

## JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

The JSG 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 group works and campaigns with other organisations sharing some or all of our aims and always welcomes new members who support our political principles. All members receive a regular internal discussion bulletin, a frequent newsletter detailing meetings and events and can participate fully in our annual conference and in any aspect of the group's work.

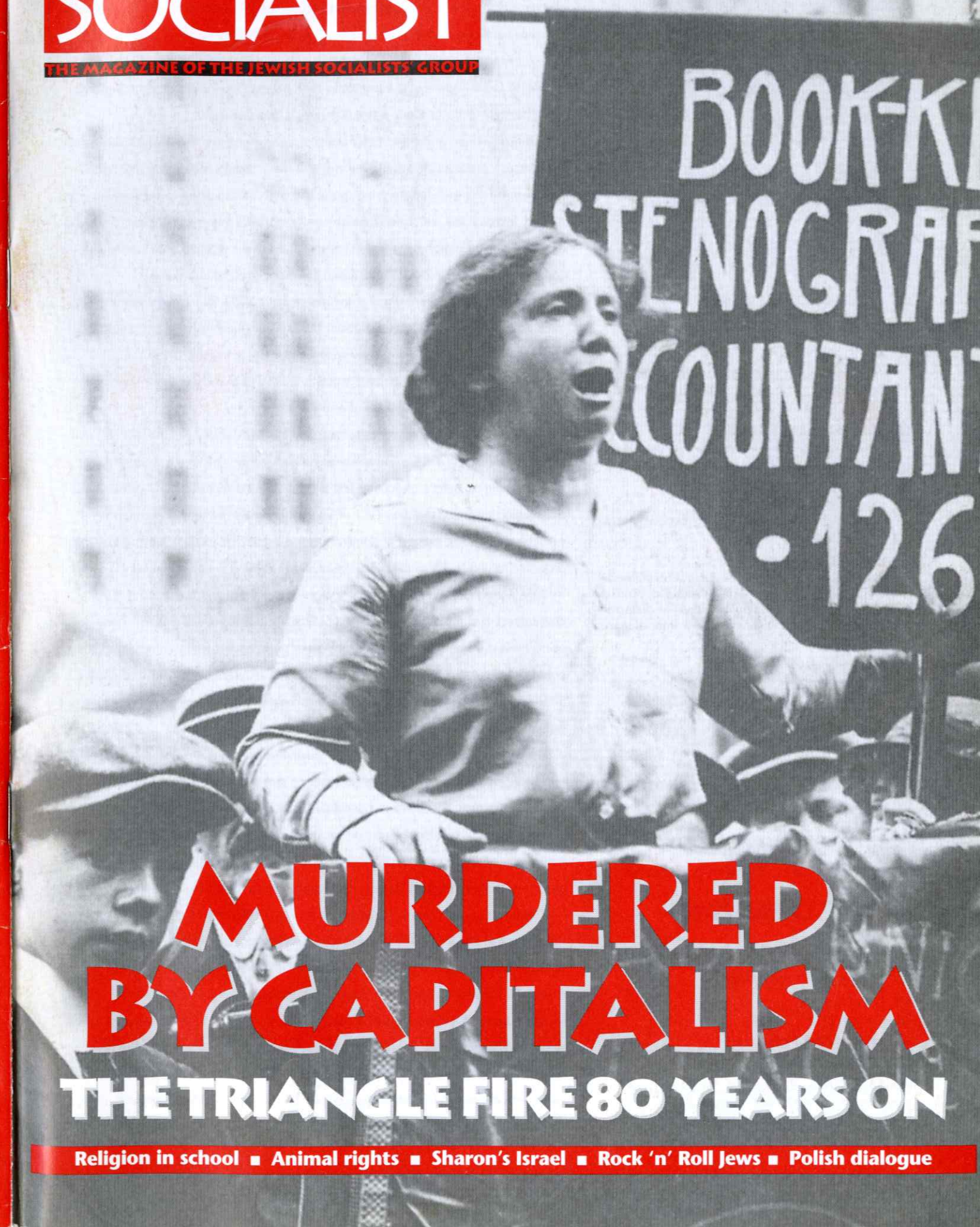
For further information write to: the Membership Secretary, Jewish Socialists' Group, BM3725, London WC1N 3XX  
[js@dircon.co.uk](mailto:js@dircon.co.uk)  
[www.jewish-socialist.org](http://www.jewish-socialist.org)

© Jewish Socialist. The opinions expressed in Jewish Socialist are those of individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the editorial committee or of the Jewish Socialists' Group. Jewish Socialist is published quarterly by Jewish Socialist Ltd, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX. Printed by The Russell Press, Russell House, Bulwell Lane, Basford, Nottingham NG6 0BT. Names and addresses of Jewish Socialist subscribers are held on a computer to facilitate efficient distribution. This information is used for no other purpose. The Data Protection Act 1984 requires us to inform subscribers that they may object to information being held in this form.

No 44 Spring 2001 £1.50

# JEWISH ★ SOCIALIST

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP



## MURDERED BY CAPITALISM THE TRIANGLE FIRE 80 YEARS ON

Religion in school ■ Animal rights ■ Sharon's Israel ■ Rock 'n' Roll Jews ■ Polish dialogue



- 3 Peace Now dropouts, Zygielbojm, Obituaries
- 4 Days of Action, Benefit

- 6 **Some are more equal than others**  
Paul Collins takes issue with meat-eating lefties

- 8 **The withdrawal method**  
Julia Bard says there is no place for God in schools

- 10 **Britain must face its past**  
Tony Klug argues the case for a Holocaust and Slavery Day

- 11 **No escape**  
As anti-capitalist protests escalate, Charlie Pottins recalls the earlier victims of the Triangle Fire in New York

- 16 **Sharon's second coming**  
Special feature on Israel after the elections by Adam Keller, spokesperson for the radical peace movement – Gush Shalom

- 22 **Friday night fever**  
Michael Billig looks at the part played by Jews in the history Rock and Roll

- 24 **Inside Europe**  
Ben Gidley shows how refugees have helped shape political movements in London; Norman Jacobs reports on a new initiative for dialogue in Poland; Mike Heiser visits Germany in search of his family roots.

- 30 **Looking back**  
Charlie Pottins writes on how his decision to join other Jewish socialists affected his life

- 7 Poem by Jacob Bard-Rosenberg
- 14 Karen Gershon, Dannie Abse, Bernard Kops
- 15 Song by Sh Ansky

- 32 The Ben Uri Story, The Whitechapel Centenary

- 4 Eye on Zion,
- 5 Change the world
- 13 From where I'm standing,
- 29 Letters
- 34 On the shelf
- 33 Modern Yiddish uses
- 35 Dybbuk's diary

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel and David Rosenberg  
Printed by The Russell Press, Russell House, Bulwell Lane, Basford, Nottingham NG6 0BT.

**MAY DAY** was established as an International Workers Day in 1890 to commemorate strikers and agitators in Chicago, six of whom were shot by the police and four arrested and hanged in the struggle for an 8-hour working day. In many industrialising countries at that time, there were people, children included, forced to labour up to 16 hours a day, six or seven days a week. The demand was raised for the 'three 8s' – 8 hours work, 8 hours leisure, 8 hours sleep.

Today, in Britain and other rich countries, many workers have formally achieved this, though pressures to work overtime and meet targets mean that working hours are often much longer. Meanwhile the basis and location of exploitation has shifted. Increasingly, when workers buy products with their wages, they are forced to invest in multinational companies whose employees manufacture the bulk of consumer products in poor Third World countries on starvation wages.

With a growing internationalist awareness and understanding in recent years, mass actions have been initiated under the banner of anti-capitalism. The major capitalist players cannot meet now without attracting huge protests, and the media, used to trivialising socialist arguments and demands, are increasingly having to adapt to the language of anti-capitalists.

The impetus for these movements has come from the young, disenfranchised and alienated, although participation has been much broader. The far left is desperately trying to cling on before it becomes Left Behind. The remnants of the Communist Party are warning supporters to steer clear of 'anarchists', while the Labour establishment, with the opportunist support of Ken Livingstone, urged zero tolerance by police against protesters taking their campaigns to the heart of London's West End on May Day.

For London's 5,000 May Day campaigners this year, a day of protests culminated in eight hours imprisoned behind thousands of riot police zealously using their truncheons and shields whenever people tried to break out. But they could not prevent a series of protests erupting in different parts of the city against a range of targets symbolising capitalist domination of our lives and their rapacious pursuit of profit over human need.

For the masses in the Third World, industrialising capitalism is uprooting more and more people from their rural subsistence and turning them literally into wage-slaves. In the most industrialised countries the price of capitalism is alienation and a lack of control over basic aspects of life. In areas of declining industries, capitalism means the death of communities. And for countless workers, capitalism has meant death – victims of neglect by bosses of safety concerns for those they employ.

Our cover picture shows Rose Schneiderman, a heroine of the Jewish labour movement in America who spoke out in the wake of the Triangle Fire of 1911, when 146 sweatshop workers, mainly Jewish and Italian immigrants, met their death. As Charlie Pottins' article (page 11) reminds us, such 'accidents' have recurred across the century and across the world. But if the problem is old, our solutions must be new. Capitalism not only impoverishes but wrecks the most terrible environmental havoc. If socialism is to prevail it must be a socialism that places environmental repair and sustainability, not as an add-on demand, or as a tactic to forge temporary alliances, but as a principle right at its heart.

## ONCE MORE INTO THE BRITISH ARMY

Whither the peace process? Or should that read wither? Not the unequal tussle between Yasser Arafat on the one side and Ariel 'Whitewash' Sharon and George Dubya on the other. I mean the unity between Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) members, non aligned Jews and left-Zionists who purport to share a search for concord and equality in the Middle East.

