

THEY WERE NOT SILENT

the United States Jewish Labour Movement and the Holocaust

Video presentation and lecture by Dr Gail Malmgreen
(Labor Archives, New York University)

7.30pm Sunday 7 May

at the Jewish Museum, 80 East End Rd, London N3

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JEWISH SOCIALIST

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

No 41 Spring 2000
£1.50



BREAKING RANKS

radicals and dissenters within minorities

The state and Holocaust memory ■ Women v rabbis ■ Orwell revisited ■ Kinky Friedman interview

JEWISH SOCIALIST

NO 41 SPRING 2000

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EDITORIAL

WELCOME to the first new-style issue of Jewish Socialist.

Despite pleas to stay as we were, we felt we were long overdue for a rethink and a facelift. We hope you like what the new magazine says and how it looks and feels.

With the new look we are very pleased to welcome a number of new writers. In the 1990s, Britain's Jewish community media finally started to open up; nevertheless we remain the only consistently and explicitly socialist publication in Anglo-Jewry. We are glad that more and more people are seeing our magazine as the vehicle through which to communicate their views to the people they want to reach.

One change is to have more clearly defined sections. Each issue will have one section of articles on a theme. This issue the theme is radicals and dissenters in minority groups which we knew would bring to light interesting material and also fulfil a goal of uniting our concerns as radical Jews with like-minded people in other minorities who are living and struggling for change in the same society. Our articles (pages 20-26) focus particularly on Jewish and Asian experience in Britain and reflect both historical and contemporary debates.

Another new section will feature current controversies. With Tony Blair's government taking time out from its scaremongering campaign against Gypsy asylum-seekers to create an official Holocaust Day in Britain, the protracted David Irving trial reaching its conclusion, new books questioning the motives of those who have made study of the Holocaust central to their life's work or who wish to make it central to an analysis of society's problems, there are clearly many difficult issues to untangle. We hope that the articles we are presenting (pages 7-12) offer new insights and perspectives.

A very different controversy, raging with growing passion in Jewish communities, concerns the impact of rabbinic divorce laws on women. This issue has been the focus of increasingly high profile campaigns. Dena Attar (page 13) argues that women need to bypass the laws rather than wait for the rabbis to act.

Selling the magazine at meetings and demonstrations is always a great pleasure, but we attract some strange questions which we suspect sellers of other publications don't have to contend with. Other socialists ask: 'Why do you need a Jewish socialist magazine? Isn't the Left divided enough?' Selling at Jewish meetings we get asked: 'Why Jewish socialist? Isn't the community divided enough?' A specifically Jewish socialist tradition of struggle has been in existence across the world for more than 100 years. We are sure that it will continue. We have included a much fuller statement of the purpose of our magazine than we have previously published (page 31) and in each issue we will try to provide content that meets these purposes.

Enjoy reading **JEWISH SOCIALIST** and let us know what you think. »

Up the cyber pass

At the same time as the magazine relaunch we are launching the Jewish Socialists' Group website. It gives information about joining the group and about our programme of events. It has extracts from the magazine past and present; a noticeboard of meetings, campaigns, events of interest to Jewish socialists, anti-racists, peace campaigners; news about the Red Herring Children's Club and the Jewish Socialist drop-in club; sources/resources on Jews and socialism - books, videos, magazines, exhibitions, libraries; and links to other websites.

» www.jewish-socialist.org » www.redherringclub.com

NEWS

Asylum seekers are arriving in Britain to find the Home Office using methods learnt from Austria and the Czech Republic

In February the Home Office was forced to admit that a refugee in detention had committed suicide rather than be returned to Lithuania. Three Romany refugees had attempted suicide in Haslar Detention Centre just two weeks earlier. No one would report the story.

In everything about Britain's new firmer, faster, unfairer treatment of refugees, the Roma are the lowest of the low. All the worst measures of the new Immigration and Asylum Act were tried out on Roma before they became law: reducing the time to make a legal statement from 28 days to five; routinely imprisoning the heads of families who had all arrived legally; issuing vouchers

Roma family

Photo: Tobias Goulden



When did you last get an election?

A new report questions the Board of Deputies' right to speak for British Jews

The self proclaimed leaders of British Jews - the Chief Rabbi and the Board of Deputies - have been dealt a major blow by the publication of a new report on representation and the Jewish community, published by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. A Community of Communities was the result of a two-year investigation. Of the original 19 academics and professionals who comprised the research commission, seven resigned along the way, two of them just days before publication, apparently not wishing to be associated with its findings.

The report states that the Jewish community in Britain is pluralist and diverse, it cannot be represented by any single voice, and should regard itself as an 'ethnic group' for purposes of representation. Contrary to the exclusivist view of the religious

instead of cash benefits; accommodating whole households in partitioned rooms in condemned council property.

Europe-Roma, the new organisation for Roma refugees of all nations, joined with campaigners outside the Home Office to light a candle for the dead and the 1,000 other detainees. Sending a message to the march against Jürg Haider a week before, Europe-Roma described how Haider uses coded words for Gypsies in his anti-foreigner diatribes and reported Haider's shocking claim that a neo-Nazi bomb at Oberwart which killed three Roma was really set off by Gypsies themselves. The message also reported that Austrian Gypsies are having their citizenship taken away, being turned into foreigners in their own country.

Back in Fortress Britain, our Home Office has introduced visas which have resulted in Slovakian refugee families being split for ever. Our Immigration Services made the Czech national airlines mark their embarkation lists with 'G' for Gypsy. Now the Roma refugees are being fast-tracked for deportation by secretive Pilot Teams inside each air terminal, which aim to get each asylum seeker out of the country within 48 hours.

While Britain shuts the gates, the Romany people face catastrophe right across Europe, being evicted from or burnt out of their homes, killed, raped, permanently injured both by neo-Nazis and local police. Computer games and popular musicals openly joke about murdering Gypsies. The echoes for anyone of Jewish descent are very clear.

Europe-Roma is wrestling with this desperate situation. We call on all Jewish people to help the Roma. We want you to join us first in organising a massive march to the Czech Embassy. The Czech Republic must not be allowed into the EU until it ends segregation and punishes racial murder. Meanwhile the Czech Roma must be treated as genuine refugees from persecution as they have been in Canada. »

Amanda Sebestyen

Contact Europe Roma:

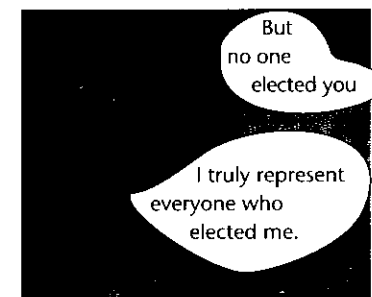
020 7267 8198; 07930 112 712; 07790 360 276. Europe-Roma also urgently welcomes all offers of help, skills and permanent office space.

Standing up for Roma Rights: Public meeting Tuesday 9th May at 7.30. With Jeremy Hardy, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Ladislav Balaz (Europe-Roma Organisation) and Donald Kenrick (author of Gypsies under the Swastika). Grand Committee Room, House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1.

right, the report states that Jewish identity must rest on self-definition.

The report is a vindication of the view long expressed by the Jewish Socialists' Group. In the 1980s there was a series of acrimonious battles between the JSG and the Board of Deputies who were claiming to be the sole legitimate political representative of Jewish opinion. The JSG held that behind the semi-democratic façade of the Board's parliament, were unelected committees and paid officers taking the key decisions on issues affecting the entire community.

Our exposure of the cosy and closed relationship between the Board, the Chief Rabbi's office, the Israeli embassy and the then monopolistic media organ, the Jewish Chronicle, our demands for other voices to be heard, our assertion that Jews were an ethnic



group whose concerns meshed with those of other minorities, and our refusal to allow definitions of Jewishness to be kept purely within a religious or Zionist straitjacket, led to ferocious attacks on the group by the establishment. In a new century we seem to be finding new allies. »

A Community of Communities is available from the JPR, 79 Wimpole Street, London W1M 7DD. Tel 020 7935 8266. Email: jpr@ort.org. Website: www.jpr.org.uk



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THE WORLD

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Israeli peace links

**A round-up of
contacts in
Israel and
Palestine
working for a
peaceful future
together**

Red and green choir

Red and Green Choir came together in March 1998. It began as a small group, which met in one member's home with the help of musical arranger Graham Knight. In September 1999 we became a Workers Educational Association evening class and took on our permanent conductor, John Hamilton.

We took the name Red and Green from a song by Robb Johnson as it reflected the political and environmental concerns that we wanted to address in our songs and by singing at events.

Most of our songs are in four parts – soprano, alto, tenor and bass – though like most choirs we are very short of tenors. As well as singing, any member who wants to conduct the choir is able to do so and we hope that choir members will soon be writing and arranging new songs for Red and Green.

The choir chooses its own repertoire from songs that reflect current issues and campaigns such as anti-war songs, socialist issues or songs for environmental campaigns.

Our aim is to sing at any political event or demonstration that members want to support. We have sung at events against the bombing of Yugoslavia, demonstrations to stop educational cuts,

at the Jubilee 2000 event in central London and outside the Houses of Parliament for Pinochet's extradition to Spain. We have also sung at folk clubs and have a regular spot at the Fair Trade exhibition at Olympia.

We have attended, busked and performed at street music festivals in Leicester and Bradford. Some of the choir went to Raise your Banners in Sheffield last November.

We have all gained musically from our continued practice, learning new skills of conducting, song-writing and arranging and have gained confidence in our own abilities. The choir has also become an important social focus for its members and their families for more socialising, singing and song workshops.

The choir would like to grow and is always open to new members. Red and Green is for anyone who enjoys singing and there is no audition to join. We put all the songs on tape and learn our parts from the tapes. You do not need to be able to read music or have any musical background. **Leslie Barson**

Red and Green Choir meets regularly on Mondays from 7.30pm to 9.30pm in Kilburn, north west London. For information ring 020 7372 1380 or 020 7624 6809.

Gush Shalom Israeli peace activists.
PO Box 3322 Tel-Aviv 61033 Israel.
Tel (00 972) 3 5221732.
Email info@gush-shalom.org.
Website www.gush-shalom.org (with
good links to other sites).

Bat Shalom Israeli women peace
activists.
PO Box 8083 Jerusalem 91080 Israel.
Email batshlo@netvision.il.
Website www.batshalom.org.

The Other Israel,
POB 2542, Holon 58125 Israel.
Email otherisr@actcom.co.il.

**Council for Israeli-Palestinian
Peace**.
Website http://members.tripod.
com/~other_Israel/

Four Mothers Movement
campaigning for an immediate
Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.
Linda Ben-Zvi
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Fax 9 9561180.
Email lindabz@post.tau.ac.il.

Red Line take non-violent direct
action for Israeli withdrawal from
Lebanon.
Email yona@netvision.net.il.
Website www.angelfire.com
/il/FourMothers/

Peace Now in Jerusalem protest
against the proposed Har Homa
settlement on Abu Ghneim
Mountain and the 'Greater Jerusalem
Plan' (see LAW website below).
Tel (00 972) 2 5660648.
Email peacenow@actcom.co.il
Website www.peace-now.org/

**The Palestinian Human Rights
Association (LAW)**, PO Box 20873,
Jerusalem.
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Fax (00 972) 2 5811072.
Email law@lawsociety.org.
Website: www.lawsociety.org

**The Israeli Committee Against
House Demolitions (ICAHD)**, c/o
Jeff Halper, Rehov Tiveria 37,
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Tel (00 972) 2 6248252.
Email: halper@iol.co.il.
Website www.net-a.org/hdemol).

**The Palestinian Land Defence
Committee (LDGC)**, c/o Issa
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B'tselem, Israeli Information Center
for Human Rights in the Occupied
Territories. 43 Emek Refaim Street,
Jerusalem, Israel.
Email btselem@actcom.co.il.
Website www.btselem.org
(see story about the victory
for Palestinian cave-dwellers
opposite).

Open Doors, Israeli academics
opposing Administrative Detention
without trial.
Email matar@post.tau.ac.il.

Yesh Gvul, Israelis who refuse to
serve in the Occupied Territories.
Email ishai@shatil.nif.org.il.

**Movement for the Civil-ization
[de-militarization] of Israeli
Society**, POB 48005 Tel-Aviv 61480
Ariga, useful Israeli peace/alternative
website www.ariga.com/

Israeli Feminist Forum,
email iff-l@research.haifa.ac.il

Foundation for Middle East Peace
1763 N Street, NW Washington DC
20036. Tel 202 835 3560.
Fax 202 835 3651.
Email jeff@clark.net.
Website www.fmep.org.

**Alternative Information Centre
Jerusalem-Bethlehem**.
Email aicmail@trendline.co.uk.
Website http://aic.netgate.net.

**Arab Association for Human Rights
(HRA)** in defence of human rights of
the Palestinian minority in Israel.
Factsheets on a range of issues
available from HRA, PO Box 215
Nazareth 16101 Israel.
Tel (00 972) 6 656 1923.
Fax (00 972) 6 656 4934.
Email hra@g-ol.com.
Website www.arabhra.org

**Women's Organisation for Political
Prisoners (WOFPP)**, POB 31811
Tel Aviv, Israel.
Tel and Fax (00 972) 3 5286050

**The Society for the Protection of
Personal Rights for Lesbians, Gay
Men and Bisexuals in Israel (SPPR)**,
POB 37604, Tel Aviv 61375.
Fax (00 972) 3 5252341.

**Kav La'oved, Worker's Hotline for
the Protection of Worker's Rights**,
founded in particular to defend the
rights of Palestinian workers
employed in Israel.
78 Allenby Street, POB 2319,
Tel Aviv 61022.
Fax (00 972) 3 5173081.

One of the children
evicted from their cave
homes in the West Bank

Photo: Chen Yanay/B'Tselem

OFRA HAZA: A TRUE SHAME

Ofra Haza, the most successful Israeli singer on the international stage, died on 23 February 2000 at the age of 41. Reluctant to be a reformer and jealous of her privacy, her death has nonetheless raised a series of debates across Israel.

When the surprise news of her critical illness broke, there was silence from both her family and the hospital regarding the cause. During her 10-day hospitalisation, speculation in Israeli e-chatrooms was rampant; and following her death, the quality daily Ha'aretz confirmed the growing rumours with a report that she had died of AIDS. The family continue to maintain their silence and denial, but the press has raised some controversial social arguments.

There has been a debate about the public's right to know versus the star's personal privacy. Sometimes this debate has revealed an appalling level of misunderstanding, including those who ignorantly accused Haza of putting the medical staff at risk through her non-disclosure, after it was said that not even the doctors at Tel HaShomer Hospital knew of Haza's HIV status when she arrived in a grave condition. Others have self-righteously blamed her shame and secrecy for a lost opportunity, chastising her for not playing a role like that of America's Magic Johnson, the popular athlete who went public about his status and who today is an AIDS educator.

Anger has been targeted at Haza's unpopular and controlling husband, who, some commentators say, pressured her not to reveal her status in order to protect himself. The Tel-Aviv weekly listings magazine, *Ha-Ir*, tied the husband to criminality and drug use. All of this has also highlighted the impact of the Internet on official Israeli media censorship. As Yael Levin, an Israeli web-expert, told me, 'All the forums and the chats in Israeli portals were full with people chatting about the reasons.'

More importantly, there has been a good deal of

analysis of how the stigma still attached to AIDS may have caused her death, by preventing her from getting appropriate treatment in time. The British gay weekly Pink Paper headlined its story 'Singing star could have been saved.' Tellingly, there was a surge of HIV test requests from the Israeli public immediately following her death.

According to the AP writer Ron Kampeas, 'fewer than 3,000 of six million Israelis carry the HIV virus. I would amend his statement: 3,000 are known to be infected. The lack of public debate and of governmental health education campaigns has allowed ignorance and shame to dominate.'

Now, however, Haza has unwittingly contributed to opening up the discussion. Doctors, journalists and AIDS activists have been widely quoted throughout the press, finally giving them an essential forum. The editor who broke the story asked, 'Isn't it time that the citizens of Israel relate to AIDS as they do to cancer or dysentery?'

