'God said, "Take your son Isaac, your only son whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a sacrifice...."'

Deciding to break this centuries-long chain of torturing young children, we started to plan an alternative route to explore Jewish history, culture, traditions, literature and life. Jacob and Reuben learnt, in the first place to read Hebrew, the language of prayer but also the language common to Jews throughout the world, and Yiddish, the mother tongue of their Polish and Russian ancestors. Dave and I taught them and, since they had made the decision themselves to delve into all this, the process was not too arduous, though they could still do with some practice. We listened to and read songs and poetry and stories in these two languages and in English, drawn from the widest Jewish sources, from the Bible to the Education of Hyman Kaplan, from the roots of Jewish history to the upheavals of the 20th century.

In the weeks before the event, my mother's answer to her colleagues' and friends' much repeated question:

'What is a secular barmitzvah?' was: 'I have no idea.' Nor did we when we started out but as the months passed, we seemed to arrive at a complex consensus. We were gradually devising a ceremony which reflected their lives as conscious, increasingly educated and politicised Jews who were suspicious of national boundaries, immune to patriotism and sentimentality, who had the confidence to challenge power and authority and who, with our encouragement, questioned the existing social and political order. A couple of months before the ceremony, the boys chose their readings, learnt them, practised reciting them and wrote their own introductions to them. Music is also very important to them and they also chose music to play in the ceremony. Thirteen wishes for the boys from 13 people who are close to them – relatives, friends and comrades – formed a centrepiece. Dave and I helped set out the ceremony and framed it with our own speeches.

This was on a different planet from a conventional barmitzvah. What, as a child, horrified me most about traditional barmitzvahs was that they were the property of the religious community: out of the control of the boy and even his family. (In the name of equality, girls now have to endure a similar form of torture.) Whatever their inclinations, talents, beliefs or personality, each one had to dress in the prescribed suit, endure months of 'barmitzvah classes' and, worst of all, stand up in front of hundreds of people in synagogue – relatives all dolled

up – and sing from the handwritten scroll. Whatever our friends and relatives thought of it, Jacob and Reuben determined their own place in the ceremony and publicly established their own place in the various communities of which they are part.

All of those communities were present at the ceremony. Of the 200 or so guests, nearly half were relatives; the rest were a mixture of their friends and ours and friends we share, Jewish and non-Jewish. There was no rabbi to stand above the children and lecture them with the duty to honour their father and mother; to tell them of the wonders of the Jewish family and issue injunctions to keep God's law. Instead, Michael Rosen, a good friend to all of us, whose Jewishness matches no known convention, led the proceedings. He told our astonished families that not only had he not had a barmitzvah himself, but he had never been to one before. He described some of the process we had been through to create a ceremony which represented with integrity our children's lives and values. He made the guests, from babies to octogenarians, feel part of the proceedings, not distant observers of it.

The move from childhood to adulthood is significant only if it is a move towards taking responsibility for yourself and for those who are touched by your life. Our children are growing up in a world which is changing so fast we often do not even have the words to describe it. It is a violent, frightening world, but it is also a world

The ceremony

The ceremony was opened by Mike Rosen

First there was a speech by Dave, welcoming everyone and explaining the history and reasoning behind this barmitzvah. The boys had chosen readings in Hebrew, Yiddish and English as well as music and written explanations.

Reuben's readings were:

Lo ya'avidakh, a Hebrew poem written in 11th century Spain by Samuel Hanagid. 'No master will hire you unless he can expect to be idle while you tire ... in his service.'

Mayn Tsavoe (My testament), a Yiddish song by Dovid Edelstadt, author of many songs of work and struggle in the latter part of the last century.

A poem Reuben wrote himself about his hero, Che Guevara.

An extract from *Who is a Jew?* an essay by Isaac Deutscher.

He also played a piece for classical guitar

Jacob's readings were

Eretz le'adam, a Hebrew poem, also by Samuel Hanagid. 'The earth is a prison to man all his life ...'

Vakht oyf (Wake up!), a Yiddish song, also by Dovid Edelstadt. 'How long will you remain slaves ... Open your eyes and see your own strength.'

An extract from *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* by Leo Rosten illustrating Jewish humour and the immigrant experience.

A Beetle Called Derek by Benjamin Zephaniah which reflected Jacob's environmentalism.

He played a sarabande for French horn.

Thirteen guests each gave their wishes for the boys.

The ceremony ended with a speech by me expressing our hopes for the boys but the celebration continued with a jazz band, a meal, magic from the socialist conjurer, Ian Saville and a disco with DJ Ruth Novaczek. There were speeches from close friends and relatives for Jacob and Reuben and toasts to world peace and Jewish internationalism.

There are no blueprints for such occasions, but it should be possible to evolve a rough structure; perhaps collect a pool of reference books and records from which to draw readings and music. Adults and children from different families could talk through different possibilities, share language skills, participate in the preparations and offer support if traditional grandparents cut up rough.

I hope our barmitzvah encourages other boys to insist on making it their celebration which reflects their lives and their concerns. Good luck.

Above: Barmitzvah cakes, made by Debbie Rose, get radical!

full of potential. Adults often think we know better than children but they are often wrong. Children need access to information and to feel they can safely explore and try to understand every facet of the world they live in, from their own locality and community to international politics and economics; from science and technology to literature and music. Most importantly, they, like adults, need to have genuine control over their lives and to have the intellectual tools to work out what kind of world they want and how to change the one they've been born into. Jacob and Reuben's childhood has in many been ways more open, freer, less bound by convention than ours were in the 1950s and '60s; they have had access to information from which we would have been 'protected'; they expect to be and are taken more seriously than we were at their age. We grew up believing that the world was on a progressive trajectory. We were lucky to live in such a world which, for all its problems, was

better than any world which had gone before and would go on getting better. Our children have no reason for such hope. They turn on the television and see dead bodies. They know that this has been a century of dead bodies. Industry and technology has brought comfort for some, devastation for others and irreparable environmental damage for everyone. The passing of years does not automatically bring progress. If anything is going to change, people will have to change it. This responsibility is what adulthood will bring our children.

Their barmitzvah tried to reflect the intimacy of their lives and relationships, the breadth, depth and vitality of their culture and the prospects they create for themselves as adults. We hope it succeeded for all the guests and participants. It undoubtedly changed Jacob and Reuben's lives and helped them to feel part of a wide network of friends and relatives, as well as to understand the risks and rewards of carving their own path in life.

Family planning

If you really want to make a decision about circumcision, start thinking about it before your baby's born, advises Ruth Lukom

Nothing focuses the mind on circumcision like having a girl. When your first born is a girl the attention your second-born receives seems strangely distorted.

My daughter was seven when we were expecting our second child. If she had been a boy I have no doubt we would have gone through with a circumcision. But over the past few years the debate had been opened up by discussions in the Jewish Socialists' Group and one very powerful piece that appeared in this magazine. It set me thinking and I began to agonise – and to bore anyone who would listen to me.

My partner was non-committal. He claimed that whatever problems he'd had in life, the shape of his penis had not been one of them. I told my parents that we would probably not want our son circumcised, and from then on there was an undercurrent of tension throughout my pregnancy which would flare up unannounced.

I am writing this article as a guide to those who, like me, know that there is a difficult issue to be dealt with but can't stand confrontation. I can't tell you how to eliminate the rows but with a little thought and timing you can minimise them. The main thing you should avoid is having the inevitable row two or three days after your baby is born.