The churlish should not be permitted to dismiss Just Peace UK as a mere cyberspace talkshop whose existence itself on such a divisive issue merits celebration. The capacity audience for a lively public debate hosted by the religious-cultural organisation Yakar may not have emerged without this new initiative. And Yakar's involvement with a wide ranging coalition helped find a necessary, if controversial, Zionist speaker. Many resisted Colin Shindler's critique, but his appearance before critics differed from their seeing red over Orange Prize novelist Linda Grant's late withdrawal.

However, the Just Peace colour was a little yellow on plans to promote a vigil through the press, broadcasters and online news. There was fertile ground to interest them. In the weeks before, apologists within Anglo-Jewry had enacted their familiar rituals in response to public outrage at Israeli repression. Adverts urged *nudniks* with more cash than commonsense to keep faith with the Jewish State and

holiday there in its needy hour. There were attacks on journalists from parliamentarians like Steve Twigg, whom some thought hitherto less self-serving than his predecessor Michael Portillo. Then Jewish leaders announced plans for a £400,000 campaign to counter imaginary media bias. Experienced news reporters, consulted on the vigil, recognised that one more peace demonstration was no major development. But a challenge from Jews to the propaganda drive by their community's authorities? Now, here's a real story.

The trouble was that just because some Zionist placard wavers are for something, that does not mean they are against anything that denies their position. So British Friends of Peace Now buried the challenge way down the news release and guaranteed little exposure. Wags suggested the Friends rename themselves 'Peace Never'. This jibe came after they withdrew as a group from Just Peace to restore their invisible profile, rather than share vital common ground with some non-Zionists and anti-Zionists.

From the first meeting some campaigners who launched Just Peace felt that far from a relationship made it heaven, it resembled the marriage from hell. Political activists are used to 'broad churches'. The internationalist Jeremy Corbyn inhabits the same party as refugee-basher Barbara Roche. Black Peer Lord Taylor of Warwick

stands alongside MP John 'mongrel' Townend. Yet this fragile alliance seemed to crave a triumph for hope over experience. It coalesced around the basic, though limited belief that Arabs in the Territories and inside the Green Line had suffered enough. A decent peace agreement would not only ensure their human rights, but Israel's security.

While the JSG's political affinities remain diverse, their consensus on Israel/Palestine has stayed consistent. Commitment to equality-based solutions is not deflected by regrettable violence when frustrations explode. For many left-Zionists, when the going gets tough they get moving to the right. If these 'backers' think Palestinian children throwing rocks and



risking death by Israeli troops have 'betrayed' Jewish sympathisers, they must be stoned on other substances. Jews who seek radical alternatives to establishment sterility need to find partners who will not run for cover when their opponents first shots ring out.

Paul Collins

JustPeaceUK@yahoo.com

## Towards a new peace camp...

Gush Shalom – the radical wing of the Israeli peace movement – is seeking to encourage international debate about an extensive document it has just published about the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the failure of the peace process and possible ways forward. It was published as a whole page advertisement in April in the mainstream Ha'aretz' newspaper to bring it to the attention of the Israeli public.

Jewish Socialist has published this document as an insert in this issue for subscribers and for members of the JSG. Send your comments on the document to: Gush Shalom, POB 3322, Tel-Aviv 61033 or email them at info@gush-shalom.org

Other readers who wish to receive a copy should send a stamped addressed envelope (A4) to JS, BM3725, London WC1N 3XX.

## OLE V'SHOLEM

In the last issue we published a poem, 'Reflections', by Isidore Wallman. He was delighted that it was to be published in Jewish Socialist. Sadly, he died a week before the magazine came out.

We also express deep regret at John Diamond's untimely death after a long and well publicised battle with cancer. He was a good friend to the magazine who responded in inimitable style to our Relaunch Appeal. Enclosing a cheque for £500 he wrote: 'This is definitely not a donation but my subscription for the next 67 years' – a perfect example of his humour and generosity.

We wish the family and friends of Isidore and John a long life.

## REMEMBER SZMUL ZYGIELBOJIM

On Sunday 20th May, people will gather to remember Szmul Zygielbojm, who represented the Jewish workers' movement, the Bund, on the Polish Parliament in Exile during the war. Zygielbojm, one of the leaders of Warsaw's defence from the Nazi invasion in 1939, took his life in May 1943 as a protest against the world's indifference to the plight of Jews under Nazi occupation. Five years ago a committee comprising Jewish Socialists' Group members and Bundist survivors persuaded Westminster council to mount a plaque in honour of Zygielbojm. A memorial ceremony takes place by the plaque each May. Meet at 11.30am on Sunday 20th May in the public gardens in Porchester Square, London W2.

## SCHOOL FOR SOLIDARITY

**Two school students – one Jewish, one Muslim – joined forces to organise a meeting in support of justice for Palestinians**

On 14th March this year, we held a meeting at our north London comprehensive in opposition to the Israeli government's violent and repressive policy towards the Palestinian people. We invited Simon Behrman from the Campaign for Palestinian Rights to speak.

The meeting, which followed several other political meetings that had already taken place in the school, met with immediate opposition from the Head who insisted that it had to be 'a fair debate'. We argued that it did not have to be a debate but we had the right to promote our political agenda. A sympathetic science teacher agreed that we could borrow his classroom for the meeting which we would hold at a lunchbreak. We also got the go-ahead from the school's citizenship post-holder.

Over the next week we put our energies into publicizing the meeting through posters and through word of mouth. Two days before the meeting, we were informed that a mother had phoned up the Headteacher, complaining that this meeting was being allowed to take place and demanding that a Zionist speaker be on the platform. The Head, however, did not force us to change the nature of our meeting.

The day before the meeting was due to take place, a girl in the upper sixth form came up to me (Reuben) with a meeting poster which she had taken off the wall and proceeded to argue with me against the meeting. She told me she was going to speak with the Head because she was not happy. We proposed that we should be allowed to promote our agenda in this meeting and that she would be allowed to promote a Zionist agenda at a different

meeting the following week as well as contribute from the floor in the discussion at our meeting. To her disapproval, this was agreed with the Head and citizenship post-holder.

The second meeting never materialized. After thanking the two members of staff for defending our right to organize we faced just one more last-ditch attempt to have the meeting cancelled. This was a phone-call from the parent who had previously complained, to my mother in which she tried to persuade my (somewhat anti-Zionist) mother to make me call off the meeting.

After jumping over all these hurdles the meeting finally went ahead. It is not easy to get students to lunchtime meetings but we hoped that ten students would turn up. By the time the meeting started 26 students and teachers filled the room as Simon Behrman spoke and was spontaneously applauded. Much discussion and debate followed over issues such as antisemitism and the peace process.

It was a great success. The controversy stirred up by Zionist attempts to ban our legitimate meeting probably increased the turnout. Our only misgiving was having the short time window of 40 minutes at lunchtime in which to debate a matter which we could have continued to debate for many hours!

We are both now involved in Youth Action for Palestine – a campaigning group set up by youth in north London with the aim of raising awareness and building support among British youth for Palestinian rights. For too long the Palestinians have received Israel's egregious blows with approval from the international community.

**Reuben Bard-Rosenberg and Sonny Rashid**

Contact Youth Action for Palestine: [Yap\\_pals@hotmail.com](mailto:Yap_pals@hotmail.com).

Campaign for Palestinian Rights: [palestinianrights@hotmail.com](mailto:palestinianrights@hotmail.com)

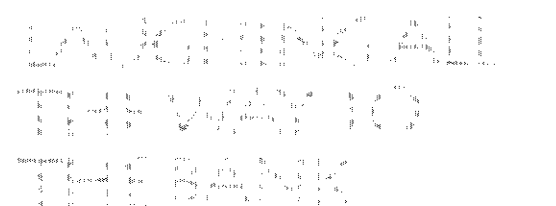
Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [psolidarity@lineone.net](mailto:psolidarity@lineone.net) Box BM PSA, London, WC1N 3XX. Tel: 020 7700 6192.

## Days of action

The Jewish Socialists' Group marked International Women's Day with a public meeting on 'Women's Struggles in Israel and Palestine'. The speakers were Ruth Cohen who has been active in Israeli feminist and anti-occupation campaigns and Palestinian activist Saida Nusseibah who has initiated many dialogue projects.

Veteran Bundist Majer Bogdanski spoke in April at the JSG's annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, about the personal courage of the fighters, the first in Nazi-occupied Europe to fight the nazis face to face in the most unequal struggle. The event also included Yiddish songs written in the ghettos, closing with the hymn of the partisans penned by Hirsh Glik.

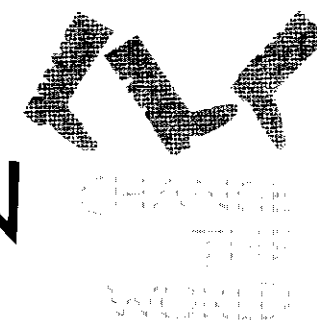
Also in April, the group marked the festival of Passover with a secular, socialist Seder. As we go press the JSG is preparing for its annual policy conference which includes resolutions on immigration and asylum, campaigning on Israel/Palestine, the general election, conflict in the Balkans, and Jewish fundamentalism.



It was standing room only at the Red Rose Comedy Club on February 12th for 'You Must be Joking!' - a benefit night for Jewish Socialist magazine. The biggest cheer of the night went to Iranian comedian Omid Djalili who showed why he had just been named Best Stand-up Comedian of the Year by Time Out. Other performers who gave their services entirely free of charge were comedian Mark Maier; the poets Mike Rosen and Redjen; musicians – Leon Rosselson and Ensemble Plaied; jugglers – the Clever Tossers; and magician Ian Saville.