Haza crossed a number of barriers in her career. One of eight children of poor Yemenite immigrants to Israel, she brought Mizrahi or eastern music into the mainstream. While Mizrahi music has always had a strong following amongst those Israelis of North African and Arabic descent, it was traditionally denied radio playtime and considered low popular culture. Her remarkable success, particularly in Europe and the USA, contributed to the acceptability and admiration of eastern-based and world music today.

Highlights of her career include representing Israel at Eurovision, a nomination for a Grammy in the World Beat category, performing at the request of Yitzhak Rabin at the Nobel Peace Prize awards in Oslo and singing the part of Moses' mother in the Spielberg animated film 'Prince of Egypt.' Her funeral attracted thousands of mourning fans, but her official website is unwilling to say more than, 'Ofra, we love you and miss you.' **Spike Katz**

Caving in to the settlers

B'tselem, the Israeli human rights organisation, is campaigning in support of 700 Palestinians from the South Mount Hebron area who were expelled from their homes in villages including Mufqara, Tuba and Jinba where they live in caves and shacks, working as farmers and grazing their flocks.

The area has been the subject of several revised military orders since the 1970s. On 15th November 1999, 24-hour evacuation orders were served on residents of Mufqara. The next day soldiers destroyed the residents' tents, sealed their caves and drove away their flocks. The residents' property, including mattresses, blankets and utensils, were confiscated.

B'tselem rejects the 'military' justification and believe that the intent is to 'create facts' and create territorial continuity between Israeli settlements in the area on the eve of the final-status peace agreement.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel filed legal

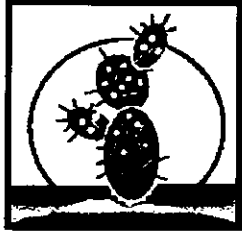


petitions against the expulsion and, on 29th March, the Israeli Supreme Court gave an interim ruling that the cave dwellers can go home. After that, an arbitrator acceptable to both sides will look into the dispute.

Gush Shalom, one of the groups participating in the campaign said: 'Today has proved that together we can sometimes make a difference.'

Unmarked ruins

DEIR YASSIN REMEMBERED



دير ياسين في الذاكرة

Further info from Deir Yassin Remembered
020 7607 7408
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dyr@eisen.demon.com.uk

On the morning of 9th April 1948, commandos of the Irgun (headed by Menachem Begin) and the Stern Gang attacked the Arab village of Deir Yassin in west Jerusalem. It was several weeks before the end of the British Mandate and the declaration of the State of Israel. The village lay outside the area which the United Nations would assign to the Jewish state; it had a peaceful reputation, but it was located on the high ground of the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem corridor, and with the knowledge of the mainstream Jewish Defence Force, the Haganah, it was to be conquered and held.

Unable to conquer the village at first, they elicited the help of a small band of Palmach troops (elite Haganah fighters) and Deir Yassin fell. The Palmach soldiers left and the massacre began. That evening, in the neighbouring Jewish settlement of Givat Shaul, gang members told foreign correspondents that over 200 Arabs had been killed and 40 taken prisoner. This was reported in the *New York Times* the next day. The terrorists boasted of the 'battle' but made no mention of the male Palestinians whom they had loaded onto trucks, paraded through Jewish sections of Jerusalem, then taken back to a stone quarry between Givat Shaul and Deir Yassin and killed. On 13th April the *New York Times* reported that 254 Arab men, women, and children had been killed at Deir Yassin; there was no mention of prisoners.

Haganah leaders denounced the Irgun and the Stern Gang dissidents accusing them of massacre, robbery, looting and barbarism. Ben Gurion sent an apology to King Abdullah. But this horrific act served the future state of Israel well. As Begin said, 'Arabs throughout the country, induced to believe wild tales of "Irgun butchery" were seized with limitless panic and started to flee for their lives.' Modern historians believe Begin exaggerated the number of Arabs killed but they all agree that the Deir Yassin massacre marked the beginning of the depopulation of over 400 Arab villages and the exile of over 700,000 Palestinians.

Despite protests by Martin Buber and other noted scholars, within a year the village was repopulated with orthodox Jewish immigrants from Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Its cemetery was bulldozed. Its name was wiped off the map.

Although nearly every Palestinian knows of Deir Yassin, few have been there. The site is not identified on post-1948 maps of Israel. The central part of Deir Yassin is a cluster of buildings now used as a mental hospital. To the east lies Givat Shaul; to the north lies Har Hamenuhot (the Jewish cemetery), to the west is Har Nof, a new settlement of orthodox Jews. To the

south is a steep valley containing part of the Jerusalem Forest. On the other side of that valley, roughly a mile and a half from Deir Yassin, and in clear view of it, are Mount Herzl and Yad Vashem.

But Deir Yassin today is not easy to visit. There are no signs, plaques or memorials of any kind. The cemetery is largely gone; the ruins of the *deir* (monastery) are unmarked; and the quarry from which the residents made a living and in which the bodies of those massacred were piled up and burned is buried under a fuel storage depot. The orthodox Jews living there either do not know or refuse to acknowledge Deir Yassin's history.

It is unfortunate that Palestinians do not visit Yad Vashem. They believe that the Holocaust was misused as a justification or rationalisation for the creation of the state of Israel and for the conquest and confiscation of their homes and villages. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate because looking north from Yad Vashem is a spectacular panoramic view of Deir Yassin. The Holocaust museum is beautiful and the message never to forget people's potential for inhumanity is timeless. The children's museum is particularly heart wrenching; in a dark room filled with candles and mirrors, the names of Jewish children who perished in the Holocaust are read aloud with their places of birth. When leaving this portion of the museum a visitor is facing north and looking directly at Deir Yassin. For those who know what they are looking at, the irony is breathtaking.

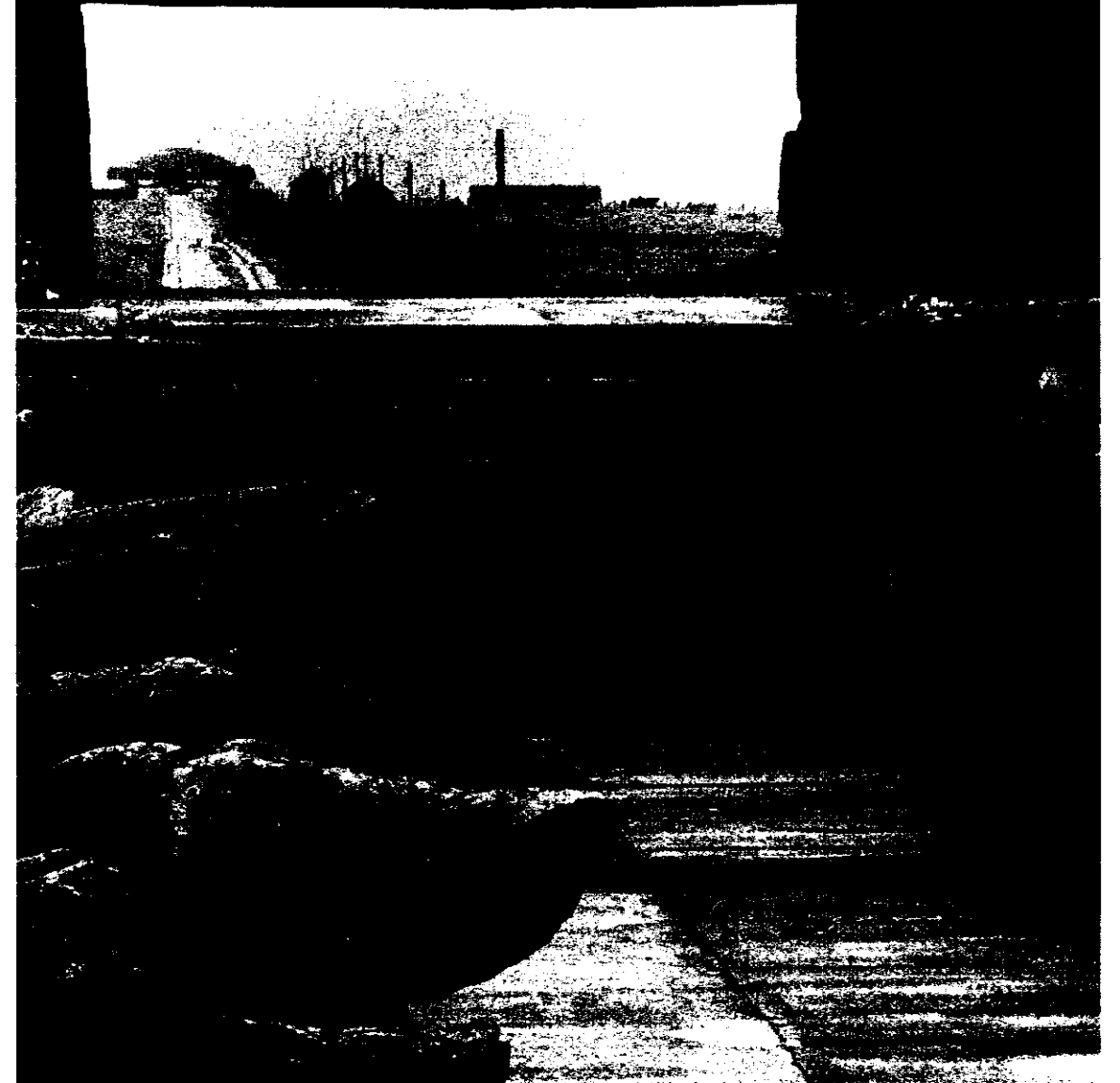
The historical suffering of the Jews has been rightly acknowledged and memorialised. But there are few memorials for Palestinians who died in 1948. Their history has been largely buried and forgotten. And yet, like the descendants of victims in Armenia, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, China and Cambodia the descendants of Palestinians want the world to remember what they suffered, what they lost and why they died. Today, Israelis and Palestinians are involved in the Middle-East Peace Process. In the spirit of reconciliation essential for its success, the organisers of Deir Yassin Remembered believe it is appropriate for the suffering of the Palestinians to likewise be acknowledged and memorialised.

But while the main purpose of Deir Yassin Remembered is to build a suitable memorial, the organisation has a broader, more humanitarian objective: to eliminate prejudice against Palestinians and to promote the human side of a people who have been the victims of the Zionist colonisation of their land and of the apartheid conditions under which they now live. ■ **Paul Eisen**

Building unity

Young First Nation members in Toronto recently took part in a volunteer effort to help restore desecrated tombstones and a Holocaust memorial in a Jewish cemetery. The effort was initiated by Tony Deguid, a Mohawk art restorer and board member of a Native Men's Residence which works with Ve'ahafta – the Canadian Jewish and Humanitarian Relief Committee. Last year Ve'ahafta worked with the Residence on its Street Help project. Deguid said: 'The Jewish community, especially Ve'ahafta, has bent over backwards to help us in our time of need. We can do something, as one community to another, saying we empathise.' Shawn Beauvais, a Swampy Cree youth involved with the project, said: 'Since I'm a minority myself, I feel we've got to help each other.' ■ Reported in *Canadian Jewish Outlook*

Protecting memories



Tolkin's memorial at Majdanek

Photo: James Young

The British government's decision to institute a Holocaust Day raises to difficult questions about how we pass on the memory of that cataclysmic and defining event of the 20th century, who interprets it, and how we can relate it to other genocides, past, present and future. On the following pages, **NORMAN JACOBS** explores the implications of an official commemoration day; **DAVID CESARANI** argues in favour; and **DAVID ROSENBERG** looks at some of the problems

Earmarking a day of remembrance may be a cynical manoeuvre to bypass British atrocities but it does place responsibility for preventing future genocides on the international community, says **NORMAN JACOBS**

THE BURDEN OF HISTORY IS BRITAIN'S

The Holocaust has reinforced how people conceive of morality and identity, and is perhaps the defining event of the last century's long list of atrocities and inhumanities. Now the British Labour government has decided to mark this most tragic episode in Europe's history by creating a national Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27th January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the consequence of a suggestion made during a Prime Minister's Question Time last June by Andrew Dismore, the Labour MP for Hendon North-West.

The proposal was first announced officially by Home Secretary Jack Straw. He declared that the intention of allocating a day in the national calendar to memory of the Holocaust was to reflect on 'tragedies in world history'. However, with the date already being marked by the European Union Genocide Remembrance Day, as well as separate commemorations in Germany, Italy and Sweden there has been some argument as to whether it is necessary or even correct to highlight the Holocaust as paradigmatic of all the atrocities of the 20th century. Moreover, it may be questioned why a country in which Nazi occupation did not occur should focus on the Holocaust. Why highlight one genocide above other world atrocities? Surely, the 'lessons of the Holocaust' mentioned in the proposal may be learned elsewhere when one considers the horrifying technologically possible acts of human against human. The more recent ethnic massacres in Cambodia, Kosovo, Rwanda and East Timor – or even the bombing of civilians in Nagasaki and Hiroshima – are just some of the inhumanities which say practically the same thing about the state of civilised humanity's ethics.

History, whether we wish to accept it or not, serves as an object lesson. Perhaps this is why Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks at once declared news of the proposal a 'brave and significant idea', which would serve as 'a powerful reminder of the vulnerability and necessity of freedom and the dignity of difference'. Such words echo President Clinton's address at the opening in 1993 of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC when he claimed that the museum would serve as 'a constant reminder of our duty to build and nurture the institutions of public tranquillity and humanity'.

Unpacking Clinton's words we may see that behind the \$168 million cost of this museum lies a

fundamental self-referential political message, one probably not lost on British government decision makers. It is very easy to justify the notion that the Final Solution was prevented from achieving its aim due to the Allies and their moral resolve. The ideological conflict between present-day democracy and past authoritarianism can be consolidated to be regarded as a battle between good and evil.

It may seem logical to conclude that today's woes are nothing compared with yesterday. Democracy could never be culpable for wrongdoing. Present-day British multiculturalism is thus put forward as the true ethos of post-Enlightenment Europe. Such thinking is worrying to some. Lauding multiculturalism in a country historically at odds with its past may be regarded as an attempt at airbrushing over the past 600 of colonialism. Of course, erasing the sovereign past's inglorious moments by focusing on Britain's victory in the Second World War may not be surprising. However, remembrance as a means toward greater social empathy is not necessarily the best way to confront the past, particularly when dealing with the Holocaust. Rather it may tend to erode its reality as an historical fact for whatever self-serving political motives happen to be current.

Conferring some overreaching human significance on the past, installing the metaphors of tranquillity and humanity on the present leave some commentators less than appreciative. Norman Lebrecht, writing in *The Jewish Chronicle*, rejects the proposal as an example of a kind of professional political correctness which borders on propaganda. Lebrecht also suggests that by creating a British Holocaust Day a wily piece of restructuring history is committed, an attempt to absolve the fact that the British government authorities refused to admit survivors of the Holocaust into Mandate Palestine and that Allied planes could have bombed the Auschwitz railroad as a means to frustrate the Nazi mass murders.

Acknowledging the above, one may feel instantly opposed to any government handling of history, especially when related to one's own community. However, correct as Lebrecht and other critics may be, there are ways in which much more positive consequences may be seen to come about when the government proceeds with its proposal. Remembering the Holocaust is far too important an event to ignore. More than any other symbol,



the Holocaust is a warning of what may happen if the fight against prejudice is allayed. None of the Jews or countless other individuals who suffered under Nazism – Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs, Romanies and homosexuals – were inherently victims. It was, of course, Nazism that was innately diseased. The Holocaust was a multinational genocide and is therefore an international issue. This is why we should welcome rather than reject a Holocaust Remembrance Day in this country. Commemorating the Holocaust is a step in the growing internationalisation of Britain, something which would be praised if it were to take place in either Austria or Poland. In addition, although marking 'international genocide' would be correct, genocide refers to a particular act. But that the word is too vague.

A Holocaust Remembrance Day is appropriate for other reasons besides. Stephen Smith, director of Nottinghamshire's Beth Shalom Holocaust Education Centre, personally welcomes the proposal. Smith founded the Centre following a day he and his brother, both Christians, visited Yad Vashem in Israel. He strongly affirms that the Holocaust is not just a Jewish issue. 'We realised that the Holocaust was not really a Jewish problem.