Your timetable

- Read about circumcision and talk to both the pro- and anti- lobbies.
- Talk to your partner. The two of you must be united.
- Warn the more sympathetic members of your family. Backup is important.
- Broach the subject with your parents.
- Be prepared for a terrific onslaught but also for 'divide and rule' tactics as you are taken aside 'for a quiet talk – just the two of us'.
- Prepare a welcoming ceremony for your child.
- Get pregnant.

Having the baby will seem very straightforward after weeks of the most surreal and sometimes hysterical discussions. One of the most bizarre warnings thrown at

my partner was: 'When you have a bath with him, he will look different'. Now our son Max has a pale complexion, light brown hair and golden eyes. His father and I could audition as extras for Zorba the Greek.

But if the going gets tough why not parry with a bit of emotion of your own. Stand up with your hands protectively covering your unborn child and say: 'I really don't feel I can continue with this discussion right now.'

Hardest and most hurtful was the accusation that we were ashamed of our Jewish identity and were trying to deny it through our son. We tried to talk about our son's right to choose when he was old enough but my father would shake his head angrily and tell us that forcing him to go through a surgical operation as an adult was cruel (as opposed, it seemed, to being held down while a knife was taken to him, with no anaesthetic).

It always seemed odd that these angry but fundamental arguments on went on with my daughter standing nearby. Any decisions that we as parents made about her Jewish upbringing were never going to cause this bitterness. But then she's a girl. The Liberal and Progressive wings of Judaism may have moved into the 20th century but for the United Synagogue and other orthodox institutions, girls are just *sheytel* fodder.

I would love to have made a Jewish secular welcoming ceremony for our son as a reply to those who thought we were in denial. But my parents, though bitterly disappointed with our decision, had quietly accepted it. They were the ones who had to deal with 'so when's the bris?' enquiries, not us. A welcoming ceremony seemed inappropriate. Besides my daughter hadn't had one. It didn't occur to anyone at the time.

So now, four years later, how do we feel? We are both happy we made the right decision. Neither of us will ever have any difficulty justifying ourselves to Max if he asks us why he is not circumcised.

I have heard the arguments that tell us we have betrayed something very sacred which transcends mere ritual. This still has the power to move me and make me question what we have done. But then I just look at my daughter.

Loves labours lost



Today the phrase 'Jewish labour movement' has such an archaic ring that it's hard to believe this vital part of our history is still – just – within living memory. Only two or three generations ago, every large Jewish city from Lodz via Salonika and Paris to Buenos Aires had not just one, but several, Jewish workers' movements – a shifting kaleidoscope of socialists, anarchists, communists and left-wing Zionists, combining or competing as circumstances changed according to the times.

The large cities of Britain also had their Jewish proletarians and artisans, together with dozens of Jewish trade unions. Most of these unions and the associated workers' clubs and societies were short-lived affairs. However, one remarkable organisation – the Workers' Circle – outlived them all, celebrating its 75th anniversary before finally giving up the struggle in the 1980s.

The story of the Workers Circle – also known by its Yiddish name *Arbeter Ring* – began in the early years of the century, at the height of the mass immigration of Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe. Jewish workers in Britain concentrated in a small number of trades, notably tailoring, shoemaking, cabinetmaking, capmaking, and cigarette-making. The labour market was crowded, earnings were low, and immigrant workers were easily exploited.

From across the Atlantic, news reached Whitechapel of a new organisation formed by Jewish workers in America – a mutual aid society calling itself the Workmen's Circle/*Arbeter Ring*. A Group of East End workers decided to launch a similar venture, and in 1903 they published an appeal for members in the Yiddish anarchist newspaper, the *Arbayter Fraynd*/Workers Friend. For a contribution of 2d a week, members of the Frayer Arbayer Ring/Free Workers' Circle would receive assistance in times of sickness and distress. The society's aims were 'mutual aid, unity and fraternity'. In sharp contrast to the existing Jewish friendly societies, it also had a radical political agenda, declaring it would work for a 'time when a commonwealth of free and happy people, who are not only politically but economically free, will have supplanted the reigning competitive industrial system of the present'.

The *Frayer Arbayer Ring* didn't last more than a year of two, despite having a core of committed

activists. However, its demise coincided with a new influx of radical Jewish workers, many of them active revolutionaries forced into exile by the failure of the anti-Tsarist uprising of 1905. Among those who came to Britain in these years were Baruch (Later Barnett) Weinberg, a young Bundist militant from the Polish *shtetl* of Biale, the anarchists Yankev (Jacob) Kapitantshik and Nathan Kramer (both on the run from the Tsarist authorities), and the brothers Shiye and Harry Birenbaum, both active Bundists from Poland.

Encouraged by their arrivals, an immigrant cabinet-maker called Nathan Weiner, one of the founders of the Free Workers' Ring, decided that conditions were ripe to restart the organisation. Weiner and a small group of friends met in his rooms in Sunbury Buildings, Shoreditch, on 17 July 1909 – henceforth considered the founding date of the *Workers Circle*.

This time the new society (still called the *Free Workers Circle*) grew at a rapid pace. A second branch was formed in 1910, consisting almost entirely of master tailors living and working in the West End. A year later, the *Frayer Arbeter Ring* absorbed another similar group with over 70 members which became the third branch (thus beginning the rivalry which existed throughout the organisation's history between its two largest sections, Branches 1 and 3).

By 1912, the Free Workers Ring boasted 11 branches, covering Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester, as well as London. Several branches maintained a distinct ideological identity: Branch 1 included a strong core of committed anarchists; Branch 10 was started by Communists; and Poale Zion members in Leeds joined en masse as Branch 12. Another section, Branch 6, grew out of one of the hometown (*landsmanshaft*) societies in the East End, in this case, immigrants from the large Ukrainian town of Zhitomir.

The *Frayer Arbeter Ring* soon elected a Central Committee, which chose as its first chairman the journalist Morris Myer, later a figure of some distinction in Anglo-Jewry as the editor of the Yiddish daily *Di Tsayt*/The Jewish Times. Other prominent members included the legendary German anarchist Rudolf Rocker, the Yiddish newspaper editor Shloyme – Zalmen Dingol, and the veteran publisher Baruch Ruderman – the first person to publish radical Yiddish books in Britain, and a link with the pioneering days of the Jewish labour movement in London in the 1880s and 90s.

Whatever their political beliefs, the leading personalities of the Free Workers Ring shared two overriding

The Workers Circle provided crucial support and enriched the lives of thousands of Jewish people in Britain earlier this century. David Mazower charts its history

aims – improving the lives of their fellow workers through mutual support and political struggle, and promoting educational and cultural activities in the immigrants' native language, Yiddish.

One of the society's first initiatives was to set up a Jewish library and reading room on Whitechapel Road. Here members could read Yiddish newspapers and borrow Yiddish books, long before such facilities were offered in public libraries. On the political front, the society raised funds to support striking Jewish tailors, set up a butcher's co-operative to force down the price of Kosher meat, and organised protest meetings over the case of Mendel Beilis, a Jew from Kiev arrested on a trumped up charge of blood libel.

The First World War saw a huge increase in the society's work. Circle members were active in the dozens of hometown relief agencies which raised money to help the traumatised Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Several leading circle activists were also prominent in the Foreign Jews Protection Committee, which formed in 1916 to counter government threats to deport foreign aliens who refused to join the British army.