The evening was expertly compered by Ivor Dembina. With stalls let to Bookmarks and to the Anti-Nazi League, and a prize winning raffle, the magazine raised £1200 towards its re-launch appeal. So a massive thank you to all who came and helped make it a great success!

## NATIONAL COALITION OF ANTI-DEPORTATION CAMPAIGNS



NCADC is a voluntary organisation that provides practical help and advice to people facing deportation on how to launch and run anti-deportation campaigns. NCADC also provides advice and assistance with the media and preparing press releases and supports public events organised by each campaign.

We believe that all deportations are inhumane and degrading. Families are being torn apart; asylum seekers are forced back into countries of persecution; and gay and lesbian couples are denied the basic right to have a relationship. These experiences motivated campaigners and supporters to get together with those facing deportation and do something about it. In 1995 they formed the National Coalition Of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.

NCADC assists anyone who asks for our help to remain in the UK. So far they are mostly asylum seekers who have been refused permission to stay; families from ethnic minority communities; or couples being split by the deportation of one parent or partner and gay and lesbian couples torn apart by deportation because they cannot benefit from the rules that protect married couples.

We provide a network for campaigns throughout the country enabling them to support each other. Every year we organise national meetings for campaigners to come together, share their experiences and discuss campaigning tactics.

The structure of the Coalition ensures that campaign members are actively involved in the running of the organisation through their campaigns

and through the activities of the organisation.

One of our aims is to inform and educate various groups and communities about the negative effects of unjust immigration rules, not only for those struggling against them but also for the fabric of our society.

We produce a quarterly newsletter and maintain a website with information on our work, up-to-date immigration statistics and news as well as the latest campaigns. The Coalition also lobbies government to amend immigration law and practice which leads to unjust or inhumane deportations, and assists in mounting campaigns against such legislation.

The Coalition has grown and now has paid co-ordinators in three regions but most of the work is carried out by a great number of passionate volunteers who invest their time and energy to help fight deportation. They come from a variety of professional backgrounds and walks of life with one thing in common – a commitment to social justice.

**Zrinka Bralo**

If you are interested in anti-deportation campaigning or volunteering, or wish to support our work or subscribe to our newsletter or email list, please contact your nearest NCADC office.

Birmingham: 0121 554 6947.

Email: [ncadc@ncadc.org.uk](mailto:ncadc@ncadc.org.uk)

London: 020 7701 5197.

Email: [ncadc.london@appleonline.net](mailto:ncadc.london@appleonline.net)

Manchester 0161 740 8206

Email: [tony.openshaw@pop3.poptel.org.uk](mailto:tony.openshaw@pop3.poptel.org.uk)

Website: [www.ncadc.org](http://www.ncadc.org)



Campaigners protest at the routine detention of asylum seekers

# WANT TO KNOW MORE?

**Socialists strive to meet human needs but it should not be at the expense of animals, says PAUL COLLINS**

Feeling peckish? How about boiled kittens? Or fried puppies? Snacks reserved for the sick? Not for one ex-comrade in misspent Labour days. 'The only good creature is on a plate' was his mildest jibe at non-carnivores. Soon he was cutting public services as much as roast pig in his councillor role for one of Britain's poorest areas.

You can't be a Christian and a Conservative. So the contention goes for the Anglican Church once called the Tory party at prayer. You often hear it from those who want to be thought of as socialists yet claim the right to fill their gullets with animal grub. They see no contradiction between their hatred of blood sports and their professed love for four-legged beings served up as gastronomic delights. The drooling looks of lamb diners about to tuck into their Sunday chops can resemble the leers of hunters when the hounds start to tear a fox cub to pieces. Species hypocrisy remains so common that this comparison may appear extreme.

Parents who pride themselves on their educative roles, as children stroke cows in the country, then treat their kids to a Big Mac for lunch. Teachers protect young pupils from TV film which shows pyres of foot-and-mouth carcasses, then join them in gorging on smokey bacon crisps. Fellow journalists, within minutes of reporting, grim-faced, on BSE victims, gobble up their beefsteak without demur.

This mass duplicity could account for Tony Blair's supine fudge over rural field carnage, besides the willingness to break countless manifesto pledges. It might also explain why a free vote seems an advance in comparison with rejecting debate on the recreation of trapping fish with bait on sharp hooks,

otherwise known as angling. Radio programmes for such hobbyists never say how aquatic life gasps for a last breath, dragged from its watery home to a miserable demise. The same stations tell how many serial killers begin their murderous acts by torturing the helpless who are both dumb and defenceless.

Amid Britain's post-Thatcher individualism, and compassion fatigue, recent reports suggest a reversal in moves away from meat eating and a revival of unashamed fur wearing. Take one relative. 'Mmm', she purred over her chopped liver. 'How could I have given up something so good for 10 years?' But, then, witness my failure to go the whole hog, pardon the expression, and graduate from spurning meat as murder to becoming vegan.

All the more laudable that the Jewish Vegetarian Society exists to present some alternative to the unthinking diet of chicken soup and chopped liver. Yet, according to informed sources, the society has repressed members' calls for pressure against controversial kosher abattoirs. The Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) has no prouder record on the issue. Two years ago its annual conference voted to launch internal discussion before a potential campaign on *shekhitah* (ritual slaughter). So far initial exchanges between three men and a dog (no, still less, without the canine) represent the full degree of this scrutiny. The deafening silence contrasts with the group's vociferous concern over another matter, which sees the fleshy assault on the defenceless – circumcision.

Never work with children and animals, goes the exhortation to actors. The advice ignores the unequal care devoted to the former. The government confronts deserved attack for neglecting the needs of

those who are waker than he is.' Elsewhere he wrote: 'For the animals it is an eternal Treblinka.'

(Quoted in Animal Rights, Mark Gold, Jon Carpenter Publishers, £7.99)

Animal Aid: [www.animalaid.org.uk](http://www.animalaid.org.uk)  
Friends of Animals Under Abuse (FAUNA), PO Box 156, Cardiff CF5 5YD  
Vegetarians International Voice for Animals (VIVA!) [www.viva.org.uk](http://www.viva.org.uk)  
Jewish Vegetarian Society, 855 Finchley Road, London NW11

Compassion in World Farming, 5a Charles St, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 3EH, [www.ciwf.co.uk/](http://www.ciwf.co.uk/)



the under fives. Imagine a fraction of the uproar over abuse directed at those who abduct and annihilate 15 million poultry and 600,000 sheep, pigs and cattle each week in Britain. The excuse for the failure to tackle *shekhitah* – antisemites demand little encouragement – looks risible when *mohalim* (circumcisers) receive no such alibi. JSG activists regret our inability to win more youthful recruits while the young in significant numbers shun Jewish organisations for fast-growing animal rights groups. One, Compassion in World Farming, produced independent scientific evidence exposing the pain inflicted by Jewish and Islamic animal slaughter without pre-stunning. Even the minority of Muslims who at least provide anaesthetics finds no match among kashrut adherents. Bold and outspoken Jewish radicals hide behind fears of racism, whereas many Africans now discard that apprehension to instigate and implement a widening ban on female genital mutilation.

Perhaps the cause of creatures is not aided and abetted by well-meaning fanatics. Terrorism mounted against laboratory staff loses more potential backers than are enticed by such malice. The writer G F Newman exposes to potent effect the symmetry between many cops and criminals. By contrast, his 'holocaust' description of animal killing wins few admirers, set alongside the limited currency of genocide for human victims. Extreme responses, however, can be understood, if not vindicated, given the death camp images of battery farming and myriad other cruelties alongside official indifference.

It took two anarchists – including Dave Morris, a Jew – to challenge the might of McDonalds and the judiciary. Their lonely stand blazed a trail for campaigners who defy the corporate mistreatment of workers, animals and the environment. The much-grieved John Diamond exhibited his generosity and leftism with a large donation to this

magazine's fundraising appeal. Less benevolent and radical was his belief that animal rights protesters signal the indulgence of a nation where most have adequate food and shelter. Diamond's rejoinder that Icelanders, dependent on fishing for survival, enjoy no such luxury holds only up to a point. Surely, the task for us is to build a world that forces no one to slay to live, any more than one which leaves nuclear arms and power employees lacking alternative jobs.

There remains a persuasive economic case for global herbivorous food systems. The huge grain supplies required to sustain farm animals before they end up on kitchen tables could instead combat hunger in developing countries. Efforts towards the contradictory 'making globalisation work for the poor' would be better spent on universal entitlement to land to grow staple crops and their fair distribution.

Realists will not underestimate the mountain of tradition and prejudice that delays such a new dawn. Progressive argument promoting even-handedness for animals is not perceived as rational to those who nonetheless oppose reactionary change which might abort every disabled baby. Remember the troubled young woman who thought existence was pointless, then heard an ancient man, living in the earth's remotest part, held the meaning of life? After months of trekking through dense jungle and scaling a mountainous peak, she at last reached the old hermit's retreat. 'Please!' she begged. 'What is the point?' The man, with a long beard which reinforced his look of seasoned wisdom, paused for what appeared eternal time. 'The meaning of life is...chicken soup', he declared with great authority. 'What?' the woman screamed. 'I've risked everything to come all this way. And you have the nerve to tell me the meaning of life is chicken soup?' 'Oh,' the sage replied. 'It isn't chicken soup?'

© 2001 The Jewish Socialist Group. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the Jewish Socialist Group.

The stench of death  
Is in the air,  
For all we know  
Our life is fair.  
We live our lives  
Shoved in a box,  
There's no fear there  
Of death by fox.