While the burden will lie with the Jewish community as an integral and tragic part of their history for all time, the cause lies with us all,' Smith argues. 'Most books and films on the subject seemed to be created by Jews, which is natural, essential and important. But where is everyone else? The reaction of others?' That Smith took an initiative from outside the Jewish community was deliberate. As he argues, Christians should be seen taking their own responsibility.

Concerning the proposal itself, several matters still need to be clarified. Firstly, there is no statement as to what or even whether public funding will be forthcoming to make possible all the education displays, library and media events which will surround the commemoration. Secondly, no one wants their history to be relativised by or regurgitated out of some government think-tank. Television offering the sort of images that only horrify, not inform, must be avoided at all costs. Sensationalism is no replacement for learning history and, hopefully, ethics. Whatever takes place, it must be done with caution and respect. The duty of remembrance is great, as is the duty of impressing on society what may be learned from the past.

German Sinti and Rom revisit Auschwitz
Photo: D Altheer

A SPRINGBOARD TO MEDITATE ON MASS MURDER

The victims and survivors are part of Britain's heritage and a day of remembrance would enable us to convey the specifics of genocide, says **DAVID CESARANI**

Britain is good at remembering certain things, like Battle of Britain Day, VE Day and, of course, Remembrance Day. The country abounds with the statues of national heroes and war memorials. But the Holocaust is not commemorated. The government wants to change that. So why should there be a Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain?

First of all, it is part of our history. Jews fleeing Nazism found refuge here: they and their descendants are part of British society. On the other hand, British forces blocked Jewish refugees from finding safety in Palestine. The RAF didn't try to bomb Auschwitz, however British soldiers liberated Belsen concentration camp. Thousands of Holocaust survivors rebuilt their lives in Britain and their story became a part of Britain's heritage.

Moreover, the Holocaust is a defining event of the 20th century. It happened because a modern, democratic, cultured, industrial society, like our own, slid into barbarism. Men, women and children were oppressed, hunted and slaughtered because of arbitrary racial-biological definitions. Jews were the main victims. But the disabled, Sinti and Roma, gay men and women, black people, and 'Slavs' were persecuted, murdered or consigned to death in vast numbers. The Holocaust exemplifies the worst that can happen when civil and human rights are abused, warning where impatience with pluralism and democracy, prejudice, and rampant science can lead.

The government proposes to set aside one day on

which to recall all these victims and to focus attention, especially in schools, on the phenomena of genocide. However, objectors claim that other genocides would be overshadowed, their victims obscured. This is considered doubly heinous by those who believe that the Holocaust pales by comparison with Stalin's crimes. And what about the Atlantic slave trade?

These protests misunderstand the government's intention. Holocaust Memorial Day, tentatively scheduled for 27th January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, would become the springboard for a wide-ranging meditation on persecution and mass murder. But it would respect the unprecedented, unparalleled assault upon the Jews. This is essential if the event is to convey the danger when prejudice and politics mix, when religious animosity commingles with 'scientific' racism, when casual violence conspires with industrialised murder, and state propaganda is used to dehumanise groups of people. This combination was specific to the Holocaust.

Certain opponents claim to prefer a 'genocide day', but this would be a meaningless blur. The point of remembrance is to restore identity to the victims and comprehend the perpetrators. To understand we need a name, a face – like Eichmann or Primo Levi. Such a day could set a major precedent for challenging our selective national memory, opening the way for days to recall other dark chapters of British and world history.

A NEO-NAZI EXPLAINS:

**THERE WAS NO HOLOCAUST.
IT WAS INVENTED BY THOSE BLOODY JEWS
THOSE GODDAM BASTARDS THE JEWS.
THEY'RE EVERYWHERE,
WITH THEIR MONEY, THEIR POWER AND THEIR INFLUENCE.
THE ONE THING THAT STOPS US GETTING POWER
IS THAT BLOODY STORY THAT THERE WAS A PLAN
TO GET RID OF THEM.
IT MAKES US LOOK
(HOW SHALL I SAY?)
NOT VERY NICE.
IF ONLY WE COULD CONVINCE THE WORLD
THAT THERE NEVER WAS A PLAN TO GET RID OF THEM
AND NO ONE EVER DID GET RID OF THEM
WE COULD GET INTO POWER
AND – ER –
GET RID OF THEM.**

MICHAEL ROSEN

THE HOLOCAUST AND THE STATE

The maverick Israeli writer Boaz Evron once commented that the Jewish people suffered two enormous catastrophes in the 20th century. The first, of course, was the Holocaust. The second, he suggested, was the interpretation of the Holocaust. The turn of a new century is pushing the Holocaust out of the arena of contemporary politics into history and memory; and the announcement of a Holocaust Day will ensure the institutionalisation by the state of what many have categorised as the defining moment of the 20th century. Today the power to interpret the Holocaust has never been so immense or so dangerous. The current spate of comment about a 'Holocaust industry' with far-reaching warnings from friends that we are reaching Holocaust overload has brought a defensive retort from the historians that for several decades the world didn't want to know, but such history cannot be kept under the surface.

Personally, I would rather there was too much than too little research and discussion of it. But while they play tit-for-tat, we are in danger of missing a more significant issue. As the generation which can give eye-witness accounts dies out, and the events themselves are shadowed by more recent attempts at mass murder elsewhere, the description and interpretation of the Holocaust is slipping from the realm of public property to becoming the sole property of professional historians. Their powerful role as framers and guardians of our history will be further bolstered by official approval by the state. While it must be beneficial to gain as much knowledge about how the Nazi genocide happened, when decisions were taken, what specific processes were set in motion and through which mechanisms, the careful researchers of such minutiae may not be best placed to decide on the lessons of this horrific episode for humanity.

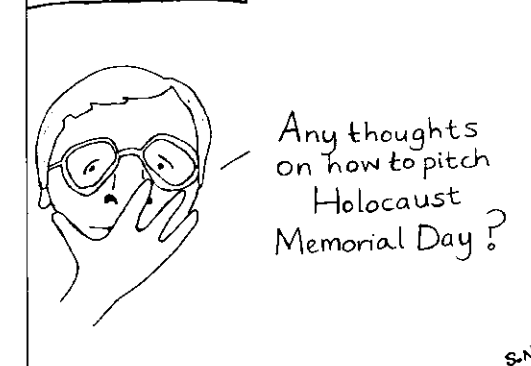
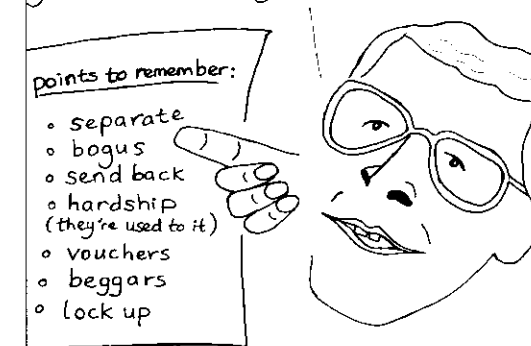
The renowned survivor Elie Wiesel did a great disservice to history when he declared many years ago that the Holocaust defied the language of interpretation. Quite rightly there was a backlash from historians who refused to accept that there was any event on the planet that was ultimately inexplicable. A great outpouring of theses followed and along the way a little intellectual humility was lost. From people grasping towards what they admitted was probably a minimal, partial understanding of the multi-layered question of what happened to the Jews and to other victims of the Nazis, and why, a new generation of historians began to declare that they had found the sole reason. For the young Harvard professor Daniel Goldhagen it was the German psyche. For many Israeli historians, when Israel was seeking to consolidate a role it claimed at the centre of Jewish life, the scale of the Nazi crimes were due to weak and powerless Diaspora Jews going 'like lambs to

the slaughter'. Popular Israeli interpretations of the Holocaust emerging from history departments of the 1970s and '80s dovetailed so neatly with Israeli state ideology that you could barely see the join. And state memorials such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem explicitly promoted a dominant view that a Jewish fortress state was the only hope and safeguard of the future of the Jews. What hopes and safeguards there were for other victims – the Gypsies, disabled people, homosexuals – one can only wonder.

A new generation of Israeli historians are only now shedding some light on the weight of ideology in the historiography actively encouraged by the Israeli state, but the Israeli experience stands as a warning of what can happen if the state is allowed to take on the role of interpreting history. My personal involvement in Holocaust memorialisation is on a smaller scale.

Seven years ago, with a small group including several survivors whose roots were in the Bund, the Jewish Workers Movement of Poland, I set about creating a small but permanent memorial to Szmul Zygielbojm. He was a Jewish socialist member of the Polish Parliament in Exile in London during the Second World War who escaped the Nazis' clutches in 1940 and spent a lonely year in London trying to alert the Allied powers to the gravity of the situation facing Poland's remaining Jews and the need for exceptional action to save them. Zygielbojm

Our policies on asylum seekers have gone down extremely well in focus groups



Cartoon: Sophie Nicol

The danger of establishing a day of remembrance is that we'll end up with one official interpretation of the memories, argues **DAVID ROSENBERG**

committed suicide at his Paddington flat in May 1943, crushed by the news of the final destruction of the Warsaw ghetto and the failure of the Bermuda Conference to offer any hope of refuge for Jews under Nazi occupation. His suicide note, echoed by the memorial plaque now placed near the house where he stayed, made it clear that he was making a political gesture, not towards the Nazis, but towards the Allies and their continued failure to find actions to meet the seriousness of the situation. 'The responsibility for the crime of murdering the Jewish population in Poland falls, in the first instance, on the perpetrators,' he wrote. 'But indirectly it also burdens the whole of humanity, the peoples and governments of the Allied states that, so far, have made no effort towards a concrete action to put a stop to this crime.'

His widely reported action moved many consciences but did not bring about a change in policy. I wonder whether Zygielbojm would appreciate the irony of a Holocaust Day being created and commemorated by a state that he regarded as 'guilty' for its own failures of nerve and imagination in that terrible period. And I wonder whether a state-sponsored Holocaust Day would focus primarily on Belsen – the one death camp that Britain liberated – and avoid any painful

questions about the role of Britain's politicians, civil servants and military leaders while the chimneys burned in Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka.

Good history ought to be about questioning received interpretations and opening new lines of enquiry. The occasional spat with the David Irvings of the world is the price of maintaining an open history. No case can ever be closed, and people, aided by the painstaking enquiries of professional historians, must be free to make their own meanings and interpretations from historical evidence.

If a Holocaust Day can engender the engagement and participation of ordinary people with the issues that undoubtedly contributed to the Holocaust and which resonate in many countries today, such as denials of civil and democratic rights, the erection of immigration barriers, the dehumanisation of refugees, the pseudo-scientific urge towards biological perfection, the deadly cocktail of religion and nationalism, then it may indeed be worthwhile. But if this commemoration is to lock us into narrow official interpretations that make the Holocaust safe, and contain it in a neatly sealed historical package, then we may one day find ourselves unprepared for the consequences.

THANKS A MILLION! (WELL A FEW THOUSAND, AT LEAST)

The production and promotion of our relaunched issue would not have been possible without very generous donations towards our £4000 Relaunch Appeal from the following people and organisations to whom we are extremely grateful:

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As we go to press the appeal stands at £2,600. **Please keep the money coming in!** Send cheques/POs to "Jewish Socialist Publications" at JS Appeal BM 3725 London WC1N 3XX.

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The JSJ is a campaigning organisation which is active on issues directly affecting the Jewish community, other minorities and oppressed groups, and the wider labour movement.

The JSJ was founded in 1974 but it is part of a tradition of Jewish socialist struggle that goes back more than 100 years to the mass Jewish workers movement in eastern Europe and also to the Jewish anarchists and communists active in the Russian Empire and in all the countries of mass Jewish immigration.

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For further information write to: the Membership Secretary, Jewish Socialists' Group, BM3725, London WC1N 3XX.

We should not argue over divorce laws which dehumanise women and turn future generations into outcasts, but should defy them, says **DENA ATTAR** (proud parent of three wonderful Anglo-Jewish bastards)

BASTARDS, BASTARDS & OTHER BASTARDS

The world is full of bastards, but what specifically is the difference between an English bastard and a Jewish bastard?

Legally, a bastard in English law is simply the child of an unmarried mother. English bastardy, to the dismay of right wing politicians and clerics, is not as stigmatised as it once was. There are ways of dealing with the consequences of a bastard child's legal status. It is even possible for the bastard children of parents who later marry to be legitimised retrospectively. You could of course take the view that such an action would be pointless and that to fuss over whether a human being is 'illegitimate' or not perpetuates a repellent, outdated mode of thought.

English bastardy is irrelevant to Jewish law. To qualify as a Jewish bastard or *mamzer*, a child needs to be the product of a forbidden union, defined as such in two ways – adulterous or incestuous. Once born, there is no remedy unless it can somehow be shown that the child was not really born a *mamzer*. Jewish bastardy is not only an inherited condition but also passes on to future generations. *Mamzerim* are forbidden to marry proper Jews, can only marry other outcasts, their children will also be born bastards and so on. All this is completely irrelevant to English law. Children with the permanent stain of Jewish bastardy are not English bastards at all if born to parents legally married in civil law.

Recent *Jewish Chronicle* reports on divorce disputes

have glossed over the embarrassing details of *mamzerut*, repeating almost word for word this misleading formula to explain the problem of the *aguna*: 'Without a *get* [religious divorce], a woman cannot remarry in synagogue. Future children are deemed illegitimate under Jewish law' (see for example JC 12/19/26 November 1999, 3 December 1999).

This leaves out quite a lot, including the question: what exactly needs fixing here?

The last time I was provoked to write about the *aguna* campaign I was responding to claims that it united Jewish women from all sections of the community in support of women's rights. I questioned that, criticised the campaign's aims as unclear, and challenged its right to expect support from secular, radical Jews. Recent skirmishes between *aguna* campaigners and others have clarified positions on all sides except the radical, secular one. I hope to do that here.

The latest campaign has included rabbis, deputies, former headteachers and other worthies. What turns rabbis into secondary pickets? Isn't this new coalition a bizarre contradiction?

There is no contradiction because, as always, the point is to pressurise individual men. The rabbis, in apparent agreement with the *aguna* campaign, publicly favour two ways of doing this. One is through community sanctions, or what actually amounts to mob rule. A silent demonstration or other community expression of disapproval may seem harmless enough but as a tactic it differs only in degree from cases where recalcitrant husbands have been physically beaten up by other men from their orthodox communities. It doesn't empower women, or redress their fundamentally unequal status.

The second way is to use the civil courts to impose sanctions, for instance by refusing a husband a civil divorce if he has not firstly gone through a religious divorce, or penalising men who refuse to keep to prenuptial agreements on divorce. The aim is still to force the man to agree to give a *get*. Naturally, the orthodox hierarchy is keen to have religious law backed up by civil law, even though it cannot reciprocate by recognising the validity of civil divorce. The rabbis are not going to worry if precedents are established which undermine the civil rights of orthodox Jewish women.

The liberal argument for supporting the campaign asserts that it is a women's rights issue, even though in countries with civil marriage and divorce an *aguna* can still, if she chooses, remarry and have children.

Jewish street in Toledo, 13th century. Part of a mural from Beth Hatefutsoth



Orthodox women do not see that as a real choice, the argument goes, and want to stay within their religious communities, so the problem must still be solved on its own terms. But this line of argument has its limits. Even recalcitrant husbands have human rights and, in principle, conscience could be an issue for either side. I can believe they are bastards of



the everyday kind in many cases, motivated by money or revenge. But suppose they have already gone through a civil divorce, are not believing or observant Jews any longer and don't want to have anything to do with religious courts? Why should they be forced to have any dealings with the rabbis? Where violent mobs or civil courts have been used against ex-husbands to try to force them to give their ex-wives a *get* (including the case of a divorced



American jailed for months in Israel), should our sympathy necessarily be with the *aguna*?