However, the overthrow of the Tsar early in 1917 – an event which led to jubilant celebrations among the Russian Jews of the East End – also set the scene for one of the most tragic chapters in the circle's history. Dozens of the society's members decided to return to Russia and offer their services to the revolutionary cause. Most of the men left on their own, intending to send for their families later on. Some, like the Bundist

leader, Hershl Himmelfarb, were lucky and managed to leave Russia before it was too late. Many others never returned – among them Morris Lenobel, Max Litvinoff (father of the writer, Emanuel Litvinoff) and Nathan Applebaum (whose son, Lou Appleton, was himself a lifelong member of the Workers Circle).

By the time the war ended, two of the circle's London branches had collapsed completely, and most of the others had suffered a severe reduction in numbers. By 1918 there was just five hundred members left, compared to a pre-war total of almost twice that number. Nonetheless, the *Arbeter Ring* carried on with its work and, over the next 20 years, developed a worldwide reputation as the representative voice of the Jewish labour movement in Britain.

In the early 1920s, the Workers Circle opened what they called a Yiddish Radical school, where members' children learned to read and write Yiddish. Teaching up to 40 or 50 youngsters on a Sunday, this is the only British example of the sort of secular Jewish schools that were common in Poland and the United States.

At the same time, circle officials set up a building fund to purchase premises for the organisation. After endless bazaars, raffles and fund-raising drives, members raised two thousand pounds to buy and refurbish a house in Alie street. The building opened in September 1924, and soon became a virtual people's university of the East End. Circle House was a social and cultural centre for thousands of Jewish families. Here, at almost any hour of the day or night, you would find people

A special dinner was held in honour of Sholem Schwartzbard, the Jewish anarchist, bringing thousands on to the streets of the East End

holding committee meetings, reading Yiddish newspapers in the library, coming to get free legal advice, playing chess, or just chatting over a plate of herring and a lemon tea.

The large hall at the back of the building played host to an astonishing range of speakers – a virtual Jewish Who's Who of the interwar years. They included the Bundist leaders Alter and Erlich; leading Yiddish writers like Sholem Asch, Peretz Hirshbein and Joseph Opatoshu; Victor Gollancz and Professor Hyman Levy; and from Palestine, David Ben-Gurion, Chaim Arlosorof, and Berl Katznelson. In the same hall, the circle also promoted Sunday concerts, featuring artists more usually found performing in the West End – among them pianists like Cyril Smith and Solomon, and the Griller string quartet.

Despite the poverty of many of its own members, the Workers Circle maintained an unshakeable faith in the power of collective action. Over the years it raised money to support dozens of deserving causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish. It was also a strong defender of Jewish rights. In Britain, the Workers Circle led the campaign to raise money for the legal defence of Sholem Schwartzbard, the Jewish anarchist who shot dead the Ukrainian pogrom leader Simon Petlyura in Paris in 1926. After a sensational trial, Schwartzbard was acquitted and embarked on a world tour to thank all those who had helped secure his freedom. A special dinner was held in his honour in Circle House, bringing thousands onto the streets of the East End desperate for a glimpse of this diminutive hero.

Another remarkable achievement was the purchase of a convalescent home, bought after a self-imposed weekly levy of all members. Wilbury house, in Littlehampton, a large house with a big garden close to the South Downs, opened in the mid-'30s. A world away from the grime and noise of the inner city, it provided a place of rest and recuperation for circle members and other paying guests.

Throughout the 20s and 30s, the Workers Circle also provided a full range of benefits for its ever-increasing membership. In addition to unemployment, sickness and bereavement payments, the circle also had its own burial scheme, a strong incentive for membership to many who were either unwilling or unable to pay synagogue membership fees.

The 1930s marked a turning point for the circle. On the one hand, this was the last decade when a sufficient political consensus could be found within its rank for campaigns of joint action. Responding to the growing strength of the far-right, leading Communists within the circle, including Jack Pearce, Issie Pushkin and Issie Panner, played a prominent role in organising the grass-roots campaign against fascism on the streets of London. At the same time, however, the 1930s marked the point when membership in the circle peaked – the last decade when new recruits outnumbered losses through death or lapsed membership.

During the Second World War, hundreds of circle members joined the armed forces, increasing the financial burden on those who remained. Circle House itself suffered bomb damage, and the large hall at the heart of

the building's many activities was destroyed. The society also suffered from the dispersal of the Jewish East End due to the Blitz.

After 1945, the circle struggled on, moving to new headquarters in a narrow Victorian house in Sylvester Path, just behind Hackney Town Hall. It continued to provide a cultural focus for East End Jewry, and supported a wide range of left-wing causes despite its reduced means. But it was no longer able to look forward with confidence: membership was declining from pre-war high of three thousand, the new National Health Service undermined its welfare role, and within the organisation, increasingly bitter political disputes sapped its spirit.

Different left-wing groups had always competed for influence within the circle, while managing to put their differences aside in the common cause. However, the birth of Israel and the cold war brought the Zionists and communists within its rank into increasing bitter confrontation. At its 50th anniversary celebration in 1959, the tone was overwhelmingly one of nostalgia rather than hope.

By the 1960s and '70s, the effort of its dedicated officers were devoted to administering the society's benefits for an aging membership. Shortly after its 75th anniversary dinner in 1984, the Workers Circle closed its doors. Its dusty files were deposited in the municipal archives, a few Yiddish volumes (translations of Marx, Lenin and Kropotkin) found a home in the Jewish museum, and the Yiddish sign on the outside of the building was removed by a souvenir hunter.

So, what conclusions should we draw from this fascinating and inspiring chapter in the history of Anglo-Jewry? Several points seem to me worth emphasising. Firstly, the story of the *Arbeter Ring* confirms both the vitality of the immigrants' secular Yiddish culture, and the failure to pass on that culture in Britain (unlike the United States, where immigrant institutions like the *Arbeter Ring*, and the *Forwards* newspaper have adapted and survived). Secondly it would be worth exploring the individual and institutional links between the Workers Circle and the significant Jewish presence the East London Labour Party from the 1930s. Thirdly, it is surely noteworthy that a hard-pressed immigrant collective could fund the sort of fully-functioning Jewish cultural centre that our community finds it impossible to emulate even today; and fourthly, the history of the circle – where respectful coexistence between different groups was followed by bitter, paralysing conflict, leading to irreversible decline offers a clear warning to contemporary Anglo-Jewry, with its genius for internecine disputes.