Nothing changes  
Day by day,  
We sit there cramped,  
Just left to lay.  
As weeks go on  
The days grow cold,  
The farmer says  
We're getting old.

And so he packs  
Us on a van;  
He takes us to  
A strange new land.  
Then people hang us  
Upside down  
And their violence  
Does astound.

The stench of death  
Is in the air,  
For all we know  
All life is fair.  
But it is not.  
Death is not forced –  
So end the chicken  
Holocaust.

*Jacob Bard-Rosenberg*

# THE WITHDRAWAL METHOD

**It is a case of 'onward Christian soldiers' in today's schools. JULIA BARD says it's time to confront them**

Like many big city secondary schools, our children's comprehensive avoided teaching Religious Education (RE) until it was criticised in an Ofsted inspection. Even after Ofsted's kick up the pants, the school decided not to teach RE as a separate subject in Years 7, 8 and 9 (the first three years of secondary school) but to integrate it into humanities. In practice, this means that history, geography or sociology teachers who are non-believers and baulk at the idea of teaching about God or religion (that is, most of them) can avoid doing so. However, in order to jump the Ofsted hurdle next time round, the school employed a specialist RE teacher, and in Years 9 and 10 (ages 13/14 and 14/15) the students prepare for a 'half GCSE'. This somewhat hopeless attempt to raise the status of the subject was where the trouble started.

There are plenty of church schools locally – as well as a large Jewish comprehensive – for parents who want their children educated in a God-fearing atmosphere, so a large proportion of families in the school are either not bothered about religious education or have made a considered decision to send their children to a secular school. The problem is that though schools like ours are state institutions, where everyone is supposed to be equal, in fact the church has insinuated itself into the fabric of the education system. Indeed, as the Ofsted inspection made clear, according to the Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA), schools have a legal duty to provide Religious Education, which should 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in great Britain'. There is a conscience clause that dates from the 1944 Education Act: students have an unconditional right to withdraw from RE (and so, incidentally, do teachers)

Of course if students withdraw from the subject in any numbers, this presents the school with a logistical problem: they have to provide a place for them, if not educational or any other useful activity. Which could be why, at a meeting at our children's school to explain what RE involved, parents were told that students could only be withdrawn if the family could show that they were receiving some form of religious education outside school. Whether this was an honest mistake or a dishonest lie (and even after it was pointed out, it was repeated many times to the students) our school was in good company. Of all the parents I have asked, I have not found one who had been informed by their child's school that they have a right to withdraw their children from Religious

Education. In fact, this is as much a breach of the law as not providing RE, as schools are obliged to explain this right in their prospectuses – not a good starting point for a subject that is billed as enabling students to explore religious and moral issues.

In fact, the decision to integrate RE into 'humanities', while extracting rational teachers from the dilemma of having to teach the irrational, means that it is impossible for parents to exercise their right to withdraw their children as they cannot know if and when religion is coming up and to what extent it will be woven through the other subjects. If they are studying the Crusades, does this count as RE or history? If it's RE, they are likely to be taught the official Christian view that the Crusades were a good thing. If it's history, they are more likely to be able to explore the Muslim or Jewish view that they constituted wanton and vicious destruction.

At my school in the 1960s, where about one third of the girls were Jewish, the school provided Jewish RE. For those of us who were atheists or even had open minds, this was no more enlightening than the Christian variety. For instance, the Rabbi's wife who taught us explained with derision that nuns had baths with their vests on as they did not want to expose their bodies to God whom they believed to be all-seeing (in contrast to us intellectual Jews who, naturally, had a more sophisticated view of God). Though my parents were appalled by this racism, they did not complain. Not many parents did in those days, especially Jewish ones.

Nowadays, setting one religion above another in this way is called 'religionism'. Amongst Christian educators it is the subject of much fascinating debate. The attempt to provide religious education that does not favour one religion (in practice, Christianity) is part of the RE establishment's response to the fact that Britain's diverse communities are, for the first time, asserting themselves. Although 'religionism' – downgrading other religions and ignoring non-religious stances – appears to be perfectly acceptable in schools attached to religious institutions, whether Catholic, CofE, United Synagogue or whatever, this will not do in county schools (those with no religious affiliation). The problem is, though, they are stuck with the legal obligation to 'reflect the fact the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian'.

A number of educationists are struggling with the philosophical and moral problems of how to teach religion without downgrading non-Christian or non-religious beliefs. At the same time they are sincerely trying to avoid the supermarket approach which gives students the impression they can pick

and choose what they like from the different religions: a bit of Buddhism for stress; a bit of Christianity for a church wedding; Judaism for its newly fashionable mysticism... Their motives are good but the task is doomed.

There is a fundamental conflict for educators who are also believers in a divine spirit. RE teachers who are not themselves religious believers, can make a serious attempt to treat all religions equally. But most people who choose to teach Religious Education are committed to a particular faith. And faith is, by its nature, above and beyond reason. If you are a Christian you cannot and do not need to try to justify to anyone that there is a God but you are duty bound to convince other people that he exists. Likewise, if your religious beliefs tell you that the law was handed down by God to Moses just as it appears in Exodus: 'You shall have no other God besides me. You shall not make a graven image ... You shall not bow down to them or worship them,' you can only pretend to respect religious Hindus whose houses are filled with idols.

Members of faith groups may, and often do, make common cause with each other over specific issues such as marriage and divorce, but they cannot see each other as equals. But worse than idolaters are atheists and secularists, rationalists and humanists – heretics who undermine religious institutions and can be controlled neither by the threat of divine retribution nor by the threat of excommunication.

Tony Blair and the religious leaders he has surrounded himself with have set themselves against the secularists and have given the church a massive boost. Though we knew he was that way inclined, this has come as a shock to the left who seemed to think that such obscurantist institutions would whither away on their own. But there's big money at stake, as well as power, and no one, particularly religious leaders, gives up that easily. Despite the fact that people are flocking away from organised religion, the government is giving increasing amounts of our money to church schools which are able to bypass the principle of non-selective schools and undermine what's left of the comprehensive system with its commitment to challenge discrimination and strive to offer equal opportunities for all children. In 1944, church schools thought they had a good deal when the government agreed to pay 50% of the costs of maintaining the school buildings leaving the church to pay the remaining 50%. Over the years, the proportion the church had to pay has fallen continuously and is now being cut to 10%. We pay the other 90%

This privileging of the churches and synagogues (the Muslims are still waiting) in the education system is giving confidence to proselytising Christians in the non-affiliated (it can hardly be called secular) section of the school system. After a brief respite when teachers were expected to be sensitive to the range of beliefs the might find amongst the children in their classrooms, we are now increasingly hearing of blatant propaganda – a six-year old boy in a city primary school was told to bring in things that God has made to put on the nature table; an eight-year-old in an inner-city junior school was told by her teacher: 'Evolution is a load of rubbish.' My own sons were shown sets of fetuses at different stages of development (only available from the Society for the Protection of the



Unborn Child), and given lurid and untrue descriptions of abortions.

That was the point at which a significant number of parents withdrew their children from RE. We, like parents up and down the country, were sold RE as an opportunity for our children to learn about cultures other than their own, to think deeply about moral issues and to explore a range of belief systems. And we, like parents in schools up and down the country, found ourselves having to undo the damage that was being done to the moral fabric of a school that in all other departments is committed to truth, open debate and mutual respect. Though the Church has a privileged place in the British state, faith, atheism or agnosticism are deeply personal. We have done our best to bring our children up to be sceptical and rational: to question what doesn't make sense; to analyse what agendas might be at work; and not to be afraid question those with power. They have both made different choices about Religious Education: one has stayed in to fight another day; the other reckons he has better things to do for two periods a week. They're both right.

The National Secular Society can be contacted at 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL on 0207 404 3126, email [kpw@secularism.org.uk](mailto:kpw@secularism.org.uk).

Women Against Fundamentalism is revising and updating its education pack. If you have ideas about what you would like to see included, contact [js@bardrose.dircon.co.uk](mailto:js@bardrose.dircon.co.uk)



# BRITAIN MUST RECKON WITH ITS PAST

**This year Britain held its first official Holocaust Memorial Day. Partly as a result of lobbying before the event, it made links with other genocides. TONY KLUG argues that it would be appropriate for Britain to acknowledge its part in the slave trade.**

The campaign for a memorial day in this country is marked by contradiction and paradox. Unlike other European countries which observe an annual Holocaust day, Britain was not complicit in the crimes of the Nazis. Blitzed but unoccupied, it did not round up and hand over its Jews and other designated undesirables for the deathly transports or watch passively while the stormtroopers did their own dirty work. On the contrary, with justification, the British nation's collective self-memory is of its own noble role in finally disposing of the Nazi evil.

Nor is the finger of guilt pointed at Britain for more recent genocides and severe human rights abuses highlighted in the recent Holocaust Day commemoration, such as those in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo. These tragedies were included – and incorporated into Tony Blair's keynote speech at the main event – both to widen the scope beyond its essentially Jewish focus and to justify the paradoxical assertion that the Holocaust, acclaimed as unique, is illustrative of other atrocities.

But what message does a British Prime Minister, in ticking off one foreign wicked deed after another, really pass on to a British public not unknown for its xenophobic leanings? Wittingly or unwittingly, the expressions of indignation carry more than a tinge of British self-righteousness, potentially reinforcing the very opposite sentiment to anti-racism.

Yet Britain has no reason to be smug. Apart from its own centuries-old tradition of antisemitism, our imperial forebears saw no shame in plundering, kidnapping, trading and enslaving whole African populations and devastating their lives and communities. Remarkably, until today, there has been no proper reckoning of these atrocities.