From the outside it looks obvious that the solution is to recognise civil divorce or give women equal divorce rights. Rabbis repeatedly explain that they are powerless to change *halacha* in this way. I entirely accept their belief that there is no easy *halachic* solution.

Their quest for a *halachic* solution also has to relate to the internal politics of orthodoxy – there is no point in any single rabbi or community finding a solution the others don't accept because of the risk of having children labelled as *mamzerim*.

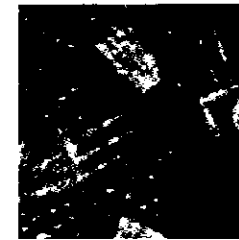
Pessimists amongst the orthodox – especially those who can separate ethics from law – say they will never find a solution. That is quite possible. If they could abolish '*mamzerut*' there would be a solution tomorrow. But the concept of '*mamzerut*' as

But suppose they have already gone through a civil divorce and don't want to have anything to do with religious courts? Why should they be forced to have any dealings with the rabbis?

hereditary and incurable, while disgusting from a human rights perspective, has its uses. It underpins the power of individual men over women by specifically restricting women's sexuality. It also underpins the role of the rabbis in approving the status of any Jew for any purpose.

My rabbinical authority might be questioned but although I don't have a beard I have worked out a complete, postmodern *halachic* solution. First, '*mamzerim*' must be declared an empty category. It was originally defined in relation to a whole list of categories of persons, from full Jews downwards. The categories only have meaning in relation to each other, not alone. As the list in its entirety became obsolete long ago – we don't have slaves or bondswomen – the categories are now all equally meaningless. We can now redefine being Jewish in relation to Judaism and culture, not through labels stuck on at birth.

Second, the category 'woman' as defined in *halacha* has also been obsolete for some time. Halachically, a 'woman' is not seen consistently as a human being but is also regarded as property in



certain respects. There no longer exist in the world – if there ever did – persons who are fully human part of the time and objects at other times. So there are no 'women', as conceptualised in the laws relating to Jewish marriage, available to marry Jewish men. It is not possible for a real woman who is also a human being (and there is no other kind of woman) to sign away part of her humanity in order to become the 'woman' referred to in *halacha*. All Jewish marriages are therefore invalid. Adultery is impossible. And no children are bastards. »

Vakht oyf – Wake up

Vi Lang was written by the Yiddish labour poet Dovid Edelstadt (1866-1892). Born in Russia he emigrated to the USA after a pogrom in Kiev and became a sweatshop worker. His poems were published in a Yiddish anarchist weekly. He died very young of tuberculosis.



Vi lang, o vi lang vet ir blaybn nokh shklafn, un trogn di shendlekhe keyt?
Vi lang vet ir glentsende raykhtimer shafn, far dem, vos baroybt ayer broyt?

Vi lang vet ir shteyn, ayer rukn geboygn, derniderikt, heymloz, farshmakht?
Es togt shoyrn, vakht oyf, un tseefnt di oygn, derfildt ayer ayzerne makht!

Un ales vet lebn, un libn, un blien, in frayen, in goldenem may!
Briders, genug far tiranen tsu knien, shvert, az ir muzt vern fray!

How long, oh how long will you remain enslaved carrying heavy shackles? For how long will you create magnificent riches for those who rob you of your bread?

How long will you remain, downtrodden, homeless, weak and weary? There is a new dawn. Wake up! Open your eyes! Recognise your strength of steel.

And all will live and love and flourish in the freedom of a golden May. Brothers, we have bowed down to tyrants long enough. Declare that you must become free.

I'M STANDING FROM WHERE I swear he's Jewish

Bad language is no joke, says comedian **IVOR DEMBINA**

My rabbi used to tell his female congregants: 'Once you let a man put his penis inside your vagina, you're fucked.'

It's not the best joke I've ever written, but it makes a point. Jews aren't expected to swear in public. As a male Jewish comedian, I'm meant to resemble my predecessors. Clever, articulate, dialectical, nokh. Yet never obscene. Despite being almost 50, I'm still expected to culturally embody the idea of the nice Jewish boy – a youngster who can entertain a group of strangers, relatives or friends of the parents, without causing offence.

Believe me, it's hard to pull off in the combative atmosphere of the comedy night club, where swearing is de rigeur and keeping clean is about as easy as keeping kosher on a budget. The modern comedy club is a curious inversion of the old idea of the swear box. Instead of incurring a financial penalty for bad language, the modern comedian is rewarded for it.

If Jews have a quality, it's as communicators. It's what makes them natural socialists and obvious comedians. But, what's the point of being great at exchanging ideas, thoughts and

feelings if you don't have others to engage with? And, what value has language, whether it be clean, obscene, Yiddish or rubbish, if it's not shared on an equal and democratic basis?

There's no denying the tedium of swearing. Today's comedians suffer the delusion that obscenity gives them status, although the opposite is true. We hear expletives every minute of the day and have become immune. Fortunately comedy audiences are smart and they recognise routine bad language for what it is – lack of material. Swearing doesn't democratise relationships. It neutralises them. As Ben Elton, another Jewish socialist, has cynically pointed out, when they're not buying your politics, bung in a knob gag.

There are exceptions. As far back as the 1950s Jewish-American Lenny Bruce, the seminal modern comic, employed foul-mouthed routines to expose the hypocrisy of those who associate intimacy with dirt. Another Jew, Gerry Sadowitz, has a marvellously funny stage act – so filthy, it transcends rudeness. Young British Jewish comic Mark Maier's neat parody of the sexually predatory Israeli soldier 'Ronni'

contains more Anglo-Saxon language than Ivrit.

So, why are these three acceptable, while for example, Jackie Mason, effing and blinding when I saw him a few months ago, isn't? It's because Bruce, Sadowitz and Maier's soldier paint an uncompromising portrait of who's on stage. Mason is trying to have it both ways. He wants to please his constituency of older, predominantly middle-class, hemishe Jews and simultaneously appear 'modern'. But he's not. Mason's attraction lies in being old-fashioned. Many of his jokes are quite reactionary, but that's how we like him, how we know him.

I believe the greatest comedian ever was Woody Allen, a Jewish stand-up whom I never once heard swear in his act. But in his film *Deconstructing Harry*, when he employed the swear word for the female vagina, I didn't like it. I wasn't offended. I just didn't believe in the role he was playing. Even though Allen retired from stand-up 30 years ago, it's that character, the one at the microphone, I still believe in. When he used that vaginal insult, albeit on screen, for the first time in my life I felt Allen was being a bit of a cunt. »

Photo: Edge Tata





JULIA BARD catches up with Jewish country singer and author, KINKY FRIEDMAN, on tour in London

No one knew where the Kinkster was. The all-but-lifeless Sky TV production assistant thought he might be in the dressing room, but then again, he might not. Suddenly, a cowboy in full regalia – hat, boots, black denims – emerged from a London taxi like an angel from heaven to inject some trouble into the neat ranks of company cars lined up around the west London studios. Kinky Friedman, Jewish country singer-songwriter and author of 11 eccentric, individual and very funny crime novels, had arrived with fellow Texas Jewboy, Little Jewford, to record a programme before departing for Germany.

More a cult hero than a star, a few nights earlier he had performed at the Jazz Café in London which was packed with aficionados. They were delighted to hear him performing songs he recorded in the 1970s – a welcome reminder of more outrageous, courageous times. At the end of the Jazz Café gig, which was itself near the end of an exhausting European tour, Kinky and Little Jewford spent more than an hour signing autographs and talking attentively to their fans.

In the anonymous surroundings of the television studio, he listened carefully and answered my questions thoughtfully. For a man who runs on espresso and cigars, he was surprisingly tentative about lighting up, and directed the merest hint of a raised eyebrow at the pale beige coffee forming a skin in its polystyrene cup. All this is at odds with the blasphemous, loudmouthed performer of such songs as 'Men's room in LA' (the paper has run out

and all he has is a picture of Jesus lying on the floor... buy the CD, Old Testaments and New Revelations if you want to know how it ends) or 'We reserve the right to refuse service to you' – 'Well I walked on into my house of God/The congregation on the nod/Just chosen folks doing their weekly thing./Hear O Israel, yes indeed./The book was backwards, couldn't read/But I got a good rise when I heard that rabbi sing.'

He is scathing about organised religion: 'I do not have much faith in Judaism or Christianity. I'd probably be a Buddhist if it weren't for Richard Gere. I've always agreed with Thomas Paine. He said as he was tortured on his deathbed by clergymen: "The world is my country. To do good is my religion." That's a good religion. And it's the only good religion. Father Damien, who worked with lepers in Hawaii practised it and the Catholic church did not. Neither did the Protestants. And neither did the Jews. They're busy with their mumbo jumbo. I remember some orthodox Jews in LA – whaddaya call 'em, fuckers? – I don't know if they were Lubavitch or what they were. A friend of mine had a lot of money and a big mansion so all the rabbis were sucking him dry. I stayed at his house for a while. He didn't want my father to clip his fingernails inside the house because the Talmud says that a woman might step on them if she's pregnant and have a miscarriage!'

'Anyway, they did a special blessing and welcomed me and they were all very nice but I looked at these guys, a *minyan* – it's a quorum I guess, enough guys to make the prayer official – and one of them is the Rolex distributor for LA; the other's the BMW distributor for southern California. And I ask how spiritual is that, spending 18 hours selling your fucking Rolexes to these assholes in Beverley Hills and then the other eight hours you spend praying with mumbo jumbo? I don't think a Rolex distributor can be a religious person, a spiritual person. That's empty religiosity. And it's bullshit.' The quietly spoken man who earlier had worried about whether he was allowed to smoke his cigar, was passionate now. 'You can't be a BMW distributor and be a good person. Not one of these assholes, these Lubavitch hassidim, not one of them worked with children, worked with animals, worked with poor people, worked with sick people – not one of them was a teacher or something that really meant something. There weren't any authors or artists or pointy headed intellectuals like myself either. So fuck 'em.'

Kinky Friedman annoys a lot of people first by asserting his identity – Jew, cowboy, country singer, Texan – then by confounding their expectations. 'They ain't making Jews like Jesus any more' lampoons Christian antisemitism but offends everyone by using terms of abuse – nigger, wops, spics, micks – to challenge bigotry. The song reflects the Jewish experience of living surrounded by a Christian world view: 'They ain't making Jews

RIDE 'EM JEWBOY

like Jesus any more./They don't turn the other cheek the way they done before ... They ought to send you back to Rooshia boy or New York city, one./You just wanna doodle a Christian girl and you killed God's only son ... They ain't making Jews like Jesus any more./They ain't making Jews who know what nails are for.'

Such lyrics make the respectable Jewish community almost as uncomfortable as the racists. Even 'Ride em Jewboy', a simple and beautiful melody with haunting lyrics, which Friedman describes as 'a western song about the Holocaust', embarrasses the self-styled Jewish establishment. He says: 'If you have a song like "Ride 'em Jewboy" or "They Ain't Making Jews Like Jesus Any More" – anything that has the word Jew in it at all, in fact – you'll get a B'nai Brith person or some straight Jewish establishment person call the radio station and say: "Take that record off." And of course they do, with one phone call.'

Kinky's parents moved to Texas from Chicago when he was a baby and he still lives on the family's ranch 'in the hill country up near Kerrville'. What do they make of him in rural Texas? 'Well there ain't too many Jews up there. I'm a fairly popular figure, I guess, in the hill country. I've always been a outgoing Jewish kinda person. An ambassador of goodwill for Jews everywhere!'

Kinky Friedman is nowadays better known for his detective novels than for his music. The books are classic in form but anarchic in content and located for the most part, in Manhattan. The central character, Kinky Friedman himself, is a reluctant amateur detective, drawn into the maelstrom of New York from his single life in a loft in Vandam Street where he retreats to drink espresso and Irish whiskey, smoke the remains of cigars retrieved from the wastepaper basket and answer one of the two red phones on his desk with a laconic 'Start talking'.

The detective, like his creator, hails from a ranch in Texas and revels gloriously in oft repeated clichés and puns, especially his own ('a sperm of the moment idea'; 'casting asparagus on me'). Kinky's allies and enemies – from Ratso, his 'Watson', to Stephanie Dupont, his long-legged neighbour – bear the names of real friends and family.

Upstairs lives lesbian Winnie Katz, whose dance classes destroy his concentration and his ceiling. His cat appears in all the books, stretched out on the desk, sunbathing under the anglepoise lamp. She is his muse and guardian of the Vandam loft while Kinky roams the streets, restaurants and country music clubs exploring the underbelly (or worse) of New York life.

In Germany, his audiences are mainly people who have discovered him through the novels. 'The books are doing so well there,' he says. 'They're book readers and their young people are reading my books to learn English, which is mildly alarming.' At any rate, it's hard to imagine what

these young Germans do with the many Yiddish words for penis that he uses in the books – petzel (that's a little one), shmeckel (so's that), shlang (snake) and shvantz (a new one on me). Or 'taking a Nixon' for taking a shit. Revenge is sweet.

What is the relationship between the tough-talking, cat-loving amateur detective and the real Kinky? During the interview he moved seamlessly from country singer to author and from author to animal lover, indicating a multi-dimensional and very clever person. He is at his most engaged when talking about the Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch a sanctuary for dogs near his home in Texas with which he is closely involved. 'Animals have been my salvation lately. They've been great comfort to the Kinkster. Anyone who works with abused animals as we do at Utopia animal rescue ranch begins to love and respect animals more and people less.' His motto, 'A happy dog means you're living right,' indicates an empathy for the vulnerable and powerless which, despite his claimed preference for animals, does extend to human beings and is related to his non-conformity. 'I've always felt that being on the outside looking in is the place to be. It's the best slant. The people who inspire many of us – across an ocean or a century – are always people that have suffered a lot and have not been too successful in their lifetimes. People that were buried in paupers' graves like Mozart, like Oscar Wilde...

Is this outsiders' perspective what has historically motivated Jewish socialists? "Jewish Socialist" is not a contradiction in terms like a "lady wrestler" or a "catholic university" or "military intelligence". Maybe it's becoming that today. Maybe more and more. That's kind of a sad commentary. There was a time like in my father's day when a Jewish socialist was a great and natural thing to be. And today, maybe Jews are becoming the one kind of Jew that Abbie Hoffman talked about – the complacent type or the merchant type. Then you got your troublemaker Jew, the other kind that the kinkster likes, as I addressed in Chapter 15 of Spanking Watson which just says about everything that needs to be said about Jesus – and about Jews. Our function in the world is to stir the putrefying pot of human history every now and then.'

Kinky Friedman's most recent novel is Spanking Watson (£5.99). All his novels are published in paperback by Faber and Faber.

His latest CD, Pearls in the Snow, and his earlier recordings are available from major record shops.

For other weird merchandise including Kinky Friedman for President stickers, visit www.KinkajouRecords.com.

And for information about the animal sanctuary, visit www.utopiarescue.com.

Kinky and friends at Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch



If you have a song that has the word Jew in it you'll get some straight Jewish establishment person call the radio station and say: 'Take that record off.' And of course they do, with one phone call.

PASS THE

"That night she gave me old boiled brisket in my sandwiches. She knew I didn't like it but I didn't say anything. I didn't complain because complaints caused arguments and one of her bitter silences. Mind you..."

Harry sighed and shook his head. "If we hadn't argued we wouldn't have talked at all."

"You see, Josh, it was not an easy time for your grandmother and I. We were living in the flats off Amhurst Road in Hackney at that time. It was 1958 and your Uncle Jeffrey was just a year old. We had only one bedroom and the nights were not peaceful. Even then your Uncle Jeffrey didn't stop talking. None of that would have mattered but your grandma was not happy. Her father had just died. Her mother was old and lonely. She only spoke Yiddish and was a very difficult woman."

"I was working nights. Now most of the cabbies did the theatre crowd in the West End. But I liked Soho. Soho stayed open all night. I left the flat at about six that night and Sylvia gave me my sandwiches and some newspaper in case."

"In case of what?" said Josh. "In case I needed to go," said Harry. "Go where?" said Josh. Harry tutted. "Look", he said. "You're on the road – in different places. Even if you found a public toilet it wasn't safe that time of night. You didn't want to leave your money bag in the cab and you didn't want to take it with you. There were some nasty types who hung around those places and they knew cab drivers carried money."