Sources for this article include: *Workers' Circle anniversary brochures, 1929 and 1959. The Yiddish newspapers Arbeter Fraynd and Di Tsayt. J S Hertz' three-volume history. Doytes Bundistn (Generations of Bundists), New York, 1956-1968; and interviews with Lou Appleton, Tom Kramer and Diana Levy.*



Visiting Workers' Circle members on the lawn at the Littlehampton Rest Home, around 1950

Michael Heiser took time out from a trip Berlin to see what remains of the ghetto which has come to symbolise Jewish resistance

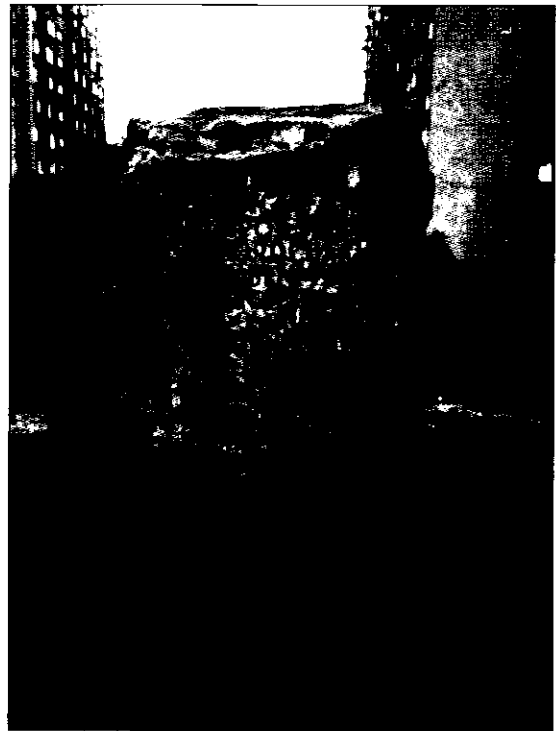
Nothing prepared me for the shock of the Warsaw Ghetto. For a start, I hadn't meant to go to Warsaw. A day trip to Szczecin, a peek into Poland and back to Berlin, where I was in the middle of attending a performance of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. I ended up staying overnight in Szczecin and then had a choice: I could either catch a train back to Berlin at 8.07, or I could take the 7.58 to Warsaw, which would get me there by half past two. That was what I did. I shared a carriage with Justina, a bright 20 something, a secretary for an English company who was studying to improve her English. She had read Dickens, Fielding, Chaucer and Beowulf. Currently she was reading a book about Stalin, in Polish translation. We discussed how he must have enjoyed manipulating people, and I mentioned that Wotan in the Kupfer *Ring* production I was currently seeing in Berlin, had the same characteristics. She wanted to work with technology for disabled people.

Arriving in Warsaw, I put up at the Polonia, a vast 1930s pile, and walked towards the Ghetto area. I thought I knew what I would find. The Germans largely levelled the area of the Ghetto after the uprising in 1943, and modern estates were later built on the site. There would be the odd monument scattered here and there but that would be it. There would be a big square, called by the Germans the *Umschlagplatz*, where selections of Jews for the gas chambers were carried out and from where they were transported direct to Treblinka. It would look something like the Waterlooplein in Amsterdam. There would be a monument in the corner, but otherwise it would be full of Poles going about their daily business.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. The Ghetto area is much bigger than I expected. Most of North Central Warsaw was at one time in the Ghetto area. Most of it has indeed disappeared and, crossing the area, are wide dual carriageways called such randomly chosen names as John Paul II and General Anders. But substantial traces remain if you know how to look. At the monument to the Ghetto fighters, located on a street now called after Mordecai Anielewicz, the commander of the uprising, I bought a book published recently by the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute, with a guided tour around the Ghetto area. As well as maps, each page consisted of two pictures, one of the Ghetto in the early 1940s, the other showing the same location today. Some are familiar images – trams on which only Jews were allowed to ride, streets divided by fences, Jewish police or German soldiers directing crowds of Ghetto inhabitants. You could see the same buildings in many of the modern photographs. With the guide in my hand I spent that evening and the following morning following the route before catching the train back to Berlin. I would cross a wide avenue, go behind a gleaming new glass office block and, with a similar sense of walking from the City of London to the East End, suddenly come across narrower streets with a higgledy-piggledy mix of buildings, clear spaces used for parking, garages and the like.

I stopped at a street corner and looked at the book. There was a picture of Jews being directed through a passage so that they could cross from the large to small ghetto area, across an 'Aryan' road. The same buildings were there as in the picture, an ordinary side street in a rundown area. I looked down a street at a church. I looked at the book and there was the same street and the same church, but with the addition of a rickety wooden bridge in the foreground, packed with Ghetto inhabitants. The juxtaposition of the extraordinary and the ordinary was shocking.

The *Umschlagplatz*, far from being a big square, is



David Rosenberg

Berlin to

the size of a school yard. The buildings which were used as a Jewish hospital and those across the road, which were barracks for the German troops brought in to suppress the uprising, are still there.

At the memorial to the Ghetto fighters I talked to some men running a stall called Shalom which, as far as I could work out, is an Israeli/German/Polish foundation. I told them about the plaque which has been put up in London in memory of Szmul Zygielbojm who tried to alert the Allied governments to the fate of the Jews in Poland and committed suicide in protest at their failure to respond. The men on the stall told me there was a monument to him a few streets away. I couldn't find it but I did see stone memorials in the form of plinths to many other well known names from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, including Michal Klepfisz and Marek Edelman, who survived the uprising and whom I met two years ago in New York. Most of these have been placed there in the past few years.

The Northern Ghetto area, nearest to the *Umschlagplatz* and where the uprising largely took place, has indeed been reconstructed with modern residential buildings. However it reminds me more of Beit Hakerem than Broadwater Farm. At the site of 18 Mila Street, where the bunker of the commanders of the Uprising was located, there is a pyramidal monument to the Ghetto fighters in Polish and Yiddish (most of the newer plaques are in Polish and Hebrew). I tried to pick out the faded Yiddish. Some Polish kids, aged around eight or nine, looked on in curiosity. I tried to communicate the Yiddish but we did not share a common tongue.

I ran to catch my train back to Berlin (the southern edge of the Ghetto area is just by Warsaw Central Station) and found the carriage I had been assigned full of American Peace Corps volunteers who were going to teach English to Poles. As the talk flowed around me, of guest parents and the like, I slowly returned to 1999.



Roman Vebnic

Warsaw return

Back in Berlin, I joined a tour of the recently completed, but still empty, Jewish museum. The building, by Daniel Libeskind, is an extraordinary amalgam of crossing lines. The whole thing is designed around a jagged line, established by plotting the addresses in Berlin of prominent people, Jewish and non-Jewish, across straight lines. Where the lines cross are empty chambers, intended to represent voids, symbolising what was not in Jewish history as opposed to what was. The Holocaust is everywhere, but the conception of the building is intended to be optimistic and look to the future, but to make the point that, within this future, there has got to be a recognition of the horrors of the past.

I think that in some ways Libeskind is expressing the same experience as I had exploring the Warsaw Ghetto with the book of 'then and now' pictures. How do we integrate the enormity of the past with the urbanity (in both senses of the word) of the present, without being a slave to the past or banalising it?

The German woman leading the guided tour tells us that the museum aims to be the leading Jewish museum in Europe but is a little shamefaced about the German wish to be the biggest and the best. I think that it will be better when it has a few exhibits in it.

Berlin has, in the last few years, established a venue where performances of Jewish music take place in the Hackesches Hof in the old Jewish quarter, in the northern part of the city centre in former East Berlin. It is a very happening place, filled with cafés and repertory cinemas, with a feel of the Marais or Covent Garden.

I went to two late-night performances on successive evenings. The first featured Rosenthal and Ginsburg, a clarinetist from Israel and an electric guitarist from Galicia. The latter proved that the electric guitar is not a suitable Klezmer instrument. The former was technically proficient in the Giora Feidman 'look at me I'm a virtuoso'

way, but the performance lacked bite. What irredeemably condemned it was the inclusion of the hackneyed Israeli tunes, *Hava Nagila* and *Hevenu Shalom Aleichem*.

Aufwind, the following night, were a different matter. They have been going since the early 1980s and come from former East Germany. The band consists of a violinist, a clarinetist, an accordion, a guitar and a double bass and vocals. They have taught themselves Yiddish.