The proposal here is not to do away with Holocaust Day but to expand it into a Holocaust and Slavery Day. Of course, there were important differences between these two horrendous experiences, but legalised enslavement and routine killing on racial grounds were characteristic to them both. The victims were disposable humanity. Dispossession, humiliation and cruelty of an extreme kind, organised and casual, were their common lot. By explicitly linking the British role in black slavery with traditional antisemitism throughout Europe, culminating in the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews and other defenceless groups, and by tracing and understanding the connections between them, the universal messages arising from the racist danger may be more readily distinguished and assimilated by society at large than by spotlighting just one of these catastrophes. Regarding these evils together, across borders and down generations, may illustrate far more effectively where indifference, contempt, bigotry or the dehumanisation of whole peoples can lead.

There may be an instructive precedent for this proposal in a Californian law adopted in 1992 whereby high schools were mandated specifically to incorporate the study of slavery and the Holocaust into their courses on human rights. As the parallels between the two experiences are drawn out, people familiar with one narrative may find themselves more receptive to the narrative of the other.

The obverse can also be true. A headteacher friend recently told me that he had considered but then rejected the idea of commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day in his large comprehensive school on the outskirts of London. He concluded that the Holocaust as such would have little resonance for his predominantly Asian and Afro-Caribbean students. However, a project that linked the Holocaust with black slavery, comparing and contrasting the experiences, would, he felt, stimulate plenty of interest. Researching the information and preparing and presenting the materials in various ways would necessarily require collaboration among different ethnic and community groups, both at the school and wider society levels. This, in itself, could make an important contribution to reducing stereotypes and enhancing co-operation and understanding across the barriers.

By contrast, the predominant focus on antisemitism – even if other tragedies are benevolently subsumed under the Holocaust rubric – could have the opposite effect. In ethnically mixed classrooms, for example, Jewish pupils may variously feel singled out, embarrassed, isolated, pitied. At a more general level, the essentially negative notion of Jews as perennial victims may be perpetuated.

None of this is to imply that there is something illegitimate about commemorating the Holocaust per se, especially by those groups who were its direct

victims. The late Rabbi Hugo Gryn, a Holocaust survivor himself, constantly called for Jewish communities to observe *Yom Hashoa* (Holocaust Day) every year. It is to be seen whether, for Jews in Britain, this day of reflection will be overwhelmed by the sheer stridency of the state-backed Holocaust Memorial Day.

A similar question mark may hover over the well-regarded Anne Frank Day, launched a few years ago by the Anne Frank Educational Trust and directed mainly at UK schools and other educational institutions. Alongside Anne Frank's own story, its materials feature the more recent Stephen Lawrence case and other instances of present-day racism in Britain, and arguably provide a more effective, less in-your-face, approach in getting the Holocaust and anti-racist messages across. As for the acclaimed success of the first Holocaust Memorial Day, it is revealing that, despite its declared anti-racist theme, very few sponsors were drawn from black groups. Predictably, there was a preponderance of Jewish sponsoring groups.

Finally, in the circumstances of the current Middle East crisis, there is a serious credibility question looming for Jewish groups and public figures who admirably deplore the suppression of human rights by governments around the world – conspicuously protesting the failure to learn the lessons of the

Holocaust – while they simultaneously urge support and understanding for an Israeli government that, in its policies and practices towards the Palestinians, constantly flouts the same human rights principles. Their deep devotion to the Jewish State may genuinely blind these groups and individuals to the discrepancies in their positions but, in the eyes of many others, their flagrant double standards expose them to a charge of gross hypocrisy. As the contradictions visibly deepen, this may impact negatively on their plausibility as advocates of a universal human rights message and so critically undermine the proclaimed purpose of Holocaust Memorial Day.

A more general anti-racist and/or genocide day has been floated as a worthy alternative, but there are potential drawbacks. First, the opportunity for Britain squarely to confront its own past, particularly its pre-eminent role in slavery, may get swamped or simply ignored. Similarly, the Holocaust in particular and antisemitism generally may be passed over in the broad sweep of anti-racism, as commonly happens. An attempt to replace Holocaust Memorial Day altogether so soon after its inception would certainly invite concerted opposition, whereas some supporters may actually welcome the opportunity to widen its scope.

## NO ESCAPE

Rose Friedman died in Los Angeles on February 16, aged 107, the last survivor of a tragedy that lives in the memory of working people, particularly Jewish people, in America. As a young girl Rose worked at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company's factory in New York. The shirtwaist, a blouse to go with a skirt, was essential fashion for 'free' 20th century women, going to work in office or factory. The Triangle factory fire symbolised their slavery.

It was late on Saturday afternoon, March 25, 1911. Workers at the factory, on the top floors of the Asch building, were getting ready to go home. Within minutes fire swept through the floors. Before it was over, 146 of the 500 employees were dead.

Many Triangle workers were young women from Jewish and Italian immigrant families, some still in their teens, struggling to survive in a strange country, battling slum conditions and ruthless exploitation. Jobs at the factory offered regular work – sometimes from seven in the morning till nine at night, with no overtime pay. Some workers had joined the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, but Triangle was not a union shop. It was hard organising when you were desperate to keep your job, to help your family. A shirtwaist workers' strike in 1909 was beaten. Employers hired thugs to attack pickets. Strikers were sacked and replaced by newcomers. The union's unsuccessful demands had included adequate fire safety provision. New York employers held a

meeting on Wall Street to block city fire legislation.

The Triangle factory's one fire escape, in an inner yard, buckled and twisted under the weight of those who managed to reach it. Others struggled through narrow aisles between machines, amid blazing cloth, only to be trapped and burned behind locked doors. Many leapt desperately from ninth-floor windows, and died on the sidewalk. Firefighters stretched out a safety net, but two women crashed through it. The firefighters' ladders could not reach the top floors, nor could the water from their hoses.

Eye-witness William Shepherd would always remember the thud as people hit the pavement. He saw a young man at the window help three young women out.

*'They were as unresisting as if her were helping them onto a streetcar instead of into eternity. Undoubtedly he saw that a terrible death awaited them in the flames, and his was only a terrible chivalry. Then came the love amid the flames. He brought another girl to the window. Those of us who were looking saw her put her arms about him and kiss him. Then he held her out into space and dropped her. But quick as a flash he was on the windowsill himself. His coat fluttered upward – the air filled his trouser legs. I could see that he wore tan shoes and hose. His hat remained on his head. Thud – dead, thud – dead – together they went into eternity. I saw his face before they covered it. You could see in it that he was a real man. He had done his best.*

**Workers have paid with their lives for capitalism's neglect of health and safety. CHARLIE POTTINS recalls a fire in a New York factory 80 years ago**

*We found out later that, in the room in which he stood, many girls were being burned to death by the flames and were screaming in an inferno of flame and heat. He chose the easiest way and was brave enough to even help the girl he loved to a quicker death, after she had given him a goodbye kiss. He leaped with an energy as if to arrive first in that mysterious land of eternity, but her thud – dead came first.*

*The firemen raised the longest ladder. It reached only to the sixth floor. I saw the last girl jump at it and miss it. And then the faces disappeared from the window. But now the crowd was enormous, though all this had occurred in less than seven minutes, the start of the fire and the thuds and deaths.*

*I heard screams around the corner and hurried there. What I had seen before was not so terrible as what had followed. Up in the [ninth] floor girls were burning to death before our very eyes. They were jammed in the windows. No one was lucky enough to be able to jump, it seemed. But, one by one, the jams broke. Down came the bodies in a shower, burning, smoking – flaming bodies, with disheveled hair trailing upward. They had fought each other to die by jumping instead of by fire. On the sidewalk lay heaps of broken bodies. A policeman later went about with tags, which he fastened with wires to the wrists of the dead girls, numbering each with a lead pencil, and I saw him fasten tag no. 54 to the wrist of a girl who wore an engagement ring. A fireman who came downstairs from the building told me that there were at least 50 bodies in the big room on the seventh floor.*

*Another fireman told me that more girls had jumped down an air shaft in the rear of the building. I went back there, into the narrow court, and saw a heap of dead girls. . . The floods of water from the firemen's hose that ran into the gutter were actually stained red with blood. I looked upon the heap of dead bodies and I remembered these girls were the shirtwaist makers. I remembered their great strike of last year in which these same girls had demanded more sanitary conditions and more safety precautions in the shops. These dead bodies were the answer'.*

Some workers did escape down the stairs before the flames spread, or across the roof to the

neighbouring building. Survivors were dazed, shocked, and traumatized. They suffered nightmares for years. In the weeks after the blaze, people tried to identify charred bodies at the morgue, and the ILGWU worked with the Red Cross to trace families. Local 25 draped its headquarters in black, and proposed an official day of mourning. Hundreds of thousands marched in a dignified funeral procession, in teeming rain. Victims' families urged the union to seek prosecution of the factory owners.

The Triangle Company offered to pay one week's wages to the families of the dead girls- 'as though it were summer and they are giving them a vacation!'. workers commented. Three days after the fire an advert appeared in the trade papers: NOTICE, THE TRIANGLE WAIST CO. beg to notify their customers that they are in good working order. HEADQUARTERS now at 9-11 University Place.

The day after they had moved in to the new premises the New York City building department found 9-11 University Place was not fireproof, and access to the one fire escape was obstructed by two rows of sewing machines.