"So you er..." Josh paused.

Harry smiled. "Well I had my lemonade bottle and my sheets of newspaper with a roll of toilet paper and Sylvia gave me a damp cloth to wipe my hands, so sometimes I'd bring home a little parcel." Harry chuckled. "Yeah I get your drift grandad" said Josh.

"Anyway so that night I left the flat at six. It was the first Tuesday of the month and I headed straight down to Soho; but before I put my light on there was someone I had to go and see: Jack Spot."

"Now at that time Jack Spot ran everything in Soho and most of the West End: the gambling, the after hours drinking plus the protection. And I owed him Josh. I used to go shpieling – poker, three card brag down in one of Jack's clubs off Tottenham Court Road. I'd had a bad streak and I owed the house over £300. I was one of many who owed Jack but for the past two months he said he could help me keep the interest on my repayments low."

"One night he invited me in to his office. The room was full of his associates who were talking in low voices as I came in. Jack broke away from one of them and gestured for me to sit. "You're a cabbie aren't you, Harry? Just like Mickey. You used to be a cabbie didn't you Mickey?"

Mickey Solomons, large and ugly, was standing over me. "I did, Mr Spot, yes." Mickey leaned close to my face, "but I found that I couldn't afford to run a cab and lose at cards at the same time."

"I need you to do a private job for me Harry,"

said Jack.

"Look," I said, "I know I owe you but I'm paying you back so don't ask me..."

"Mickey clutched my shoulder with a grip that pinched the flesh."

"Mr Spot hasn't finished," he hissed.

"Harry, its a fare," said Jack. "It so happens there's an acquaintance of mine who needs a pick-up from a club in Wardour Street around one o'clock the first Tuesday every month. And he and his lady friend go on to her flat in Maida Vale. He'll pay. But I want you to give him a parcel for me. An important parcel."

"Why can't you post it?" I asked. "Don't be fucking clever," said Mickey.

"Jack opened a drawer and took out a parcel shaped like a brick and wrapped in newspaper. It was soft and it was light."

"You won't let me down will you Harry?" he said softly.

"And so it was, Josh, that at around one o'clock in the morning on the first Tuesday of every month I would collect Chief Inspector Ronald Mason from outside the Blue Diamond in Wardour Street. He and Rita would tumble in the back of my cab smelling of whisky and perfume. I'd drive them to Rita's flat in Maida Vale. Without a word he would hold out his hand and I'd give him Jack's parcel."

"Did he tip you?" asked Josh. "Tip me! The bastard didn't even pay his fare. I didn't even know who he was at first 'cause Rita only ever called him "daddy". She giggled at everything he said and as we swerved round the corners I'd see in the mirror as he fell against her with his greasy hair on her bare throat. Once she caught me looking and her face turned hard as she nudged him. He looked up at me. "Eyes to the front, Jewboy," he slurred.

"So that night I'd eaten the boiled brisket sandwich and it was already repeating on me. Sylvia's sandwiches were like a barometer of how she was feeling towards me at the time. When we were first married she'd go down the market and get me some pickled herring wrapped up carefully so as not to make the rye bread soggy, or she would make me some chopped liver with pickled cucumber. After our first big row she made a sandwich with a slither of soap in it."

"I stopped off for a short at The French in Dean Street. I hated these Tuesdays and I wanted a quiet few moments before I set out. Phyllis, toothless and clutching her milk stout, sat next to me. "I see my niece is on tour in Australia this month," she said. "Eh?"

"Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth. But she hasn't taken the littl'un's with her. But I s'pose the nannies will take care of them."

"My stomach was churning and my head was thumping. Phyllis continued. "I see from the Court and Social that 'is' ighness conducted a tour of a water station in the desert. I do hope he wore an 'at."

Phyllis claimed she was the illegitimate daughter

PARCEL

A short story by
RUTH LUKOM

of Edward VIII. She was an 80-year-old ex-prostitute from Limehouse who picked up loose change from the tarts in Old Compton Street by sorting out their laundry. "I've got to go, Phyllis," I said. "You may buy me a drink if you so wish," she said and smiled showing a large yellow tooth.

"It was a cheap way to escape. "You are a gentleman," she called as I left.

"It wasn't a busy night but just before 11 I picked up a suit off Piccadilly who wanted to go to Wimbledon. He'd had a lot to drink so I hovered close to the kerb as I drove keeping a close watch on his face. After I dropped him off I began to receive a joint message from Sylvia's sandwich and Mother Nature. I pulled over in one of the dark suburban streets and did what had to be done wrapping my parcel and leaving it on the cab floor. It was 12.30 so I tore off reaching Wardour Street just before 1pm.

"Mason kept me waiting for 20 minutes then with a clatter and some shouting he appeared at the top of the steps with Rita pulling at his arm. "Leave it, Ron," she was saying as Mason tried to turn back. "I could close you down tomorrow if I wanted," he yelled. They climbed into the cab and I drove off with Mason muttering into Rita's breast. "I've done him favours and he knows it." "Poor daddy" said Rita.

"I stopped outside Palm Court in Elgin Avenue. Mason lurched against my window. "You all fuckin' owe so don't forget it." I handed him his parcel and drove off as quickly as I could."

"Which parcel?" asked Josh. "Aha," said Harry. "I realised very quickly, not 20 yards down the road at the lights, when I looked down on the cab floor and saw the neat newspaper rectangle. I turned around but jammed my brakes on when I saw the blue flashing lights and Mason and Rita stepping into a Black Maria. They'd had their eye on Mason for a while. It was the start of a clean-up campaign in the Met and Mason wasn't difficult to finger with his drinking and big mouth."

"I sped off in a panic. I was heading towards Soho. I'd tell Jack. Give him his money back then Sylvia would leave this bloody city – maybe move to Manchester. I had army friends in Manchester. But first I'll go home and calm down. There outside our

flats was Jack Spot's Bentley.

"I opened the front door. Jack and Mickey Solomons were standing in the hallway next to Sylvia who was wide-eyed and clutching her dressing gown round her throat."

"There you are," said Jack. "What's happened? Did you get picked up?"

"No" I said. "I didn't even see them till I turned back."

"Did they see you?" said Jack. "Why did you turn back?" asked Mickey at the same time. "Look I did what you asked. Sylvia go to bed. This doesn't concern you."

"I want to know what's going on" said Sylvia.

"What's that?" asked Mickey pointing to my pocket. Jack's parcel was hanging out with a square of toilet paper stuck to it. "Oh my God" shrieked Sylvia. "These days you're bringing all sorts of shit into my house." She grabbed the parcel and ran out the front door. "What does she mean?" said Jack. Mickey snorted. "Harry is carrying a cabbie's deposit." Jack looked blank. "He'd been caught short" said Mickey

"Talk English, for Christ sake," Mickey whispered into Jack's ear. Jack grimaced and pulled out his handkerchief to cover his face.

"Sylvia came in and pushed past him into the bathroom and began switching on taps."

"Jack turned to me and said. "I don't want to see your face round my clubs again. Do you hear? You and I don't know each other. Understand?"

"That suits me" I said "but what about what I owe?"

"It's paid. Now get away from me." They disappeared into the night."

Harry leaned back and smiled.

"I went out and found the parcel. It paid the deposit on a nice house in Mill Hill. Two years later your mother was born and I switched to working days."

Josh held out £10. "So tell me again what you want me to get."

"I want some pickled herring and shmaltz if they've got it. Don't bother with any chopped liver. I only ever liked your grandmother's."

"No boiled brisket," said Josh smiling. "No boiled brisket," said Harry.



TAXI!

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He and Rita would tumble in the back of my cab smelling of whisky and perfume. I'd drive them to Rita's flat in Maida Vale.

Lines of dissent

East End radicals

So many figures in socialist history have been Jews that Jewish radicals have come to look upon Marx, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg as embodying an 'essence of Jewishness', whether it consists of pariah or outsider status, or a restless urge to question and criticise. Many of these figures, though, denied the relevance of their Jewish ancestry to their radical politics. 'This sublime silence of affinity,' wrote Rosa Luxemburg to a friend, 'where so many cries are lost, it burns in my bosom so strongly that there can be no special little corner in my heart for the ghetto: I feel myself at home in the wide world.' Likewise, the 'leaders' of minority communities also go to great lengths to play down their communities' distinctiveness in an effort to fit the norms of a bleached-out Englishness.

In contrast to the disavowal (radical or otherwise) of Jewishness and our own tendency to root out some radical essence in Jewishness, specific expressions of Jewish culture at particular moments can provide images of struggle that are relevant to radical and dissenting politics today. In Victorian and Edwardian London, the assimilation project was represented most of all by the established native-born Jewish elite of the West End. Dominated by a handful of wealthy families, this group was known as 'the Cousinhood' who thought of themselves as 'English citizens of the Jewish faith'. The mass arrival of Jews from the East threatened Anglo-Jewry's sense of itself as English so they made every effort to remake their arriving co-religionists into English people as quickly as possible; the immigrants, in historian Bill Fishman's words, had to be 'indoctrinated with the English language and way of life. The modes of the *shtetl* were discouraged. Yiddish was to be eradicated.' They tried to get the ghetto to dissolve itself into English society and throw off its old-fashioned, peculiar rituals, and, above all, its radical politics. The Cousinhood used coercion, bribery, charity, repatriation, missionary work to civilise the *Ostjuden*, anti-emigration propaganda in Russian papers, and even financial support for anti-immigration and pro-deportation policies.

Meanwhile, the first socialists active in Jewish London, despite their ruthless criticism of the bourgeois values of people like the Rothschilds, had surprisingly similar views about the East End Jews. Middle class Eastern Europeans, such as Aaron Lieberman or Morris Winchevsky, came to London as revolutionaries, fleeing the Tsars' prisons. They saw themselves as a hyper-internationalist wing of

the world socialist movement, rather than as the revolutionary wing of the Jewish people. They were so deeply anti-clerical, secular and anti-nationalist that they firmly rejected any Jewish identity. They were intellectuals. Mostly coming from educated homes, they were not Yiddish speakers. Aaron Lieberman, the first important Jewish socialist leader, wrote in one letter, 'I am an internationalist who knows only men and classes!' and in another, 'I hate Judaism, just as I hate all other nationalities... I love only the oppressed masses.' The socialists had a similar either/or logic to the assimilationists: international proletariat or Jews. And like the assimilationists, they had a straight line view of history as progress. This vision sees the future of the Jews as belonging alongside the proletariat - and the 'problem' of the Jews as disappearing with the coming of the socialist millennium. As such, these early Jewish socialists represented a left-wing variation on the Cousinhood's assimilationism.

But the ghetto Jews were not interested in giving up their *mameloshn* or their folk beliefs. Instead they gravitated towards home-grown versions of radical politics being developed by Yiddish-speaking worker-intellectuals. In 1884, a Society of Jewish Socialists was started. From this grew the International Workers' Educational Club, based at 40 Berner Street. The Berner Street Club, formed the model for a range of Jewish working class organisations that constituted the institutional infrastructure of the ghetto radicals' world. It was a meeting place for every shade of radical Jewish immigrant and some like-minded gentiles. In 1885, the *Arbeter Fraynd* (Worker's Friend) was started, the newspaper that gave voice to this movement. In 1889, a strike wave swept through both the non-Jewish riverside industries and the Jewish garment sweatshops. This moment represents a coming to maturity of the ghetto radicals, their ability to take leadership of their own movement. The new ghetto politics drew on the culture of the sweatshop workers themselves rather than on abstract Marxist formulas. And it expressed the desires of those workers too: for control over their communities and workplaces.

One crucially important figure in this development was a gentile. Rudolf Rocker was a charismatic, yet unambitious German bookbinder, exiled first to Paris, and then to London in 1895, where he learnt Yiddish. He soon became a leading light in the Berner Street Club and, in 1898, became

Radicals within threatened minorities have had to develop strategies to confront oppressors within their own community without strengthening the forces of racism and nationalism directed against these minorities as a whole. In this section **PRAGNA PATEL** and **ISAAC DEUTSCHER** describe their struggles against family and communal pressures and **DAVID ROSENBERG** relates how the Jewish Socialists' Group has expressed its dissident politics. **BEN GIDLEY** opens this discussion by looking at the resonance today of the connections between culture and politics established by Jewish radicals in London's East End at the turn of the 20th century.

editor of the *Arbeter Fraynd*. Most of the militants in Rocker's circle were garment workers, many of them women. In 1906, with veteran anarchist-communist Kropotkin in attendance, they started the Workers' Friend Club. Parallel to Rocker's anarchist circle were other radical developments: the Worker's Circle, branches of the Bund, unions, and innumerable less formal places of gathering and debate.

As radicals in a minority, the Yiddish-speaking socialists and anarchists of Stepney had to face many directions at once. While struggling against the injustices they experienced as Jews and immigrants



Rudolf Rocker (centre) with other anarchists

in imperial England, they had to struggle against injustices within their own community, engaging in class struggle against the (Jewish) sweatshop bosses; a political battle between West End Anglo-Jewish liberalism and East End Yiddish socialism; a cultural struggle between West End Anglo-Jewish assimilationism and East End refusal to assimilate;

and gendered and inter-generational conflicts, which were often (then as now) articulated as conflicts between tradition and secularism.

To conduct their politics on all these different levels, the East End radicals drew on their own community's culture - traditions disavowed by 'leaders' of the community in their drive to assimilation. Zygmunt Bauman has written that the Jewish poor 'had every reason to consider their plight as the result of class as well as national oppression. The exploiters, whom they knew directly and who caused them most suffering, were Jews.' Bauman identifies this form of radicalism with the ghetto and its traditions of autonomy: 'The spiritual reflection of this autonomy was the tendency to inscribe all the problems facing Jewish life into the framework of internal Jewish resources... [They] did not perceive any contradiction between their Jewishness, which they had no wish to renounce or hide, and the human emancipation they sought. The opposite was the case. Many Jewish-thinking and Yiddish-speaking socialists saw in socialist society the fullest implementation of the same redemptive, Messianic drive of Judaism that had been swept under the carpet by the joint efforts of official orthodoxy and

the rapidly 'gentilising' capitalist elite.'

Though people like Luxemburg and Marx had no time for the values of the ghetto, the Yiddish socialists were rooted in Jewish tradition: Jewish religious values, biblical norms of social justice, the moral commandments of Torah and Talmud, messianic belief-systems, traditions of *tsedaka*, mutual aid and communal responsibility, Jubilee and prophecy, and Yiddish conceptions of humanity and respectfulness like *mentshlikhkayt* and *edelkayt*.

The interplay between class-conscious radicalism and religion, and the movement between different terrains of struggle meant that the East End Jewish radicals understood their identity as multiple. In historian Geoffrey Alderman's words, 'there was not merely no conflict between praying in a synagogue and then sitting in the same room to discuss socialist principles and organise industrial stoppages.' They identified simultaneously as workers, immigrants; as secular or religious; affiliated with the informal attics of the East End rather than formal synagogues; as Russian political émigrés; as *landslayt* from a particular region; as dwelling in a particular East End neighbourhood; as a nomadic force whose transnational view allowed them to link the struggles of different peoples and as extreme internationalists who denied the validity of national designations.

These forms of belonging were bound to a concentric series of spaces and places where the East Enders moved: the *shtieblekh*, *khevros* or *landsmanshaften* (informal backroom congregations and friendly societies), the socialist clubs, the ghetto, the International, the diaspora.

These spaces, in the shadow of the City of London's walls, defined a geography of resistance, the terrain of a dissident public sphere. These institutions of self-help and mutual aid were at the heart of the vernacular culture of Jewish radicalism. Like Yiddish language, these were rooted in tradition, yet adapting to new circumstances. They were the spaces where Yiddish popular culture flourished, where social justice was fought for, where a sense of community was nurtured, and where an alternative sphere of active citizenship came into being. These spaces bear a striking similarity to the dissident public spheres of other immigrant minorities in the metropolis, from the shebeens of Caribbean Brixton to the working men's clubs of Turkish Dalston.