Their repertoire consists of Klezmer doina standards which were the staple of the late lamented Royte Klezmores, performance numbers such as *Rabeynu Tam* and *Yidl Mitn Fidl* and genuine rarities which they have picked up by travelling to Poland, Roumania and the Ukraine and talking to older Yiddish speakers. Claudia Koch, in particular, brought a Molly Picon-like archness to *Yidl mitn fidl* and in *Rabeynu Tam* acted all the parts, including the scolding Rabbi's wife and the goat who bleats 'meh', with an infectious enthusiasm and aplomb.

I would guess that most, if not all of them, are non-Jewish, unlike the two the previous night. But Aufwind established a genuine rapport with their audience. They explained the songs in German but sung them all in clear Yiddish. There was little doubt in my mind which represented the more genuine performance tradition.

In a Berlin Jewish bookshop I bought a Yiddish edition of Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Mayn tatns beis-din shhtub* (My father's courtroom). I sat reading the first pages in the Berlin S-Bahn, surrounded by good-natured football supporters. It is set in Krochmalna Gas (street), in Warsaw. I remembered passing a dead end, all that is left of the street, in Warsaw a few days previously.

We won't bring back Jewish Krochmalna Gas nor 'Jewish' Brick Lane. But the title of one of Aufwind's CD's *Lomp nokh nisht farloshn* (A lamp not yet extinguished) reminds us of the place that Yiddish and Jewish culture has in Poland and Germany today.

Far left: memorial to the Ghetto fighters, inscribed in Yiddish and Polish.

Left: The old city market, inside the medieval walls of Warsaw, 1938.

The dinosaur and the professor

A short story
by Harold
Rosen



Some little girls were making daisy chains, smiling their way amongst the gravelly graves of Russian soldiers hastily buried in the thin strip of park closed by Irmgard Strasse where I had just been stationed. The graves, scattered to the point of randomness, were those of the very last casualties of the battle of Berlin. Over each was a wooden red star nailed to a short wooden stake with a name painted on it. In that first post-war late summer the paint was already flaking. The little girls danced away, carefully skirting the graves. I stopped on the path.

Frau Somebody stopped on the path beside me. Suddenly she burst out, 'Barbarians! Barbarians! No crosses. What a way to bury the dead!' I looked at the indignant German woman. So much I might have said. About barbarians for instance, or ways of disposing of the dead but I took my words and my anger away with me through the once genteel suburb of Zehlendorf past the tank turrets sunk at crossroads, taking in the acrid smell of brown coal from thousands of improvised stoves somewhere in the rubble. Once on an overcrowded underground train (they had started up again) I stood strap hanging and a middle-aged man, seeing my uniform, stood up and deferentially offered me his seat. He seemed baffled by my impatient refusal. The others in the carriage watched and then looked at their feet.

And then there was that day when you could feel the arrival of winter and you started turning up your great-coat collar. I stood on the platform of an underground station (Wannsee was it?) which took Berliners out to the woods and lakes on the edge of the city. It was crammed with people all of whom had been collecting wood and had strapped bundles of logs and branches to their backs. The stronger ones had collected prodigious quantities which jutted above their heads. They stood silently waiting for the train. Suddenly I noticed a little old man near me. He was bent double under his load, his grey pointed beard stuck out in front of him. He could have been a figure from a folk story, a woodcutter

returning home from fuel gathering but with one startling difference. His face was a strange yellowy-grey and his eyes were fixed in an unnatural gaze. He's going, I thought. At that moment he fell. I stepped forward and knelt beside him to unhitch his load and loosen his collar. His eyes rolled and he made a dry sound in his throat. He's finished I was sure. Not one of the other wood-gatherers moved or looked down. And the train came in. As though we were nothing more than an obstacle, they stepped over us and crammed into the train. Twenty minutes later the two of us caught the next one for by then the old man had struggled to his feet.

Later that year the first snows came. I found my way to Invaliden Strasse in to the Russian sector and was making my way to the *Geologische und Palaeontologische* Museum. At least that's what my memory tells me it was called, and I would hardly have made that up. The museum, with its huge Greek column facade and pediment, you could recognise immediately as one of those European buildings which look like replicas of each other. It had taken some direct hits from bombs or shells but was still unmistakably what it was. All its columns were still standing but it was cocooned in silence. Not a soul was about, even in Invaliden Strasse. I went slowly up the broad flight of steps, hugging my big brown paper parcel and moved through powdery snow, two inches deep perhaps, towards the great doors. There was not a footprint in the snow but chunks of masonry showed through. The museum was defunct.

My mission with the parcel seemed so absurd, so improbable that I was inclined to turn round and make my way back to my billet but I had a promise to keep and would at least be able to tell Nan that I had tried, even while cutting a ludicrous figure, entering the dead museum to look for Herr Professor Dietrich an aged academic who might be anywhere in Germany or even long since dead and was certainly not going to be found in amongst the rubble and debris. Nan was the mother of David, my closest university friend, and I had over several years visited the house. His father was a university teacher, grimly dying of a brain tumour in an armchair. In spite of this cloud the house was to me an exciting revelation. His younger brother, later a brilliant physicist, sat like a sinister conspirator in the cellarage twiddling with his ham radio transmitter and conducting improbable conversations with fellow hams in unlikely

like Brazil and Hawaii. David himself kept in cages in the garden and raved about their Of the feeding of them I will not speak. The puzzled me with its books, Cooper's marmalade, livers, and assorted university lefties who came talk soberly of the coming war or listen to classical music on the acoustic EMG gramophone. Nan herself an historian and despite her personal tragedy, she to be very hospitable in her brusque kind of two egocentric students. I had not met before a who'd been to Cambridge. What's more that had the end of the First World War. When she came on from Birmingham she always took the two to a meal somewhere in Soho. Bertorelli's per-Schmidt's. One day, talking of Nazism, she told sometime before Hitler took over she had spent a year in Berlin perfecting her German and her abiding interest in the Peasant's War. She had a family who'd been very good to her, treated a daughter. Herr Professor Dietrich, the head of the school, was a gentle scholarly figure who always me to help put some polish on her German. He found the museum where he worked and introduced to Kathe Kollwitz's Peasants' War drawings. Now there was Nan's letter. There was no of pleasantries; just that she'd heard I was in Berlin and she knew that the order had that allied soldiers were not to fraternise (that word they used) with the Germans. In particular as a ban on making gifts of any kind. Did I er, she asked, her talking of Professor Dietrich? I could send a parcel of warm clothing directly to I could seek out the old man and give it to him. It was just a chance that I might find him in the unlikely she knew, but I must try. She's gone off her rocker? I wondered. She must be in the newsreels of devastated Berlin. And what Professor been up to during the war? All the wasn't it just like Nan to send that parcel in defiance of officialdom and against all the odds to hope it reach him. It was all of a piece with her collecting an ambulance for the Republican side in the Civil War and running concerts for Basque children.

the request come from anyone else I might have asked. At the very least I might have checked out or Dietrich first. When the parcel arrived, in some inner truculence I set out for the museum and it in the snow, as I've said. A lifetime of film has made me see these moments as the opening of a continental film - the battered museum, a layer of snow, the solitary uniformed figure finding the steps clutching a shapeless parcel tied in a string. Who is he? Where is everybody? What's in the parcel? When is it? Where is it? Does the body-language suggest reluctance? and the building; was it a seat of government? Rathaus? Museum? A young soldier go in or turn back?