On April 2, 1911, Rose Schneiderman, one of the leaders of the 1909 strike, told a memorial meeting at the Metropolitan Opera House:

*I would be a traitor to these poor burned bodies if I came here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting. The old Inquisition had its rack and its thumbscrews and its instruments of torture with iron teeth. We know what these things are today; the iron teeth are our necessities, the thumbscrews are the high-powered and swift machinery close to which we must work, and the rack is here in the firetrap structures that will destroy us the minute they catch on fire.*

*This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city. Every week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. There are so many of us for one job it matters little if 146 of us are burned to death.*

*We have tried you citizens; we are trying you now, and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers, brothers and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us. Public officials have only words of warning to us – warning that we must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back, when we rise, into the conditions that make life unbearable.*

*I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement.*

Eight months after the fire a jury acquitted Blanck and Harris, the factory owners, of any wrongdoing. Trade unions continued fighting for better conditions and fire safety, winning legislation. But around the world, lives remain cheap, and property sacred.' May 10, 1993: fire at the Kader toy factory, near Bangkok, Thailand, kills 187 people, injures 500, mostly young girls. Doors at the factory were locked to stop them stealing dolls.



November 25, 2000: Garment Workers Die After Being Locked In Burning Factory At least 45 workers including 10 children burnt to death in a devastating fire at Sagar Chowdury Garment Factory, on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Bangladesh... sparked from electrical short circuit... fire soon engulfed the entire building...

The struggle goes on.

# A TRIANGLE FILE

Cornell University Press is republishing Leon Stein's book *The Triangle Fire*, which deals with the fire and the struggle for reforms that followed. The Triangle Fire also figures in Meredith Tax's moving historic novel of a Jewish immigrant family, Rivington Street. Books for younger readers include Bonnie C Bader's *East Side Story* (New York, Silver Moon Press, 1993).

'A young girl and her older sister, working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, join a protest to try to improve the miserable working conditions.'

Holly Littlefield, *Fire at the Triangle Factory*, about two 14-year old friends who survive the fire'. Barbara Goldin Diamond- *Fire*.

Some websites if you want to find out more about the Triangle Fire and the continuing struggle for workplace rights and safety:

[www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/takes](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/takes) you to the Kheel collection at Cornell University, including articles, pictures, contemporary cartoons, and survivors' testimonies. Plus tips for high school history projects and a full bibliography.

[www.uniteunion.org/](http://www.uniteunion.org/) The US textile and garment workers' union, UNITE, is commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Triangle fire with rallies for workers' rights against global sweatshop exploitation.

[http://newdeal.feri.org/library/d\\_4m.htm](http://newdeal.feri.org/library/d_4m.htm) - More Triangle pictures, from an interesting library on social and political reform under the Roosevelt 'New Deal' administration.

# STANDING

I don't hate Zionism. I'm unable to listen to Zionists rant without wanting to punch them in the face but I can't hate Zionism the way I hate apartheid, homophobia and those who persecute asylum seekers. Zionism is the scarred child with bad parenting who has turned into a playground bully. Perhaps it was a bad idea to start with, all that 'land without people for a people without a land' stuff. But for post-Holocaust Jews the Law of Return seemed like a parent opening its arms to a lost child. It embraced every lost or dispossessed Jew and told them 'you have a home'. Later it beckoned to Soviet Jews and airlifted the Falashas from starvation in Ethiopia, though I wonder what other Ethiopians thought as they saw them whisked away.

The Law of Return is enshrined in the constitution of the State of Israel and Jews who have abandoned their birthplace to make a new life there are as disparate as the Diaspora itself. Any Jew, (or half-Jew), can go to Israel and the state will provide them with a home. It may be a fortified settlement but they are given the full resources of the state and army protection. It is absurd and unjust that someone from Brooklyn or Johannesburg can be handed a piece of land which was once an olive grove belonging to a Palestinian family for generations. Messianic Jews will choose to be there with intent to purge the land of Arabs. They are loathed by Jews and non-Jews alike. But some are immigrants who are desperate and will take anything that's offered.

I used to think that removing the Law of Return might ease the bitterness between Palestinians and Israelis. But I now realise that the only moral solution is to enshrine the same law for Palestinians. Those Zionists I hate will shriek in horror about 'being swamped'; even the soft-left will nervously mention 'numbers'. But I suspect that Palestinians across the world will think carefully before applying for a visa. For decades Diaspora Jews have preferred to write a cheque rather than go and live there. Most were happily settled in their own communities and silently rejected the Zionists' assertion that they were only semi-fulfilled as Jews outside Israel. Many were parents who were reluctant to see their children go off into national service for two years. These days they'd be terrified to watch them catch the bus for school. And would Palestinian families want to bring up their sons in a country where, if they survive the Israeli snipers, the Imams will teach them that tying explosives round their bodies will immortalise them in glory?

But the Law of Return for Palestinians will not just be a visa. It is an acknowledgement that their identity has been stripped from them through exile and dispersal. Wherever they now live in the world they must ask permission. Citizenship or residency is granted grudgingly and many still feel like unwanted guests. The issues of land, borders, water rights and Jerusalem remain, but a Law of Return gives them back a basic element of nationhood. No one understands this like Zionists.

by  
Ruth Lukom



**Selections from  
a fine new  
anthology,  
Passionate  
Renewal – Jewish  
Poetry in Britain  
Since 1945  
edited by Peter  
Lawson,  
published by  
Five Leaves**

PO Box 81, Nottingham  
NG5 4ER, Britain  
www.fiveleaves.co.uk

**A LETTER FROM  
OGMORE-BY-SEA  
Dannie Abse**

Goodbye, 20th Century  
What should I mourn?  
Hiroshima? Auschwitz?  
Our friend, Carmi, said,  
'Thank forgetfulness  
else we could not live;  
thank memory  
else we'd have no life.'

Goodbye, 20th Century.  
What shall I celebrate?  
Darling, I'm out of date:  
even my nostalgia  
is becoming history.  
Those garish, come-on posters  
outside a cinema,  
announce the Famous  
I've never heard of.  
So many other friends, too,  
now like Carmi, have joined  
a genealogy of ghosts.

**THE CHILDREN'S  
EXODUS  
Karen Gershon**

**I**  
It was an ordinary train  
travelling across Germany  
which gathered and took us away  
those who saw us may have  
thought  
that it was for a holiday  
not being exiled being taught  
to hate what we had loved in vain  
brought us lasting injury

**II**  
Our parents let us go  
knowing that who stayed must die  
but kept the truth from us  
although  
they gave us to reality  
did they consider what it meant  
to become orphaned and not know  
to be emotionally freed  
when our childhood seeds were  
spent

**III**  
When we went out of Germany  
carrying six million lives  
that was Jewish history  
but each child was one refugee  
we unlike the Egyptian slaves  
were exiled individually  
and each in desolation has  
created his own wilderness

But here, this mellow evening,  
on these high cliffs I look down  
to read the unrolling  
holy scrolls of the sea. They are  
blank. The enigma is alive  
and, for the Present, I boast,  
thumbs in lapels, I survive.

Delightful Eros  
Still hauls Reason along  
zig-zag on a taut leash.  
I'm still unsettled by  
the silence in framed pictures,  
foreground and background;  
or the mastery of music  
over mind. And I hail  
the world within a word.  
I do not need to be  
a fabulist like lolo  
who, from this same coast,  
would see seven sails  
where there was but one.

Goodbye, 20th Century,  
your trumpets and your drums,

your war-wounds still unhealed.  
Goodbye, I-must-leave-you-Dolly,  
goodbye Lily Marlene.  
Has the past always a future?  
Will there always be a jackboot on  
the stair,  
A refugee to roam?  
A man with no roots is lost  
like the darkness in the forest  
and it costs 100 years  
for a hiding place  
to become a home.

Now secular strangers come  
sealed in Fords and Nissans,  
a congregation of cars,  
to this opening estuary  
so various, so beautiful, so old.  
The tide is out.  
And from the sleeping reeled-  
in sea – not from  
the human mind's vexed fathoms -  
the awakened, eternal, murderous,  
fanged Tusker Rock is revealed.

Copyright Dannie Abse

**IV**  
This race-hatred was personal  
we were condemned for what we  
were  
no one escaped the ritual  
from which we rose inferior  
the blood-guilt entered every home  
till daily life was a pogrom  
we who were there were not the  
same  
as those who have no wreck to  
share

**V**  
Home is where some know who  
you are  
the rescue was impersonal  
it was no one's concern what use  
we made of the years given us  
one should not ask of children who  
find their survival natural  
gratitude for being where  
ten thousand others have come too

**VI**  
At Dovercourt the winter sea  
was like God's mercy vast and wild  
a fever to a land-locked child  
it seemed fire and cloud to me  
the world's blood and my blood  
were cold  
the exiled Jew in me was old  
and thoughts of death appalled  
me less  
than knowledge of my loneliness

**VII**  
My mother sold my bed and  
chair  
while I expected to return  
yet she had kept me close to her  
till I saw our temple burn  
it was not for her sake but mine  
she new that I was unripe fruit  
and that exile was a blight  
against which one prepared in vain

**VIII**  
People at Dovercourt were gay  
as if they thought we could  
forget  
our homes in alien play  
as if we were not German Jews  
but mealtimes were a market place  
when sudden visitors could choose  
although we were not orphaned yet  
a son or daughter by their fate

**IX**  
My childhood smoulders in the  
name  
of the town which was my home  
all we were became no more  
than answers on a questionnaire  
at Dovercourt we were taught  
that  
our share of the Jewish fate  
had not been left behind but was  
the refugee life facing us

Copyright the Estate of Karen Gershon

**PASSOVER 38  
Bernard Kops**

One thing I remember  
even more than the hunger.  
Scrubbing my knees, smarting  
my hair and  
rushing downstairs  
into that playground of my  
childhood;  
where all the other children  
with their eyes alight  
were building castles with  
crackernuts.  
I built my castle.  
I was a shopkeeper, a  
millionaire,

I ruled the world;  
challenging all to chance  
nuts of their own,  
gathered from high pitched  
aunts  
the day before,  
as we went from home to  
home,  
running that Yomtov gauntlet  
of twisted cheeks and wet  
kisses

In those days families extended  
forever and ever.