As with these other immigrant radicals, though, for the Jewish radicals, being rooted in the local or being an East Ender was understood in the light of

The new ghetto politics drew on the culture of the sweatshop workers themselves rather than on abstract Marxist formulas.

their various transnational contexts. East End Jews were refugees seeking sanctuary from racist violence; they were migrants seeking opportunities denied by the restrictions of the lands they left. The Jewish radicals were also political internationalists who saw themselves as world citizens. Yet their identities, their political culture, came to be rooted in an urban context, which required a different territoriality.

As a result the Jewish radicals stressed the local and the transnational over the either/or options of Englishness and Jewish racial identity. The commitment to the local is expressed in the Bundist concept of *doikayt*, 'here-ness'. The commitment to the transnational is expressed in the concept of diaspora and of the Socialist International. The Bund developed an open, non-territorial conception of the 'nation': in the words of the Bundist leader Medem, 'A national culture as an independent entity, as a closed circle with its own content, has never existed.' Bundists saw nations as changing, contingent, shaped by struggle; diasporic nations all the more so. For the Jewish radicals, diaspora was not the scattered expression of a single essential unity, but a multiplicity of trajectories.

The ghetto radicals' stress on the local and transnational over the nation-state was at its most subversive during the First World War. The war machine categorised most of the East End Jews as either 'friendly aliens' (born in the Russian empire) or 'enemy aliens' (born in the German or Austrian empires). 'Enemy aliens' were interned. 'Friendly aliens' were expected to join the British army, or return to Russia to fight. The multiple identities of the ghetto radicals were mobilised to resist the warmongering. As workers, they engaged in strikes and stoppages where more patriotic unions declared an industrial truce. As proletarian internationalists, they had no squabble with German workers. As refugees, they fought for the right of asylum against ethnically exclusive official concepts of nationality. Loyal to the diaspora, a non-territorial collectivity, they resisted the Anglo-Jewish pressure to join up and look like good Englishmen.

The radical openness of the ghetto's public sphere, its ability to speak across 'ethnic' borders, enabled a movement against conscription, internment and deportation to develop, stretching beyond the Jewish ghetto. It involved gentile workers, feminists (around Sylvia Pankhurst) and the internationalist side of the wider socialist movement (like the East End branches of the British Socialist Party). These alliances built on coalitions established by the ghetto radicals in earlier cycles of struggle – especially during the garment industry strikes of 1889 and 1912.

These struggles fought nearly 100 years ago can help reinvigorate radical culture today. The way that the *Ostjuden's* multiple identities challenged the militarised logic of the nation state resonates today as we witness a similar wave of refugees and asylum seekers from the east. The ghetto's spaces for dissidence and dialogue, and its coalitions with radicals in different minorities provide a model today when the Left and the Jewish community are riven by sectarianism. The Yiddish socialists created a radical politics that drew on the cultural resources of the ghetto itself. In an age of liberal racism and militarised multiculturalism, when minority dissidents struggle to retain both their minority identities and their dissidence, this offers us hope.

Southall Black Sisters

PRAGNA PATEL of Southall Black Sisters talked to Julia Bard about her personal balancing act

MY MOTHER was very religious but her religion was inseparable from her cultural view. From her teens until she was in her 30s my mother did not practice it strictly, whilst my father didn't believe in religion or in God at all. Then when I was about 14 they turned to religion and my parents became 'born again Hindus'. I am the oldest of four girls and a boy, and I did get into conflict with her. That was when her religion asserted itself, though my father was more relaxed. They joined the Swami Narayan, a revival religion within Hinduism which began as a reformist movement in India and is very caste-based.

They weren't highly educated. They struggled. My father was born in Kenya and so was his father. They left Kenya out of fear and have always been afraid that any day they could be chucked out again. For years my mother wouldn't have expensive furnishings in the house because she thought she'd just have to leave them behind.

My family was poor in Kenya and in this country. My father worked as a baggage handler and then cleaner at Heathrow Airport and my mother worked in various factories in London. After having four daughters was pressurised into trying to have a boy. She wasn't seen as a proper woman until she had my brother, the youngest in the family. She wanted a boy to take care of her because she had a very hard life. It was hard to mouth. My father turned to religion in his 40s as a way of explaining the fact that he hadn't fulfilled his aspirations – that he had worked hard but didn't have much to show for it.

When I was at school, 75% of the students were Asians but we were not acknowledged as a presence – except that we were all expected to end up working in factories or at the airport. I was told I'd make a good ground stewardess! I never told my parents about the racism because they would have sided with the school even though they suffered from racism themselves. My father was never called by his name at work. He was always called Paddy. He was demoted to being a cleaner and was never promoted. But they felt they just had to get on with it.

My mother worked so she couldn't spend time teaching us Gujarati and telling us stories but she tried to instil in us a pride in our identity. However, I felt I was being taught all the negative aspects of that identity – to be a good Asian daughter, to be groomed for marriage, to manage the kitchen. I rejected it wholesale. I wouldn't speak to my brother and sisters in Gujarati. I can't read and write the language. My daughter will, but things have changed. Because of the constant racism I faced, I always felt I had to obliterate my identity in the outside world.

When I was at secondary school my parents started to do voluntary work for the Neasden temple. They are from the same caste but are not as well off as other members of the temple. My parents were keeping up with the Joneses. The temple is a centre for charitable work but it's also a place for displaying your wealth and some people

Not so dutiful daughter

give phenomenal donations.

The temple is segregated by gender, with men at the front and women at the back. Anyone can petition the Swami for help or advice but only men or boys can approach him; women can petition only through men. That infuriated me from the start and I got into arguments with my parents about why they were turning to this useless religion. At first they supported it with great zeal, doing errands and voluntary work. When visitors from India to the temple arrived at the airport my father made sure they got through OK. Now, their activity has eased off, partly because of disillusionment, but also because there was a lot of petty jealousy and infighting. My mother remains religious and still has her shrine at home but she's not actively involved with the temple any more and doesn't attend regularly. My father distanced himself when he lost a lot of money. I rejected it lock, stock and barrel when I was 17.

There was pressure on me as the oldest child to be a traditional Asian woman. At 17 my parents tried to arrange a marriage for me. I was taken to India for the first time and was very excited about that. I wasn't aware that once I got there I would be under pressure to get married. I thought I was going on holiday. I tried to absorb the experience but the scale of the poverty overwhelmed me.

I was taken to the village my mother came from and was forced to see a boy who had been chosen for me. The next thing I knew I was engaged! My mother's mother and older sister put pressure on her and she in turn pressurised me. I knew no one. It was a traumatising experience. I remember weeping and weeping and weeping. I met the boy for 15 minutes. I didn't think I'd be with him for the rest of my life. I was taken to his home and his mother asked me what my decision was. I said I wanted time to think.

When I got home I was sat on a stool facing a semicircle of women. I said no, I wouldn't accept. My mother's older sisters said that I must. They kept up the pressure, saying: 'What makes you so special?' I wept and continued to say no but it was out of my control. I was so desperate that I confided in a couple of my male cousins. They felt helpless. I even went to see the priest in the village church. He was fat and was lying on a bed. In English I asked for his help. He said: 'My child, have faith in God!' It turned out afterwards that I had caused a great scandal because the church was in the untouchables' area.

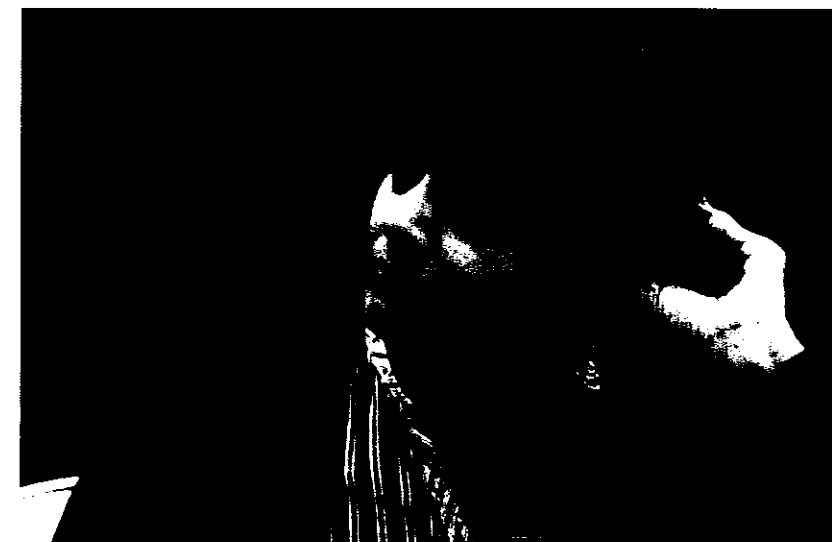
When we returned to England the pressure was kept up for a year. Now I understand my mother's difficulties. She kept the family together culturally which, at the time, made her my enemy; my father hid behind her. I refused to write to the boy and she wrote on my behalf. By the end of each evening I'd be so tired, I'd give in. In the morning I'd say no again. I didn't know how to extract myself. There wasn't anywhere I could go for support in 1978. I knew about social services but I was too scared to ask them for help. School was racist at the best of times and there were no teachers I could talk to. I

was told that I was ruining everyone's life; my sisters would join in, putting more pressure on me. At that time I was doing my A-levels. I loved English literature, especially *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, with the constant refrain: 'I will not submit.' After a year I won and I loved that victory.

I think that as a result of my battle, my younger sisters came under less pressure. I left home and went on to further education and my sisters

Pragna Patel

Photo: Cynthia Cockburn



followed suit. It has been a momentous journey for my mother. Six years later she apologised to me and the past conflict immediately melted away. Having a child myself has also helped to heal our relationship. My parents are positive about my work with Southall Black Sisters – they see it as an extension of the tradition of charitable work, doing good for the community – and they're proud when they see me on the telly.

In a number of campaigns, especially at the time when there were pogroms against Muslims in India, SBS tried to reach the heart of the Hindu communities by enlisting the support of more liberal Hindu temples and publications. Most of the Hindu diaspora support the right wing movement in India and that involves donations from here and within India. A lot of ordinary families are caught up in the rhetoric, and discussions quickly turn heated and menacing.

In Wembley we organised a controversial meeting in the heart of the Hindu community. The meeting was largely attended by supporters of the Indian Right, from sympathisers to zealots and extreme bigots. We planned the security in advance but the left had a hard time. We brought over Gandhi's grandson. He spoke so well, it gave ordinary Hindus a lesson in how to communicate effectively. He could connect better with religious people because he is steeped in the Hindu tradition and because of that he could strengthen the view that there are dissenters within that tradition. People like me are slightly removed from the mainstream of the community. We live a different life and speak a different language. ▶

SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS was set up in 1979 to meet the needs of Asian and African-Caribbean women. Since then, we have helped thousands of women facing violence and abuse at home and racism from the host society. Apart from providing welfare services and support, we have run campaigns to highlight and bring about changes in the social, political, economic, and cultural constrictions that have led women to our door. We have sought to liberate women from these constrictions on their individual freedom.

Isaac
Deutscher

Waiting for thunder

The Polish Marxist writer and thinker Isaac Deutscher took a dramatic step in his youth to test

his break with religious orthodoxy. But he underestimated the pull of family and community. In Tamara Deutscher's introduction to *The Non Jewish Jew* she describes this moment.

A few months after Isaac's 14th birthday he became very friendly with a young apprentice in the printing shop. An excellent worker, very mature for his age, always well informed about current political events, he was a communist and an atheist – and yet he was Jacob Deutscher's (Isaac's father) favourite! He treated Isaac with a little condescension and a touch of irony; but liked to engage him in all sorts of arguments about politics and religion. In both he seemed to be determined to convert Isaac to his views. On the eve of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, he 'dared' Isaac: 'If you really do not believe in God, prove it. Come and meet me tomorrow at the gate to the Jewish cemetery.' Isaac agreed. While his parents were at prayers, the two met. The apprentice led the younger boy to the grave of a rabbi. There he took out of his pocket a couple of sandwiches with butter and ham. This was indeed, blasphemy multiplied a thousandfold; it was piling sin upon sin. On the day of the most solemn fast, when not even a drop of water should pass the lips of the orthodox Jew, Isaac was handed the most sinful of food. The mere sight of ham should have been odious to him; to put any meat between layers of butter was a grave offence against the ritual laws; here was ham, the most abhorrent, the most evil of messes. 'I was petrified by the iniquity of my behaviour. I munched the sandwich and swallowed each mouthful with difficulty. I half-hoped and half feared that something terrible would happen; I waited for a thunder that would strike me down. But nothing happened. All was quiet. My companion treated the whole experiment as a huge joke. He shook my hand and patted me approvingly on the back. I left him and ran back to the town.

At the synagogue nobody had noticed Isaac's absence. He returned from the sinful escapade just in time to mix with the crowd of people who after the day of prayers were returning to their homes for a solemn feast.

'At the table I could hardly lift my eyes. I have never felt more remorseful in all my life. Not for what I had done; it was not at all the offence against the Mosaic Law that weighed so heavily on my conscience. The solicitude of my father, the tenderness of my mother, who, herself pale and worn out by the long fast, was hurrying to feed the hungry family – to feed me first of all – became unbearable.'

Isaac used to relate this episode with a great deal of emotion. The unholy meal at the grave of the rabbi, the sacrilege, the impiety, his own fears, faith and disbelief, were only the culmination of a long drawn process towards complete atheism. But on that evening it was not God who was mocked but his parents who were deceived. That was what made the young offender choke with food, shame, and tears. ■

The Non-Jewish Jew and other essays, Isaac Deutscher, Merlin Press 1981.



For 25 years the Jewish Socialists' Group has fought for justice, democracy and equality in the wider society but also within the Jewish community. **DAVID ROSENBERG** describes the struggle within.

TO BE A SOCIALIST, a radical, a protester in Britain in the 1930s was as natural for many Jews as breathing the air. The daily struggle for a living wage and better conditions in the workplace, the fights against fascists, the desire to overcome bad housing, the internationalism of first and second generation immigrants, the desire to ensure that they and their children enjoyed a better life than their parents or grandparents could have, impelled Jews into battle with their class enemies; with the authorities, and with their own communal establishment. At that time the establishment, comprised of bodies like the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association, were controlled by an anachronistic aristocracy who lived in a different world from their subjects.

The Jewish radicals of the 1930s expressed their militancy in many ways from joining left wing parties through to joining the International Brigades in Spain. At the same time there was a growing intellectual movement of artists whose work reflected Jewish working class life and the desire to change the world. Institutions such as the Workers Circle linked the different political and cultural elements, and nourished the continued growth of Jewish radicalism.

The 1940s, '50s and '60s all but smashed this movement. The shattering recognition that the international Left failed to defeat Nazism in Europe, combined with a growing disillusionment with the Soviet Union under Stalin. The failure of powerful nations to solve the Jewish refugee crisis for the victims of Nazism, languishing in displaced persons camps after 1945, led many Jewish radicals to shift their energies towards building a Jewish homeland, a homeland in state form that could only be built at the expense of the Palestinian people. Years later these radicals found themselves entrenched on the side of Zionism and a new world order dictated by the USA, railing against the liberation movements they would once have found a natural affinity with.

A generation bursting with idealism, vitality and creativity endured the reality of war, and though the population as a whole voted Labour in ever greater numbers, many returned from the war with more conservative and patriotic values. In the years of post-war opportunity, the bulk of the Jewish community headed towards the suburbs and economic independence. As they mapped out their children's future, only a university education would do. Families who couldn't meet these expectations increasingly stood on the margins of the community. The political centre of gravity shifted too. A small minority stayed loyal to the communist movement, and many Jews still voted Labour, but more out of habit than conviction as the community adopted more and more conservative ideals. Alongside Middle England's lower middle class, many shifted decisively to Thatcher in 1979.