I didn't turn back but went up to the big doors, and entered what was a great exhibition hall. In the distance, defying probability, stood a vast, heroic figure, its length stretching from one end to the other. The glass roof dome over it had shattered and scattered shards of pieces of broken glass around its feet, mingled with the snow which had drifted in. Its head still forward but its vertebrae had collapsed and littered the floor beneath. I thought of its sibling in the Natural History Museum in London, still intact and with which I



had been on friendly terms since childhood. The Germans in their miseries were still not ready to do the housework, sweep up and ready the poor dinosaur for restoration. Maybe the Professor somewhere was planning to collect the vertebrae into a neat pile, number them, protect them under sheeting and submit a meticulous report on work in progress. Meanwhile the broken-backed creature towered over me and I picked my way around it and headed for a staircase at the end of the hall. I wasn't quite sure why I was doing what. I went up the stairs, turned at a landing and was suddenly confronted by a huge grinning gorilla. I confess it terrified me, for by now I was taut in every nerve. Then I realised that the gorilla's glass case had been blasted away leaving him standing there like a living creature shouting 'I've survived! I've survived!'

The staircase continued but suddenly came to a jagged end, jutting out into empty air. I turned and descended warily and, as I did so, I heard, or thought I heard, sounds coming from somewhere, scrapings, a muffled thump or two, a door closing and even voices - nothing very distinct but the subdued signals of human presence. That film again. I was assembling a soundtrack. All imagination. I listened intently nonetheless and it seemed to me then beyond doubt that the sounds were coming from somewhere deep in the basement. From the ground floor there was another staircase going downwards. I followed it. At the bottom there was a row of dim light bulbs burning showing a long vaulted passage.

Slowly I realised that all along one side was an improvised plywood partition and in it, at regular intervals, doors with numbers and labels on them. I moved along the tidy debris-free passage and started to read the labels. They told me one thing: scholarship had survived in the catacombs. The dinosaur might be terribly maimed but the lecturers, the *dozents* and the professors were still in business and hard at it.

I remained sceptical about my mission but there it was, on a door 'Herr Professor Hans Dietrich'. I wasn't quite ready. I hadn't fully prepared my head for this encounter. As I stopped before the door I tried to imagine how I would look to the professor in the uniform of an Occupying Power and with an unmilitary, inexplicable bundle under my arm. I rehearsed my opening gambits and then knocked on the door. A voice gave me permission to enter.

The Professor was seated at his desk, around him the paraphernalia of scholarship - books, files, papers, some beautiful fossil specimens and a microscope. There was a separate pile of what looked like to me student essays. It was all cramped, gloomy and uncomfortable. Behind the professor's head was a black framed photograph. Anyone in Europe and well beyond would have recognised it at once; an icon of our times. It was a photo of a young German officer, head and shoulders, serious face, peaked cap, immaculate tunic and all the insignia as well as, in this case, an Iron Cross at the throat. The Professor himself was as old as I thought he would be and looked very weary and apathetic. He was clearly

This story is from
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Circumcised?* a new
autobiographical
collection by
Harold Rosen,
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bewildered by his visitor. He frowned and asked my business. As soon as I mentioned Nan's name he rose to his feet.

'Nan, Nan,' he repeated. 'I never thought to hear from her again. Especially now. A very clever young woman she was. Did she ever write her history of the Peasants' War?'

'No,' I said and provocatively took the plunge. She was too busy with anti-fascist political activities.'

A blatant oversimplification, in fact, but I needed the phrase at that moment. His face closed up and he looked away and said nothing. I had not mentioned so far the brown paper parcel simply because I hadn't worked out how to carry out the awkward manoeuvre of handing it to him. Meanwhile I found myself looking at the photo, the icon, the Professor swivelled and looked at it with me.

'My son,' he said, struggling to speak. 'You cannot know what it is like to lose a son. Very hard. Very hard.'

Leave it. Leave it, I thought. A man is mourning his son, but I couldn't leave it.

'No, not a son.'

And I should have left it at that.

'Killed,' he managed to get out. 'A very promising biochemist.'

Again, I thought, leave it now. But again I didn't leave it.

'Where was that?'

'On the Russian front, somewhere near Smolensk.'

'A long way away, in another country,' I said.

'And what was he doing there?'

'Doing? Doing?' he said sternly. 'His duty, else?'

I could have told him.

'Smolensk, on the Russian front,' I repeated his duty. What else? And your famous museum ruins and you're down in the cellars. And the back is broken.'

'We shall repair it,' he said with his first must. We have our duty too. That's why I'm still here. I picked up the brown paper bundle.

'Nan sent these warm clothes for the winter. The Professor stood up again. I could see how frail he was. I dropped the bundle on the table. The shock-surprise of our encounter we had omitted the basic formalities.

'My name,' I said. 'My name is Rosen,' and

Upstairs I crunched past the sad dinosaur, steps into the Invaliden Strasse, knowing I would return to fraternise.

Dear Nan,

I never expected for one moment to find Dietrich in the snow and rubble of Berlin, least of all in the museum. The museum is in ruins but there he was, tiny office underneath it all, knee deep in his passion, the biochemist (you must have known he was killed on the Russian front. I think he wanted to tell me about it. I did not. I delivered the parcel of work as instructed, doing my duty, as old Dietrich would have done).

You must have seen the great dinosaur in the hall of the museum. Its vertebrae are in heaps on the floor but otherwise it's more or less intact. Not just enduring.

The dinosaur in Berlin was, in a sense, the sibling of the dinosaur in the Natural History Museum. Copies of the original fossil were distributed to prestigious museums all over the world. Professor Dietrich continued to work at the museum and was much honoured in the German Democratic Republic.

Alien poem

I was born in a strange land.
Though I never invoked strangeness
The houses' grey walls
Of the town that was chosen
Kept back secrets, because of my lateness.

And though my father remembered
Other towns with trams and trees and silence
Their secrets, too
Would not be shared
With vagabonds, however respectable.

Strangers never grow into cities.
And their children encumbered with memories
Are clumsy and afraid
They miss too much.
Sometimes, the strangeness is itself a promise.

Report

Suddenly, I read in a newspaper
About an Arab poet.
Whose name I've never heard of,
Whose work I don't know.
In the land of Israel, in Palestine.
Fined, suppressed, threatened with imprisonment
For 'incitement'.
And I want to shout:
Let his poetry survive in its valley
Making nothing happen.
Let him demonstrate his types of ambiguity.
Let him speak awkwardly, inadequately,
Like the rest of us,
For himself.

My fathers planned me

My fathers planned me with their prayers
And gave me their coded, ancient learning.
I heard their urgent voices where I walked,

But took my love in my arms
And found a human music in her voice
And named as joy what they explored with law.

We are a new people, she and I,
Whose lilt is pagan and have no appointed sound.
Away and far down my ghosts whisper a weak song.

poet A C Jacobs died in 1994 and lived in London, Glasgow, Jerusalem, and Madrid. His Collected Poems and Selected Translations are published by The Menard Press/Hearing Eye. Price £13.99

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To give is better than to receive

Western Jewry and the Zionist Project 1914-1933, Michael Berkowitz, Cambridge University Press, £35

When a few years ago Yossi Beilin, a minister in the last Peres government, told an audience of Anglo-Jewish fundraisers that Israel didn't need their charity any longer, he caused more than consternation. In one utterance not only did he demolish Zionism's own *modus operandi* for involving western Jewry in the building of its state but also tore away at the very heart of a self-understanding in which the vast majority who never intended to settle in Israel nevertheless were able to fervently identify with it. If most of these would strongly protest that their commitment could hardly be reduced to anything so base and vulgar as their size of their cheques for the latest appeal, Michael Berkowitz's *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project 1914-1933* contends that this, indeed, is what an emerging Zionist apparatus did want most from them. His study will not be appreciated in some quarters. But that hardly makes what he calls his 'history of an institutionalisation of a contradiction' any the less compelling. Or timely.