Who wants a castle?  
Knock down my castle! I dared.

All in their sudden beauty  
the girls came singing, flirting.  
Holiday! Passover!  
The Angel of Death? Who is  
he?  
a madman on the radio, far  
way.

Passover lasted for the rest of  
the year;  
the crackernuts secure  
in the lining of my sleeve.  
Belonging - we belonged.  
Poverty came later  
when most of us did well  
and moved away.

Copyright Bernard Kops

# TSUM BUND

**This song was written by the Russian Yiddish author, dramatist and folklorist Shloyme Rappaport (1863-1920) who was better known by his pen-name Anski. He was most famous for writing the Dybbuk - a dramatic supernatural treatment of the struggle between parents and children. Anski was a supporter of the emerging socialist movement in Russia. He was not a member of the Bund but was very sympathetic to it and the role it was played in revolutionising the lives and hopes of Jewish workers.**

In zaltsikn yam fun di mentshlekhe trern  
gefint zikh a shreklekhe tum  
Er ken shoyrn nisht tifer  
Nisht finstere vern  
Im tsaykhnt a blutiker shtrom

Dem tum hobn toyzenter yorn gegrobn  
Amune un sine un payn  
Un toyzenter yorn alts tropn nokh tropn  
Es gisn zikh trern derayn

Nor aykh bale-melukhes, avyonim,  
kaptsanim  
geheht dokh der blutiker tum  
Un ayere 'brider', di raykher gazlonim  
Gehert nor fun oybn der shoyrn

Dem arbeter, ver zhe vet endlekh derleyzn  
Fun hunger un eybikn layd  
Un ver vet dem veg im tsu frayheynt  
bavayzn  
Tsu bridershaft, glaykhayt un frayd?

Di gvirishe kinder, maskilim, rabonim  
Zey ruft in tsion dem yid  
A lidl an alte fun unzere sonim  
"A geto dem eybikn zhid!"

Der held vet di velt i bafrayen i heyln  
Er't greykh dem tum bizn grunt  
Es leben fun rusland, fun lite un poyln  
Der yidisher arbeter bund!

Translated by David Rosenberg



In the salty sea of the people's tears there is a terrible abyss. It cannot get deeper or darker. It warns of a bloody storm ahead. The abyss has been dug for thousands of years. During thousands of years of faith and hatred and pain, drop after drop of tears have poured in. Only you the artisans, workers, the poor and the paupers belong in this bloody abyss and your 'brothers' the rich thieves belong only above the foam.

Who will end the hunger and eternal suffering of the workers and who will show them the path to freedom, brotherhood, justice and happiness? The sons of the wealthy, the 'enlightened' ones and the rabbis call the Jew to Zion. But it's an old tune of our enemies – a ghetto for the eternal 'yid'. There is a hero who will repair and free the world. In Russia, Lithuania and Poland long live the Jewish Workers' Bund!



**The return to power of Ariel Sharon has come as a bitter blow to Israeli radicals seeking a just peace with the Palestinians. Israel's peace movement as well as the 'peace process' is in disarray. ADAM KELLER reports from the front-line of Israel's peace camp and analyses the long term processes unfolding within Israeli society.**

The year is 2001 and Ariel Sharon is Prime Minister of Israel. Who'd have thought this is what the new century, the new millennium, held in store for us?

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. This string of words became reality precisely 18 years after a memorable day in February 1983, a day of a collective sigh of relief at the news that Ariel Sharon had been forced to leave the Ministry of Defence.

It was after months of mounting tensions and struggle. The invasion of Lebanon, Sharon's initiative, had claimed thousands of lives in its first week. The months-long siege and bombing of Beirut culminated in Sharon's allies, the Falange militia, massacring hundreds of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila, under the protection of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF).

During those months the anti-war movement mushroomed from a few isolated dozens to hundreds of thousands filling the squares, forcing the government to appoint the Kahan Commission of Inquiry which found Sharon totally unfit to hold a position of responsibility. Even then, he clung to power. It was only after an over-zealous Sharon fan murdered Emil Grunzweig, a decorated war hero turned Peace Now activist, that the outpouring of public anger finally forced Sharon to quit the Defence Ministry. What we did not know then was that Sharon's war would go on without him for nearly two decades.

These memories were revived among those who marched through Jerusalem on the night of February 3, 2001 – with the elections three days ahead and Sharon's victory a foregone conclusion. A thousand people came out into the street on a night of pouring rain, holding banners aloft, chanting: 'Emil is not Forgotten! Lebanon is not forgotten! Peace Yes – Sharon No!' It was the last effort to save a Prime Minister who could not – who did not deserve to be saved.

The passions of the participants in this annual Emil Grunzweig Memorial of Peace Now did not reflect the general mood of the country. By and large, Israel *did* forget. So much had happened since, wars and confrontations and bloodshed, hopes raised and dashed, bloodshed again, political careers made and lost. A new generation

grew up for whom the war of 1982 was an uninteresting piece of ancient history. The same for the million new Israelis who were still Soviet citizens when Sharon rampaged through Lebanon.

Sharon's place as Israel's foremost nationalist demagogue had long since been taken by Binyamin Netanyahu. For younger leftists Netanyahu was 'The man you love to hate.' Sharon was considered a spent force, by his own camp as well as by his opponents. An old man, long past his peak, still nursing pathetic illusions of a comeback, still having a bee in his bonnet about creating and extending settlements, but soon to retire to his Negev farm. Yet here he is, smiling in the seat of power. The babies born at the time of his downfall are soon going to put on military uniforms and learn at first hand the effect of his political and military policies.

## **BARAK PAVES THE WAY**

To some degree, Sharon's victory is due to his shrewd ability of seizing an opportunity and using it to the full. But mostly he owes it to Ehud Barak, the Prime Minister who so thoroughly discredited his own policies, so systematically alienated and splintered his own supporters, that he would have probably been defeated by virtually any contender. Rarely was the old adage more true, that it is the incumbent losing – rather than the challenger winning – in elections.

Many causes were cited to explain Barak's crushing defeat, and all of them contributed: haughty and arrogant behavior towards people and groups he later desperately needed; surrounding himself by a coterie of dubious advisers who soon split into mutually-hostile cliques; posing in his elections campaign as a social reformer and completely discarding these pretensions the moment he was elected; raising the idea of 'a secular revolution' and then repeatedly 'freezing' and 'unfreezing' it according to expediency – with the result that he made the religious parties into his implacable enemies without the slightest concrete achievement to show to his secularist voters.

Still, the electorate may have been willing to

forgive Barak had he fulfilled his basic promise – to make peace with the Palestinians and the Arab World. Barak himself defined this as his major task, stating again and again: 'judge me by results.' Barak presented himself to the voters after a year and a half of supposed peacemaking, at the end of which Israel was embroiled in a brutal conflict and peace had rarely seemed so distant.

True, very different views existed among the voters, but hardly anybody held a high opinion of Barak's record. There were voters who got their information from the liberal Ha'aretz, foreign TV stations, material circulating on the internet and some personal contacts with Palestinians. They saw a Prime Minister who offered great verbal concessions but implemented none, and launched a campaign of brutal repression on the ground unprecedented since 1967.

There were also the voters who learned of events mainly through the mass-circulation papers and the two Israeli TV channels. Relying on such sources, it was very easy to form the image of a soft PM, persisting in a policy of 'restraint' in the face of murderous Arab terrorism, and even offering the terrorists ever-new concessions, which they flung back in his face.

And then, the Arab citizens of Israel, the community which in 1999 gave Barak 95% of its votes – more than any other group in Israeli society. They have their own media in which the photos of the 13 Arab Israeli demonstrators killed by the police in October appeared again and again. The main debate there was whether to cast a blank ballot or to boycott the elections altogether.

Different as they were from each other, none of these groups of voters was impressed with the Barak election propaganda. Barak's spin doctors decided to concentrate on the war which Sharon conducted two decades ago, and the hypothetical one which Sharon may launch if elected – but they could find little to say about the present war, daily intruding with news of horror.

A considerable part of the electorate sought in vain for a third candidate to challenge both Barak and Sharon – and since there was none, campaigned for a blank ballot or just stayed home in disgust; while voters of the other kind flocked to Sharon, who, after all, solemnly promised that he would be the one to make 'a different kind of peace, peace with security'. Barak was not totally deserted. He still had the 'My Party, right or wrong' Labour faithful, plus those who 'took anti-nausea pills' to be able to vote for the only anti-Sharon candidate. But altogether, these comprised only a third of Israel's citizens. Given the circumstances, one may actually wonder how Barak still got the support of so many.

## **THE PEACE FACADE**

Throughout the long stages of Barak's slide into perdition, it had been common wisdom that his political survival depended upon the ability to present the voters with a signed peace agreement. Relying upon the axiom that a politician always takes care of his interests, the Israeli peace camp waited for Barak to produce an agreement, around which it could rally and campaign.

According to all polls, at the time of Camp David, most Israelis were willing to welcome a peace agreement, however far-reaching the

concessions, and vote for it in elections or referendum. The right-wing was certainly very apprehensive that this was going to happen.

Even after the new Intifada broke out, after blood had been shed and distrust sown, there seemed still a chance for Barak to turn the tide. Until the last moment the Meretz youths were still willing to stand at roadsides, day after day, with the banner: We must not lose the future – vote Barak!