But it wasn't all one way traffic. Pockets of Jewish



JSG protesters, a stone's throw from the Israeli embassy

their families to benefit from higher education. While some 18-year-olds dutifully prepared for their professional careers others came into contact with a huge wave of student radicalism and, to the annoyance and disbelief of their parents, took to it like fish to water. Britain's militant movements of the 1960s and '70s – the anti-Vietnam war campaign, anti-imperialist groups, a range of Trotskyist groups – were disproportionately populated by young Jews whose parents had settled into conservative suburbia. A new generation of fascists took notice. The British Movement plastered lamp-posts with stickers: 'Workers do not be fooled. The SWP is a Jewish family business.'

But if, in the 1930s, being a Jew and a socialist and a radical was an expression of being part of the community, by the 1970s and 1980s it indicated alienation from the mainstream; standing on the margins as fair game to be attacked. Many radical Jews opted out of the struggles within the community to concentrate on wider issues.

Occasionally they contested issues affecting the Jewish community – especially Zionism – but because they had effectively left the community behind they could be dismissed as minor irritants by the Jewish establishment.

What was far more disturbing to the community's leaders and its 'moving right show' was the presence of an organised group of Jewish radicals and dissenters who were involved in issues in the wider world but who announced they were still part of the Jewish community and weren't going anywhere. This was the Jewish Socialists' Group which for 25 years now has been a continual thorn in the side of those who want to identify the whole community, unquestioningly, with religious orthodoxy, political conservatism and Zionism.

The fiercest clashes took place in the late 1970s and 1980s – over responses to antisemitism and community security, the Israel/Palestine conflict, Zionism, and democracy and pluralism in Jewish life.

The Board of Deputies had usurped the power of various grass roots organisations and hand in hand with the Israeli Embassy acted as if it had the right to dictate where the Jewish community as a whole stood on any issue. Its authority came under attack during the fight against a growing fascist threat from the National Front. A huge popular movement – the Anti-

working class communities survived. When the Jewish community sent its children to university in the 1960s, these children were often the first generation of

Nazi League – was set up to counter this threat, with a great deal of energy being put in by the Socialist Workers Party, who saw it partly as a recruiting vehicle. On behalf of the Jewish community the Board of Deputies denounced the ANL and urged Jews to put their energies into other initiatives. The JSG came out strongly for Jewish involvement in the ANL and frequently provided speakers for ANL events and meetings. This clash heralded a further series of disputes about whom the community should ally with in the fight against antisemitism and how it should fight it. Jewish Socialists' Group members who advocated unity with other groups suffering racism were denounced for working with 'Enemies of Israel'. Today it is commonplace that the role of the Jewish community is to stand alongside black communities and others facing racist persecution and put aside disputes over Israel and Zionism. Perhaps anti-racism is seen as a more mainstream activity today and less identified with the Left, because although the Board of Deputies threw up smokescreens about not allying the anti-Zionists, their main concern then seemed to be to keep young Jews away from the Left.

The conflicts over Israel/Palestine present a similar story. The Jewish establishment initially accused all anti-Zionists of being antisemites, denied that Palestinian claims had any validity and cast the PLO as simply a bunch of terrorists finishing off Hitler's work. At the time Israel passed a law forbidding contact between its Jewish citizens and the PLO and a number of people were imprisoned for this in the 1980s. At its 1981 policy conference the JSG clarified its position on the conflict and, alone in the Jewish community, argued that a lasting solution could only come from negotiations between the Israeli government and the representative body of the Palestinians the PLO. Putting this into practice, the JSG combined with a group of expatriate Israeli dissidents and other socialists and peace activists to bring about the first public meeting in Britain with Jews, Israelis and PLO speakers sharing the same platform.

It was the catalyst for increased repression of the JSG through smear campaigns launched by the Jewish establishment and physical violence in Britain from supporters of Herut, the Israeli far right, which the Board of Deputies never denounced. Certainly there were other groups – like Friends of Peace Now and Poale Zion – who advocated a peaceful solution but they stopped well short of wanting to talk to the PLO. Today such dialogue is wholly unremarkable and, as with anti-racism, while it has become more mainstream it has been emptied of its political content.

A deeper ideological battle though was only just beginning. Uniquely, the JSG not only condemned the repressive practices the Israeli state but also identified a clear conflict of interest between the needs of the Israeli state and the needs of diaspora Jewry. We accused the Jewish establishment of imposing the demands of the Israeli state on Diaspora communities to the detriment of those communities. As this came into clearer focus, so the fight became dirtier involving harassment of our

Jewish
Socialists'
Group

It's our community too

members by 'community security' forces and, most likely, Israeli security forces.

There was no doubt in the 1980s that there was clear blue water between the positions of the Jewish establishment and mainstream Jewish media and those of the radicals and dissidents of the JSG. And yet changes were in the air. Support amongst Anglo-Jewry for the Lebanon war was relatively muted and there began a slow process of recognition that the Palestinian question was central to Middle East peace and the PLO were the relevant body to deal with. At the same time, as Thatcher's domestic policies began to bite into welfare organisations, questions were asked about the proportions of money raised among Jews in Britain allocated to Israel and to welfare at home. 'Diaspora First' was becoming a legitimate view.

The collapse of the Eastern 'communist' bloc at the end of the 1980s had a curious affect. The Soviet states had become a very useful enemy, facilitating Zionist-inspired campaigns to 'rescue' Jews from communism' (but only if they went to Israel!). The new realities encouraged the growth of indigenous Jewish communal organisations in Eastern Europe whose agenda couldn't be dictated by Israel and couldn't be assumed to share the same priorities as western Diaspora leaderships.

And if *glasnost* – openness – was one of the catchphrases of the time, it was starting to find expression among Jews in Britain. New non-establishment groups sprang up to contest accepted views – Jews Against Apartheid, Jonah (anti-nuclear weapons), Jews Against the Clause, Friends of Yesh Gvul. These groups had their own impetus but the JSG was an important element within them. The launch of Jewish Socialist magazine as a forum for a widening band of dissenters, shortly preceded a wider opening up of the Jewish media, which had once been the preserve of the monopolistic Jewish Chronicle and the JC is no longer just a willing poodle of the establishment.

Despite these opportunities the Jewish Socialists' Group did not grow as significantly as it could have done. Hundreds came into the organisation but drifted out again. Maybe we were too protective of our political purity. Maybe we didn't match the *glasnost* in the wider community with enough *glasnost* within our group. Perhaps our internal organisation was too centralised and we should have allowed a more federal structure. Maybe we concentrated too much on confirming what we opposed rather than what positively united us politically and culturally.

Today the lines separating conformists and dissenters are less clear cut and predictable. Diasporists are now found deep in the mainstream, and trenchant critiques of Zionism sometimes emanate from those pursuing a mainly religious agenda. Although the Jewish establishment would never concede that it has tilted towards our analysis, the JSG has won a lot of the arguments. But from the present state of flux and uncertainly, no doubt there will be attempts to impose new orthodoxies in a new century. While we hold to our principles of secularism, diasporism and/or socialism we will either be the eternal dissenters or those sewing the seeds of the new commonsense. †

Glasnost was starting to find expression among Jews in Britain. New non-establishment groups sprang up to contest accepted views – Jews Against Apartheid, Jonah (anti-nuclear weapons), Jews Against the Clause, Friends of Yesh Gvul.

ORWELL

When people discuss politics they use the term 'Orwellian' to describe more than the futuristic totalitarian state he wrote about in the book 1984. It speaks of a fearful attitude of mind where wrong is right, lies are truth, and those who govern deliberately deceive their citizens about the facts of the real world. He also created other words and phrases that have gone into the language: 'Big Brother is watching you', 'War is Peace', 'Freedom is Slavery'. In his anti-Stalinist fable Animal Farm, he coined the immortal line: 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.'

During his life, Orwell rigorously exposed the language and euphemisms politicians used to manipulate voters. His hatred of cant and abuse of language are admired. Above all, he's seen as a writer who championed individual liberty and tolerance, and opposed authoritarian state control. He described himself as a democratic socialist, and was intensely independent in his views about Socialism. One biographer, Bernard Crick, wrote: 'He took his stand among those who were to the Left or on the left of the Labour Party: fiercely egalitarian, libertarian and democratic, but by continental comparisons, surprisingly untheoretical.'

Although his real name was Eric Blair, he wouldn't have signed up to a New Labour under Tony Blair that wasn't committed to radically redistributing power and wealth, and he would have detested the very idea of spin-doctors.

More than most authors, the events of his varied life shaped Orwell's character and writing. He was born in Bengal in 1903. His father, Richard Blair, was a member of the Indian Civil Service during the days of the Raj. Orwell was sent home to England to be educated first at a prep school then Eton. At Eton and it was there that he first became aware of the injustice of the English class system.

After Eton, he decided to go back to the East. He joined the Indian Imperial Police and spent five years in Burma as an assistant superintendent. He eventually became sickened by what he saw of imperialism in action and resigned. Determined to become a writer, Eric Blair went to Paris in 1928 to live cheaply while writing and learn French. He experienced extreme poverty working as a *plongeur*, the lowest of kitchen staff, in an expensive French hotel. Later he became a tramp in London. These experiences were recorded in, Down and Out in Paris and London, the start of his efforts to become a political writer. After returning to London, he deliberately 'went native' in his own country spending time in East End doss houses and on the road.

He later wrote: 'I sometimes lived for months on end amongst the poor and half criminal elements who inhabit the worst parts of the poorer quarters, or take to the streets begging and stealing. At the time I associated with them through lack of money, but later their way of life interested me very much for its own sake.'

With Down and Out in Paris and London, Eric Blair took the pseudonym George Orwell. He chose the name because he didn't want to embarrass his

REVIEWS

George Orwell was one of the greatest political writers Britain has produced in the past century. fifty years after his death, TREVOR GOODCHILD assesses his influence

upper middle class parents about his way of life, and because he liked the River Orwell in Suffolk

He had two novels published over the next few years, although he couldn't make a living from writing. In 1936, he was commissioned to write a book about unemployment and industrial poverty in Northern England. He went to Wigan, Sheffield and Barnsley. His account of what he saw of the lives of miners and others was published in The Road to Wigan Pier by the Left Book Club. With this book, Orwell emerged as a fully politicised writer and thinker with a forceful, plain-speaking style.

While finishing it, Orwell decided to go to Spain where the civil war had broken out between the forces of the left-wing Republican government and the army led by the Fascist general, Francisco Franco. He joined the POUM, a Marxist political militia fighting the fascists, and saw action on the Aragon front. But when he went on leave to Barcelona he became caught up in fighting against the Communists who wanted to take complete control of the Loyalist side by eliminating other left-wing groups. Soon after the street-fighting ended, he went back to the front. He was wounded in the throat by a sniper's bullet not long afterwards, was medically discharged, and eventually returned to England

Orwell never forgot what he learned in Spain about comradeship and the real face of communism under Stalin. He recounted his experiences in Homage to Catalonia published in 1938.

Spain was used by Stalin and Hitler as a testing ground for the battles to come in the Second World War. When that conflict started, Orwell's health was too poor for him to join the British army. Instead he worked for a time as a talks producer at the BBC. His encounter with bureaucracy and war-time censorship there is said to have inspired the creation in 1984 of The Ministry of Truth and Newspeak, the truth-denying language of Big Brother.

In late 1943, Orwell started to write Animal Farm, a fable about animals who drive out their master and take over the farm themselves. Orwell described how the animal revolution, a metaphor for the Russian one, turned sour. The book didn't appear until 1945 because of publishing concerns about criticising a war-time ally, the Soviet Union. It was a great success when it did.

1984 was Orwell's next and last book. It, too, showed his opposition to autocratic government and it, too, became a modern classic. A vision of a post-war world governed by power blocs, it was written as a warning against totalitarianism. The chief character, Winston Smith, works at the Ministry of Truth altering the official history books to reflect constantly-changing political associations. The book describes his failed attempt to rebel against the system.

Orwell's health was deteriorating while he wrote 1984. Many people have speculated about the greater works he may have produced if he had not died, from TB in 1950, at the early age of 46.

Although his stature as a writer and political thinker has reached great heights since his death, there has been some reappraisal in recent years of



his reputation for being decent and straightforward. Two aspects of his life have come more into the spotlight: an antisemitic attitude early on and a later link with British intelligence services. It's shocking, reading it now, to see Orwell quote disparaging anecdotes about Jews by characters in his first book, Down and Out in Paris and London. Bernard Crick called them 'stock, rather nasty, indeed positively antisemitic anecdotes'.

Some suggest that Orwell unconsciously reflected prejudices of the time and the social class he came from. Later he certainly attacked fascism and the antisemitism of Mosley's fascists. Crick recalls an article by Orwell in 1944 in which he attacked some people who had written antisemitic letters. 'His comments show him fully purged of the mild and conventional, but none the less clear, antisemitism which appeared early in Down and Out in Paris and London and lingered in his War-Time Diaries.'

Given his defence of the individual against the state, it's hard to believe that a year before he died Orwell handed the British intelligence services a list of people he considered to be 'crypto-Communists'. Details of his action are given in a recent book, Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War by the historian, Frances Stonor Saunders.

Orwell apparently named writers, actors, intellectuals and left-wing politicians. In 1949, he offered the document to a secret propaganda arm of the British Foreign Office. As Stonor Saunders says 'once in the hands of a branch of government whose activities were not open to inspection, Orwell's list lost any innocence it may have had as a private document.'

Orwell seems to have had no evidence that any one of them was involved in anything illegal. His motivation appears to have been his loathing of Stalinism. On that list he put other great British and Irish writers – JB Priestly, George Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Casey and Cecil Day Lewis. It's intriguing to think what they might have written about that – and Orwell if they had known.

Above right: Orwell with his adopted son, Richard
Photo: Vernon Richards

History's heroes

RIVONIA'S CHILDREN

Glen Frankel

Weidenfeld and Nicholson, £20

The winners in life's wars are given the honour of writing its history. *Rivonia's Children* is the chronicle of some of those most unlikely winners telling how, against all expectations, their history at last became the authorised version.

It is the story of Joe Slovo, the theoretician his wife, Ruth First, the scholar and dynamic activist; of Rusty and Hilda Bernstein, communists and artists; and of AnneMarie Wolpe, drawn in to activism by her husband and unwittingly fated to pull her non-political brother into the swamp that was the Rivonia trial.

This is also the story of left wing Jewish history. Few of the characters had any significant contact with the South African Jewish community; they were, in essence, excommunicated from the insular right wing environment

developed by South African Jews. They saw themselves not as Jews, but as internationalists. However, they were as much products of a particular Jewish experience as those who criticised them so severely at the time and who now suffer from collective amnesia.

These courageous people followed a trajectory set by those Jews, emancipated in the 19th century from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe, and privy to the optimism of the 20th century with its belief in the possibilities of making a 'heaven on earth'. This appealed to the sceptical Litvaks who colonised the Southern tip of Africa. Not for them the myths of individual salvation: they were schooled in the collective ethos, and its disciplines.

That Jewish communist world seems almost quaint from our more self-absorbed vantage point today. These brave people sacrificed their chance of advancement on the altar of a better future for the downtrodden African majority. They stood shoulder to shoulder with Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, African leaders of the time. They were imprisoned, tortured, abused and even murdered. Their children were deeply traumatised and yet they never faltered in their strength and commitment. It is hard to imagine heroism of this nature in today's more cynical times.

The South Africa they did so much to bring about which, today, is a multiracial country with a strong and liberal constitution is, in great measure, due to the work of the people whose lives are so strikingly documented in this book.

Frankel takes as his working text the statement by Hannah Arendt that it is 'the goal of the police state to establish holes of oblivion into which all deeds would disappear. It is our duty to rescue these deeds, recounting them to ourselves and to our children.' Why does that sound like a preamble to a recital of the exodus?

He has succeeded admirably. He conveys with ease the strange heady atmosphere of the time. The story is gripping and awe-inspiring. There is a huge cast and great tragedies are played out, none more so than that of Braam Fischer, the Afrikaner advocate condemned as a traitor to his people, who has rescued Afrikanerdom from ignominy by his staunch, and unbending commitment to a greater cause. There is the court Jew, Percy Yutar, who took sadistic delight in prosecuting the Rivonia accused and when it emerged that he had backed the wrong side, tried to whinge his way out of responsibility.