Building on the thesis of his previous volume which examined the nascent pre-1914 movement, he charts its continuing successful co-option of substantial sections of British, American and German Jewries by providing them with a 'supplemental nationality'. In the early years of the Palestine mandate Zionism consolidated this hold by repeated use of graphic images which both emphasised the 'sacred geography' of the biblical land and, at the same time, the progressive nature of its project, suggesting an environment in which modern people might actually choose to live. The message was reinforced by constant allusion to famous Jewish and non-Jewish names, notably Einstein and Balfour, who seemed willing to lend themselves to it. The overall impression is of a sophisticated if unusual brand-marketing exercise in which the western Jewish consumer was left in no doubt that he or she should 'buy' (or more accurately



Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, pondering. And well he might

'give') Zionist.

By such means, Berkowitz proposes, the creation of a Jewish national home became synonymous with, if not inextricably tied to increasing demands for western Jews to fund it. He does not deny that the project needed vast capitalisation. His objection, rather, is the way it became an end in itself. Worse, Weizmann and the central leadership treated *Keren Hayesod*, Zionism's chief fundraising machine, as a personal fiefdom. Weizmann's famous 1920s struggle with the United States Zionist, Judge Brandeis, for its control and direction thus, far from being an heroic clash between western 'patrician' and eastern 'democratic' versions of Jewry, as traditional narratives would have it, is instead treated as a dispute about its probity, accountability and efficiency.

Berkowitz clearly revels here in the opportunity to slay some cherished Zionist myths. In focusing on the normally unassailable character of Chaim Weizmann he goes for the jugular. Berkowitz does not, however, content himself with hints of money laundering. Implicitly, Weizmann and his managers are accused of turning Zionism into a mirror image of the very

Jewish type which it claimed to modestly detest; namely the *shnorer* who off his rich relative or neighbour by a yarn which promises him that he is blessed if he did and cursed if he didn't. Berkowitz thus charges the enabling western Jewry to identify with the movement characterised by its commitment but one which, in contradiction to its original radical message, practice, utterly banal.

This may be a highly iconoclastic of an aspect of Zionist formation, but also a penetrating one. En route, Berkowitz taps rich, largely unexplored veins, in the connection between Zionism and tourism, an important foray into gender via Henrietta Szold and Hadassah, and another. If this study seems, sometimes a little too kaleidoscopic not to serve for its own good, Berkowitz is to be congratulated not simply for introducing cultural discourses into an often surprisingly insulated judaeocentric historiography but for opening up the study of Zionism in a fresh and bold way.

Mark

Dealing with difference

Frank N Stein books by Ann Jungman (Orchard-Watts)

My first impression of this series was that they look good. The front covers are colourful, fun with lots of nice drawings. But the details don't always match what is written in the books.

The first book is about Frank N Stein. He doesn't have any friends at his new school. Then some kids tease him about his name but they get along rather well. They go to the garage of one of the boys and, using all the junk they can find, build the monster.

Suddenly a storm hits and a bolt of lightning makes the monster come alive. He is very hungry when he wakes up and the children are rather scared of him. But once they get to know him they discover that he's really very nice. When the father of the boy whose garage they are using comes home they tell him about the monster. He thinks they are being silly until the monster starts to talk and to eat his car. The boy's father phones the police... But don't worry there is a happy ending. I thought this was a sweet book and very easy to read.

The second book is called *The Missing Monster*. When his monster goes missing one day Frank N Stein

is frantic. He is worried both about the monster coming to some harm and, without meaning to, doing harm to others -- especially because he loves eating rubbish. This story was more adventurous than the first but in the end didn't hold my attention as well.

The third book, *Monster in Love* was my favourite. The story is that everyone is very happy, tooling along doing their own thing, except the monster who is lonely, until he meets Marina Dodgson, the famous film star who starred in one of the Frankenstein movies. He falls in love with her but can't have her because she's a human and doesn't know how he feels. So Frank and his friend decide to build another monster, a female this time. I like the way that in all the books the government, scientists, nurses and binmen -- everyone is affected by the monster.

In the fourth book, *Monster in Trouble*, his habit of eating rubbish puts the refuse collectors in England out of a job. The German Green Party would rather recycle it and in the Philippines some people live on rubbish tips. This book was more political than the others and unusual in that it showed how people need rubbish. Also it showed the monster as being quite naïve and more sensitive.

Overall these books are pretty good and are probably aimed at an audience aged 6-8.

Lily Barson, aged 10.

Fruitful collaboration

**The Well
The Klezmatics and Chava Alberstein
Xenophile**

The Klezmatics' hallmark is to defy categories. They turn traditional East European Jewish music into a klezmer/jazz/rock fusion and each of their CDs breaks new ground. Not only do they carry their audiences with them from familiar melodies to new sounds, but they have formed creative relationships with an eclectic array of other musicians. Itzhak Perlman was one. Their latest CD, *The Well* is a collaboration with Chava Alberstein, the enormously successful Israeli singer who raised the profile of Yiddish music at a time when Yiddish was suppressed and downgraded. She is also a thorn in the side of the political establishment for her work for peace in the Middle East.

The Well is unusual in many ways. Together, Alberstein and the Klezmatics have set to music Yiddish poetry from the last 100 years. These are songs to make you laugh and to cry; sometimes they approach sentimentality, but they never succumb. Instead, having grabbed you attention, they create a new way of

expressing the Jewish life of yesterday and today. I wasn't sure I liked this CD the first time I listened to it. Now I have played it over and over again and still hear new sounds

and sentiments each time. In particular, *Bay nakht* (By night) and *Mayn Shvester Khaye* (My sister Khaye) seem to capture Jewish history this century.

The booklet with the CD includes the words in Yiddish and English and though the translation is rather eccentric, Alberstein's diction is so clear and her voice so compelling that you hear all the words you thought you never knew. But Yiddish is like that.

Julia Bard



Thoroughly modern massacres

Understanding the Nazi Genocide: Marxism after Auschwitz, Enzo Traverso, Pluto Press, £11.99

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, debate is still raging over how to comprehend one of its defining moments: the mass industrialised slaughter of Jews and Gypsies by the Nazis. On the threshold of a new millennium some fear that even episodes such as Auschwitz will start to be treated as ancient history. Dramatic events within the lifetimes of people living today, driven by forces that are still present, may yet be dismissed as having little significance in the perspectives of those embracing the forward march of civilisation in the new Year Zero. If this is true then the current outpouring of books and theses attempting to explain the mass slaughter in 1940s Europe is surely to be welcomed.

Cynics have detected a crude economic agenda in what has been termed the mushrooming "Shoah business". Publishers, aware that coherent witnesses to the events are now very thin on the ground, have encouraged a host of memoirs. And yet the more books that are written the less we seem able to comprehend what happened and why. If the stage was held once by writers who talked of the impossibility of comprehending Auschwitz, and the inadequacy of language in which to describe it, there is now an onslaught of writers. Some like Daniel Goldhagen or Ernst Nolte seek to give one dimensional explanations backed up by great documentation, and others, like Zygmunt Bauman or Arno Mayer seek to understand the mechanics of the Holocaust as a synthesis of many multi-layered dimensions.

It has also been an arena through which today's political concerns can be articulated. Many Israeli writers have produced scholarship on the genocide to justify the role of Zionism and the State of Israel which followed in its wake. Among left wing activists, the Holocaust has been crudely coopted to militant anti-racist and anti-fascist agendas, often at the expense of recognising the glaring contradictions between the reality of Nazism as a cross class movement and popular theories of fascism and class politics then and now.

According to Enzo Traverso, when

Marxists today repeat the age-old slogan "socialism or barbarism" they are failing to recognise that the 20th century as a whole has already represented the triumph of barbarism and that that barbarism, in a modern industrial setting, is the essential context in which to start to unpick the ways and means through which the Nazi genocide occurred and its many accomplices concurred.

His book is a direct challenge to the conflicting conventional wisdoms on Holocaust historiography promoted by Jewish historians and writers in the Marxist tradition. He does not dismiss them out of hand but identifies their strengths and their limitations. He takes issue most with those who wish to remove the Holocaust from historical analysis, who see it as both unique and unfathomable. But he also criticises their mirror image – the relativists who slip effortlessly between genocides, massacres and oppressions visited on various peoples over the last 200 years, who refuse to acknowledge unique features: aspects that mark a decisive break with previous intentions and practices.

He is particularly convincing in his attack on those who describe Nazism as a backward looking movement, reviving ancient hatreds. For Traverso, Nazism is located where ideologies of biological racism and the most modernising tendencies of industrial society meet. His argument with traditional Marxism is about the blinkered positive hope invested by Marxists in these modernising tendencies, which has made it so difficult for Marxists to come to terms with what he defines as the 'civilisational break' represented by Auschwitz.

Rather than Marxist optimists who continued to trumpet humanity's ultimate redemption through a revolution that would fulfil historical destiny, Traverso lauds the more ambivalent tendency represented by the Frankfurt School Marxists who saw revolution as applying 'the emergency brake capable of halting the rush towards catastrophe'. If Leon Trotsky forcefully announced the

Enzo Traverso



Understanding the Nazi Genocide

Marxism after Auschwitz

gravity of the imminent danger in 1938, says Traverso, it was Walter Benjamin who developed the philosophical categories 'capable of recognising and thinking through the laceration of Auschwitz'.

In enabling us to develop a deeper understanding of the forces that produced not only Auschwitz but also Hiroshima, and more recently Cambodia and Rwanda, Traverso has also done a service to Marxism. He has shown us that socialism is not a battle won in advance by the laws of history but a constantly reflective and critical struggle for liberation that must understand the causes of its defeats in the last century if it is ever to succeed against the resilience of capitalism and the capacity of the modern states' functionaries to destroy all of humankind many times over with or without a philosophy of hatred.

David Rosenberg

I have a truly appalling book to tell you about this time, but let's save that and start on a positive note. *In the memory of the forest* by Charles T Powers (Anchor, £6.99) is a fascinating and beautifully written novel set in contemporary Poland. The book is full of striking insights into life in a small village, both under the communist system and during the more recent revival of capitalism. With gradual hints and then more overtly, the book explores the attitudes of ordinary Poles to the slaughter of millions of their Jewish neighbours during the war. In an episode which encapsulates many of the moral issues, an old man describes how as a partisan he hid and watched while a Jewish family was captured and shot by the Gestapo.



Afif Safieh, Christian Palestinian voice

Many of the farms in the village still use gravestones from the former Jewish cemetery as building materials. It's a powerful and important work, though I have some doubts about using the detective story structure – the book starts as a whodunit in an exotic setting – to deal with major issues like the Holocaust. The cover compares the book, accurately, with Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, another recent murder mystery which delves back into some of the worst horrors of the war. Detective stories are basically escapist nonsense, with interesting dialogue and characters if you're lucky: they arguably don't work as a vehicle for dealing with genuine evil.

I still can't bring myself to mention that horrible book, so let's move on quickly to Frederick E Cohen's sober and well-researched historical study, *The Jews in the Channel Islands during the German occupation 1940-1945* (Institute of Contemporary History (£5 including p&p from the Wiener Library 4 Devonshire St, London W1). Cohen describes the process of bureaucratic racism which culminated in deportation to concentration camps in Germany and, in some cases, to Auschwitz. In a few instances, islanders took considerable personal risks to save Jews, and there is some evidence of formal protests by local political leaders against the anti-Jewish measures. Most of the time, however, the Channel Island authorities did

the shelf

what they were told – interestingly, by the regular German army rather than the SS or other special units, which was unusual compared to other areas that were occupied by the Nazis. Cohen also carefully documents the forced labourers, many of them Jews, who were brought to the Islands: 400 graves have been identified in Alderney alone, though the actual figure for those who died is probably in the thousands.

Now for the dreadful book ... sorry, my conscience continues to resist. Instead, a word about a pamphlet published by the Palestinian General Delegation in the United Kingdom – B Sabella, A Aghazarian and A Safieh, *Christian Voices from the Holy Land: on the eve of the new millennium*. The tone is positive, with the writers describing efforts by Palestinian Christians to build social institutions within the narrow limits of autonomy that the Oslo accords have given them. Possible benefits of tourism to Bethlehem by millennium junkies (my term, not theirs) and relations between the Palestinian Authority and the Vatican, are discussed lucidly and constructively.

The authors note 'dramatic reductions in per capita income, rocketing levels of unemployment and hardly any significant investment' in the West Bank and Gaza, but continue: 'We are condemned to succeed in the economic arena'. Let's hope they are right.

I've put it off long enough. Here's how the book begins: 'Benjamin Netanyahu closed his eyes for a moment, took a deep breath, and walked into the hall. After two months of tense campaigning, he was exhausted. Yet his walk remained firm and confident.' Believe me, it gets worse. Ben Caspit and Ilan Kfir, two journalists on Ma'ariv, have written a stunningly awful biography called *Netanyahu: the road to power* (Vision, £10.99). 'This,' we are told on the cover, 'is the human side of Netanyahu, a man weighed down by tradition and tragedy'.

Written while he was still Prime Minister, the book actually shows that Bibi's main burden was his failure to conceal his extra-marital affairs from his wife: she stuck to him like a leech thereafter, even attending top-secret meetings 'with her short skirt revealing just a little too much thigh'. Heady stuff.

The only useful piece of information in this atrocious writing comes in a description of how Netanyahu courted the West Bank settlers (what a lovely word – we should call them what they are, 'land-grabbers'), by setting up over 80 political offices on the other side of the Green Line during his bid for power. Of course, once he was in power and didn't do exactly what they wanted, his settler friends turned on him and plastered the country with pictures of Netanyahu wearing a kaffiyeh with the caption 'Liar!'. It's nice when the bad guys start attacking each other.

As Prime Minister, Netanyahu made extensive use of his charm and PR skills, managing to alienate Ariel Sharon, David Levy, most of the Likud Party, fanatical Zionists like Bill Clinton and Madeleine Albright and many Jews round the world. The most important thing, though, is that while Netanyahu may have gone, Sharon and Levy are – God help us – still in the Israeli cabinet. Barak may yet bring about major changes for the better – but that's a bit like expecting the Mafia to stick to selling vegetables after Don Corleone died. I'm not holding my breath.

Raf Salkie



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