There are brave people and there are cowards. There are confused children whose lives were blighted, and, above all, there are the many Africans who were condemned by the state.

Glen Frankel's research is meticulous. He lets the riveting story develop through the voices of the main protagonists. He remains unobtrusive, allowing his story of human achievement and frailty to unfold chronologically like a 19th century Russian novel. He spares us nothing of the trauma suffered by those who made the sacrifices that were essential to obtain the democratic state of South Africa, but respects them enough to allow their stories to emerge in their own words. He has used contemporary documentation and oral testimony throughout.

If I have one criticism it is that he succumbs to the American line on communists, providing the obligatory disclaimer about their beliefs, without examining how their actions and ideas were the antithesis of the Stalinist terror which they had never formally criticised.

We all need our heroes. We need to know that, within our lifetimes, giants walked. It is to Frankel's credit that he has seen fit to bring these narratives to the attention of the larger public. ■

Diana Neslen

Fatal logic

THE SEVENTH MILLION

Tom Segev

Hill & Wang

Given the current discussions about how best to remember the Holocaust, it might be worth looking at *Seventh Million*, first published in 1991, which deals with the specifically Israeli dimension of Holocaust remembrance. The author, Tom Segev, is an Israeli journalist known for his work on the expulsion of the Palestinians during the 1948 war.

Here he attempts to deal with the impact of the Holocaust on Israeli politics and society. Although at over 500 pages it might appear a little daunting, Segev's background as a journalist shows in the accessible writing style and structure. Each of the book's eight sections can be taken separately, making this an interesting book to dip into.

This is a multifaceted work which is descriptive as well as analytical. Though while Segev is not concerned with simply making an ideological case, certain points recur strongly throughout his book:

- 1 Scepticism toward claims that the Holocaust vindicated Zionist ideology;
- 2 That the legacy of the Holocaust has been consciously manipulated and constructed by political factions and the Israeli establishment;
- 3 The dominant trend in the Israeli memorialisation of the Holocaust has been fatalistic, in line with Zionist ideology, and therefore tends to support chauvinistic and militaristic conclusions.

In the sections dealing with reparations and the Kastner libel trial (dramatised in Jim Allen's play, *Perdition*) Segev shows how the Holocaust was crucial in defining the right wing challenge to the Labour establishment and, specifically, in establishing Menachem Begin, 'the great populariser of the Holocaust', as a major political figure. Segev's description of the political controversy surrounding the issue of alleged collaboration with the Nazis by leaders of the Zionist

movement and the campaign against accepting reparations payments from West Germany give a flavour of the insanely vindictive atmosphere of Israeli politics at the time.

The trial of Adolph Eichmann in 1961 is identified as crucial in creating the conditions for a consensus to be formed around the Holocaust which up to then had been a contradictory and troublesome issue in Israeli life. At its worst, this consensus became an unbendable doctrine justifying any act of aggression or repression

the other hand, the competing tendency to apply humanistic and democratic lessons has been fragile and occasional. The reaction to the Kafr Kasim massacre, when 50 Arab civilians were killed by Israeli soldiers, is cited as an attempt to do this. The attempt to define an illegal order made by the court which tried the soldiers responsible for the massacre is described by Segev as 'one of the most important, noble and imprecise paragraphs ever formulated by an Israeli court'. However he concludes that the



Tom Segev: 'The Holocaust summons all to preserve democracy.'

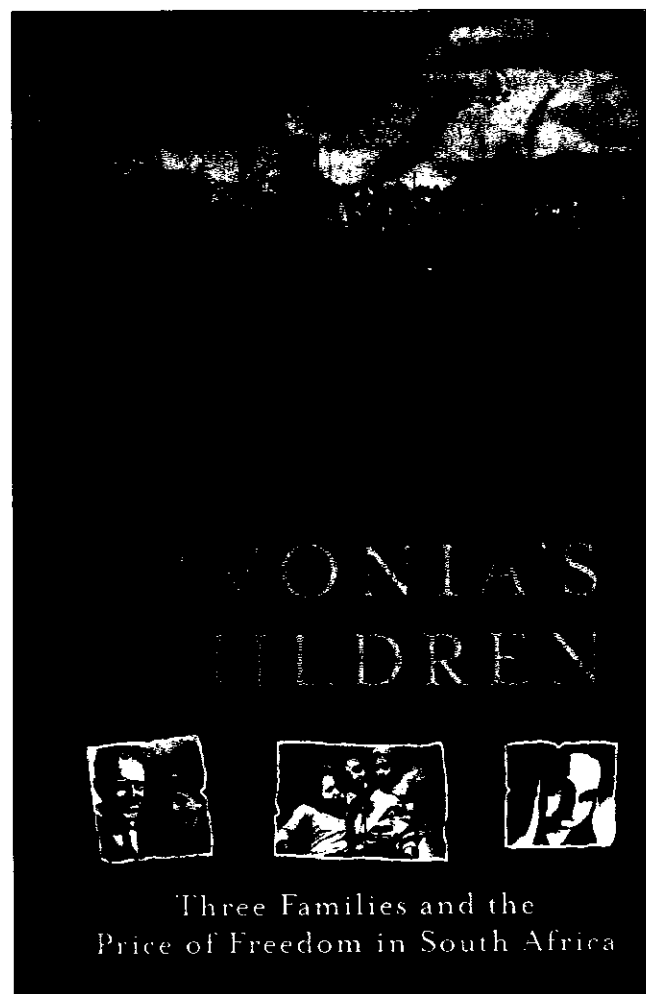
and at the same time, a legacy of guilt for the rest of the world which disqualified any criticism of these actions. Crucial to this mindset was the understanding that the Holocaust was in some sense the exclusive moral property of the Israeli state. So, while Israel's leaders repeatedly, and often bizarrely, compared their opponents in the Arab world to Nazis they simultaneously outlawed the same comparison from being made about their actions in the occupied territories.

On the whole then, according to Segev, the Holocaust has been used to justify aggression towards Israel's neighbours and unjust treatment of the Palestinians. On

promise contained within this judgement was not fulfilled. Public opinion did not reflect the initial outrage of sections of the Israeli press and within three years all the soldiers responsible for the massacre had been released.

Despite the many negative aspects of what he describes as 'Israeli memorial culture', Segev concludes that it would be wrong to forget or downplay the Holocaust, arguing instead that Israeli society needs to learn that 'the Holocaust summons all to preserve democracy to fight racism and to defend human rights'. ■

Marc Gutteridge



RAF SALKIE reviews books about fascists here, there and everywhere

As I write, the newspapers are denouncing bogus asylum seekers, Austria has a new government which includes the far right, the David Irving libel trial is in full flow, and the Chief Rabbi is supporting Clause 28. As for Tony Blair's New Tories, the less said the better.

Meanwhile the Israelis have unleashed violence in Lebanon, and have failed to negotiate seriously with Syria. What we need is some principled socialist analysis, I hear you say. Well, I found an excellent article by Tanya Reinhart about the 'peace process' (www.zmag.org/tanya%5Freinhart.htm), but otherwise this selection of reading matter will only leave you with more unanswered questions.

In **Children of a New Fatherland** (IB Tauris, £25), Jan Herman Brinks tries to explain why neo-fascist groups are flourishing in Germany, particularly the former East Germany. We are told that the

official anti-fascist ideology promoted by Ulbricht and Honecker became 'a meaningless ritual' in the German Democratic Republic. School students 'were almost forced to visit the torture chambers of the concentration camps', but 'some people may have identified with the heroism of the Third Reich rather than with the grey routine of "real socialism"'. What was the regime supposed to do? Not mention the German socialists who tried to fight the Nazis from the 1920s onward? Treat the concentration camps with embarrassed silence, as happened in Poland? A lot of anti-fascist ideology was accurate – probably more so than the version of history I grew up with, in which the brave British, led by Churchill, defeated the jackbooted hordes with a bit of American help at the end.

The far right's tactic is: never examine your own dirty past, just complain about other people. The trouble is, we're all like to that to some degree. If we genuinely cared about oppressed and marginalised people, one group that would be near the top of our agenda would be gypsies. In **the Shadow of the Swastika; the Gypsies during the Second World War** (Centre de recherches Tsiganes/ University of Hertfordshire Press, £12.75) documents in horrifying detail the detention, deportation and slaughter of Romany and Sinti people by the Nazis and their collaborators in many parts of

Europe. In France, one of the biggest concentration camps for 'nomads' was near Poitiers; another was in Montreuil-Bellay, about 50 miles to the north. I lived in Poitiers for a year, and drove through Montreuil-Bellay many times, in ignorance of all this. I'm angry at the French for not telling me about it, and I'm angry at myself for not knowing.

None of which put me in a good mood to read **New Voices in Jewish Thought** (Limmud publications, £5), a collection of essays by graduate students in Jewish studies. There's an interesting piece about radicalism in the Jewish East End in the late 19th and early 20th century, and I was intrigued to read in another essay about Israeli devotees of 'extreme metal', a part of the music scene has neo-Nazi adherents in many countries, so contacts between Israeli enthusiasts and their Nordic counterparts lead to problems, as you can imagine. It's good to see Jewish writing which lacks the smugness and nastiness of the mainstream but I couldn't see the hardest questions being asked.

Why does the right dominate the Jewish community? How can we deal with the ugly things Jews are responsible for? Until these issues are tackled, Limmud and other attempts to revitalise Jewish culture will be knocking at a closed door.

And so to **100 poems Without a Country** by Erich Fried, who died in 1988 (John Calder, £9.99). An Austrian Marxist who lived in England for most of his life, Fried wrote with passion and humour about many of the big and small problems facing the European left. His poem, 'Classical Freedom of Choice' about Scylla and Charybdis, ends:

*though it was said that the two
were secretly allied
most people would settle
for one
or the other*

*strangely enough
not one of them
survived
except Odysseus
he did not recognise the need
to choose*

Not many answers here, but Fried was asking the right questions.



The Vanished Shtetl is a beautiful book of 50 paintings by the Warsaw-born Jewish artist, Stanislaw Brunstein who died in 1994. Brunstein came to Britain in 1946 having endured the early years of the war in a Soviet labour camp while his family perished at the hands of the Nazis. In 1962 he began a prolific and haunting series of paintings connected with his Polish-Jewish childhood, described by his daughter Lorna as capturing 'the obliterated world of the shtetl with warmth, colour, compassion, clarity and tenderness, helping to keep at bay the dark, painful and nightmarish memories.' The book includes essays by Ross Bradshaw, Dow Marmur and Raphael Scharf.

The Vanished Shtetl: Paintings by Stanislaw Brunstein, Ross Bradshaw (ed), Five Leaves Publications, (£10.99).

LETTERS

Send letters to **Jewish Socialist**, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX; js@bardrose.dircon.co.uk

Human dimension

I've had a subscription for some years and really look forward to getting each issue of the magazine. You have provided me with articles and stances that have enriched my own approach to socialism and I often find that my own thoughts about important world events coincide with what you have to say on them. You have a human dimension to your politics which is all too often missing from other organisations. Your concern with issues such as the upbringing of children is a case in point. I wish you all good fortune in the years to come.

Yours for socialism
Keith White
Fife, Scotland

No regrets

I was conceived just before my father was shipped overseas in the Second World War so that, were he to be killed, my mother would have some remnant of that relationship. My mother was a militant, atheist Jewish socialist. When I was born she announced that she 'wasn't making a blood sacrifice to a God I don't believe in'. Relatives and friends were horrified. The paediatrician, an observant Jew, admitted that there wasn't any medical reason to perform the surgery but cautioned that that the area under my foreskin must be kept clean.

I have two younger brothers, also not circumcised as children. One brother was eventually circumcised for medical reasons. My other brother felt self-conscious about his penis being different from his classmates' (oh, those locker rooms!). I don't share his self-consciousness. I go to gatherings where clothing is optional and people say: 'I thought you were Jewish.' I explain my mother's adamancy. I am proud of my status and proud and happy that my mother had the strength to withstand all the cultural pressure to conform to old-fashioned Judaism.

Faygele BenMiriam
Seattle, USA



THEY BELIEVE IN YESTERDAY

Attempts to stop Ken Livingstone with a dog-eared Zionist dossier on his support for the Palestinian cause, reminded a JSJ member of the time he was asked to help someone writing a book about the former leader of the Greater London Council. Our comrade confessed that he knew nothing about Ken that wasn't already in the papers. But the would-be author, pursuing an 'anti-Jewish angle', had been given access to Board of Deputies files; 'and as you were involved with *Labour Herald*...' Livingstone's paper in the early 1980s had run a Lebanon war cartoon depicting Menahem Begin as a Nazi and the Board of Deputies had protested.

The JSJ member had only been slightly involved with *Labour Herald*. He had been on the Labour Committee for Palestine but Livingstone rarely attended, having been busy running the GLC at the time. Meanwhile, he wondered, just what was in those Board of Deputies files which Jewish Socialists had been assured at the time did not exist. That book on Livingstone never appeared, but the recent mayoral campaign rehashed stuff from those years. New Labour? Stale old material?

LAND OF OZ

Australia's Jewish community was alongside trade unionists and the Left in supporting the people of East Timor. World War II veterans sent support, and rabbis took as their Yom Kippur

sermon the verse: 'We must not stand by the blood of our neighbour'. But Jews for Justice and Human Rights in East Timor ran into trouble at a Rabin commemorative rally in Melbourne when they distributed an open letter attacking guest, former Prime Minister Paul Keating's record of support for Indonesia's military.

Top Zionist officials came 'shouting, tearing up the leaflets and calling out that security should be called to prevent Robin and me from putting the leaflets on seats,' writes John Ebel. 'I tried to persuade them that given that my mother is a survivor of Auschwitz, I was very concerned about the fate of East Timorese and that it was highly appropriate to raise these concerns but to no avail. One of the heavies forcibly snatched the bundle of leaflets that Robin had been holding. I couldn't quite see whether this person pushed Robin. I was totally appalled by this type of thuggish behaviour.'

CIVIC RECEPTION

Volunteers trying to clear up the mess from France's Erica oil disaster included a team from SOS Racisme, mostly black and Arab youth from deprived areas. 'They deserve a civic reception,' said an onlooker. Returning to Paris, the exhausted young workers got one. Lining the stations were hard-faced riot police, clubs at the ready. Pity they couldn't sort out irresponsible oil companies and shipowners, but when politicians talk of getting tough with crime, they invariably mean the crimes of the poor and young, not the rich and powerful.

JEWISH SOCIALIST

is a quarterly magazine launched by the Jewish Socialists' Group in 1985 as a forum for radical ideas and opinions on issues directly affecting the Jewish community here and elsewhere and on questions vital to minorities and socialists everywhere.

Through this forum we aim to:

- highlight the clash of political, economic and cultural interests in our community;
- encourage the democratisation of all aspects of Jewish life and publicise and support all democratic forces in the Jewish community;
- highlight the struggle for equality for women and gays and lesbians within and beyond our community;
- promote views that link the interests of Jewish people to the interests of other national and cultural minorities and oppressed groups, locally, nationally and internationally, and to a common socialist future;
- counter myths about the 'shrinking', 'dying' and 'assimilating' diaspora by affirming the vitality of Jewish communities across the world;
- counter Zionist ideology, which subordinates the needs of diaspora Jews to the demands of Israeli state nationalism, and justifies exclusivist, discriminatory and repressive practices towards the Palestinian people;
- promote ideas and perspectives that offer a progressive solution to conflicts involving the Jewish people such as the Israel/Palestine conflict;
- expose and oppose fundamentalist ideas and religious coercion within and beyond our community;
- reclaim a 'people's history' of the Jews which connects our historical experience to the struggles of other working people and the oppressed;
- highlight the problems facing minorities in society and within progressive movements and make these concerns central to discussions of socialist strategy here and now;
- support and promote radical progressive cultural initiatives within and beyond the Jewish community;
- promote views which link the struggle to build socialism with the struggle for a healthy and sustainable environment;
- promote a socialism that is culturally pluralist and fully democratic both in its ends and means.

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