Clearly we had all made a gross miscalculation. Either we had pinned our hope on an incompetent bungler, dragging his own career to ruin and the cause of peace with it; or else we had totally missed the point of what Barak's real aim was.

From the very start his declared wish to do 'everything' to achieve peace and 'to leave no stone unturned' was accompanied by the easily overlooked addendum: 'if everything fails, at least the people will go to war in the knowledge that there is no other choice.' Could that have been his motivation all along – as such radicals as Professor Tanya Reinhart said right from the start, and as more and more of us came to suspect?

Was that why all the rounds of negotiations – from the talks with Syria last April, through Camp David, and up to the last-ditch talks in Taba – always came 'almost' to a successful conclusion, and still always failed? Was that why the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon – Barak's one and only



achievement – had to leave a bone of contention, the bare mountain ridge known as the Shaba Farms whose continued occupation by Israel ensured the continuation of the guerrilla war?

Barak was either an incredibly incompetent opportunist or a crypto-warmonger (idealistic enough to sacrifice his own career). In either case the peace camp has been following the wrong man. And the results of Barak's year and a half in power are obvious: the cause of peace has been discredited, enormously.

While part of the peace camp is coming to the conclusion that its 'leader' has been cheating all along, most Israelis believe Barak really intended peace and was willing to sacrifice everything for it but the ungrateful Palestinians responded with violence and 'with ever new demands.'

For their part, the Palestinians tend to believe just as firmly that they had gone very far – even to accepting the settlement blocs planted on their land – but that Barak never intended to make peace, which goes to confirm the old suspicion that no Israeli government can be trusted.

It will take a huge lot of time and immense effort to undo the damage which Barak did. And now that he has paved Sharon's way to power, this damage

BARAK WAS  
FOLLOWING  
INCREDIBLY  
INCOMPETENT  
OPPORTUNIST  
OR A CRYPTO-  
WARMONGER,  
IDEALISTIC  
ENOUGH TO  
SACRIFICE HIS  
OWN CAREER  
& FOLLOW THE  
PEACE CAMP?  
HE WASN'T  
FOLLOWING  
THE PEACE CAMP



will long outlast the end of his own term.

Ariel Sharon came out of the elections under quite auspicious circumstances. He is credited with having won by a wide margin, the largest in Israeli history. The fact that the abstention rate had also never been as high was conveniently forgotten.

The Labour Party was not defeated but routed. Many among its leadership have been quick to jump on the bandwagon and scramble for ministerial positions in the winner's cabinet. It did not take Barak long to join the queue and declare his intention of serving as Sharon's Defence Minister – but this declaration caused an explosion of public outrage and indignation, not least from that very minority of faithful activists who had worked until the last moment on his behalf.

Before finally bowing out, Barak left to his successor the inestimable boon of declaring null and void all Israeli concessions made at Camp David and Taba, and ramming a resolution to that effect through the rump Labour cabinet's meeting.

## WHAT WASHINGTON WANTS

Apart from the protests at Barak's perfidy, the formation period of the Sharon cabinet was accompanied by hardly any manifestations of opposition. Internationally, too, Sharon found his path much smoother than might have been expected. The Bush administration accepted without demur the Israeli electorate's choice, though in the time of the senior George Bush, Sharon had been a definite persona non grata in Washington.

The new US administration also seemed to concur with Sharon's contention that 'negotiations cannot take place under fire.' (According to this rule, the Vietnam War would still be raging.) While it is not clear what Sharon would offer if talks ever take place, it will certainly be much less than what was talked about until a month ago. Hardly a strong inducement for the Palestinians to make a huge effort.

The Americans also prevailed upon their European and Arab allies to 'give Sharon a chance' and 'not hold his past against him.' Yet, Sharon knows that his bloody past – the Lebanon exploits as well as his earlier record, going back to the 1950s – have been dug out of the archives and plastered across many of the world's newspapers. With many pairs of eyes watching carefully for any sign of the old Sharon peeping behind the new mask of moderation, Sharon's greatest need is for legitimacy and respectability. For that reason, he offered Labour the choice portfolios in his cabinet – even at the cost of leaving old ideological allies, such as the National Religious Party, out in the cold.

Sharon would have liked to have Barak, with his credit as the one who 'tried the way of peace', in his cabinet. But when that proved impossible, he made do with Peres. Who could doubt the bona fides of a PM who has a renowned Nobel Peace Prize Laureate at the Foreign Ministry? And, as a further embellishment, the daughter of Israel's Peace Martyr, Dalya Rabin-Philosoph, was appointed

Deputy Minister of Defence. It is unlikely that a few tame doves can make much difference in Israel's new cabinet. Still, Sharon must realise that Labour's participation in his government cannot be taken for granted, given the opposition inside that party – led by Yossi Beilin, once Peres' disciple and protégé.

An additional constraint upon Sharon manifested itself during Secretary of State Powell's visit to the Middle East, and again at Sharon's maiden visit to the White House. The Bush administration's declared priority in the region is to re-establish the anti-Saddam coalition. While not having any special liking for Arafat, Bush and his advisers are well-aware that any conspicuous Israeli brutality towards the Palestinians could play into the hands of Saddam Hussein by rousing the masses in the Arab World and threatening the stability of the fragile pro-Western regimes. Sharon was asked, politely but firmly, to desist from giving the hated Iraqi ruler such aid.

## PEACE MOVEMENT REVIVAL

On Thursday, March 8, Ariel Sharon presented his oddly assorted 'National Unity' cabinet to the Knesset. On the same day, lecturers and students at Bir-Zeit University, the West Bank's oldest academic institution, alerted their Israeli and international contacts to the fact that Israeli forces had just dug a deep trench right through the Bir Zeit-Ramallah Highway. Students and faculty – and some 70,000 inhabitants of villages and suburbs north of Ramallah – were suddenly, without warning, cut off from the main city of the district.

The news roused Israeli peace activists out of their post-electoral lethargy. Protest actions were initiated, and lecturers at Tel-Aviv University started circulating a petition of support for their Palestinian colleagues. Meanwhile, more alarming news came from the ground: the cutting of the road to Bir-Zeit was just a first step; all the roads to Ramallah were cut off, and the city came under a full-scale siege.

This wasn't a new policy but an intensification and exacerbation of what the army had already been doing under Barak, since the Intifada broke out: erecting ever-new checkpoints and road-



blocks, cutting off Palestinian roads with cubes of concrete and high earthen ramparts, reserving the main highways to settler and military traffic, while Palestinian vehicles were shunted off to rutted, unpaved side-roads. As reported in the papers, all this reflects an old contingency plan made by the army long before the Intifada and aimed at dividing the West Bank into 64 military districts or 'cells'. A military unit will be assigned to each one to control the population. That would in the generals' mind make a fine solution for Israel's 'security'.

After the news of the total siege of Ramallah, 70 activists of different groups answered Peace Now's call to hold an immediate protest outside the Defence Ministry in Tel-Aviv, and rolls of barbed wire were symbolically spread out on the pavement outside the central military compound.

The following day, there were four simultaneous protests by Gush Shalom and the Women's Coalition – at Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa and the Northern Valleys. After months of beating against an overwhelmingly strong current, the protests of the peace movement found resonance in the wider Israeli society. The closure policy – hitherto only disputed by the hardcore left – suddenly became a controversial issue in the mainstream politics, hotly debated on the airwaves and even in the new cabinet's first meeting.

A change was also evident on the pages of the mass circulation Yediot Aharonot, whose news reporting of the past months had often been war propaganda in all but name; now the same paper came up with a full-page colour photo of Palestinian parliamentarian (and Bir-Zeit lecturer) Hanan Ashrawi holding a shovel and taking part in filling up that infamous trench, accompanied by a sympathetic interview with a Ramallah resident telling of the hardship experienced by the besieged population.

At the Surda roadblock, half-way between Ramallah and Bir-Zeit, soldiers opened fire on a crowd of hundreds of unarmed students, killing the 28-year old Abed-el-Kader Ibrahim and wounding several others.

The footage was shown repeatedly on international TV channels, and there were protests by various governments and institutions. There was also an expression of American displeasure – not very loud or sharp, but even a whisper from Washington is highly audible in the halls of the Israeli government.

Sharon was quick to take a step back, hastily dissociating himself from the whole move and attributing its origin to 'the colonel commanding the Ramallah region', though admitting that he had approved the colonel's action himself. A day after the shooting at the Surda roadblock, it was opened to Palestinian travelling. There followed an official cabinet decision to ease the closure – making Palestinian travelling merely difficult instead of virtually impossible.

On the Palestinian side, the whole affair increased the tendency to renew the big demonstrations and protests by unarmed crowds, after months in which the Intifada had been carried on almost exclusively by the armed groups. On March 16, the extreme-right paper Makor Rishon published an angry editorial:

'This week Ariel Sharon tried to give the army its freedom of action. The attempt failed because of international and internal opposition. Yes, also internal opposition, despite the fact that we have a National Unity Government, and that Shimon Peres stood by the Prime Minister... True, it is not easy to withstand a campaign of international pressure, coordinated with such internal forces as Meretz, Peace Now, Gush Shalom and the Arab parties. But why did the National Camp elect a bulldozer for Prime Minister, if not in order to resist such pressures? If he does not succeed now, what will he do if on a future occasion the pressure will be joined by Peres and the fickle Labourites?'

We should not delude ourselves. This struggle

has barely begun, and next time Sharon may be better prepared. Still, the affair of the Ramallah siege gives some hope at a time when hope has become a scarce commodity.

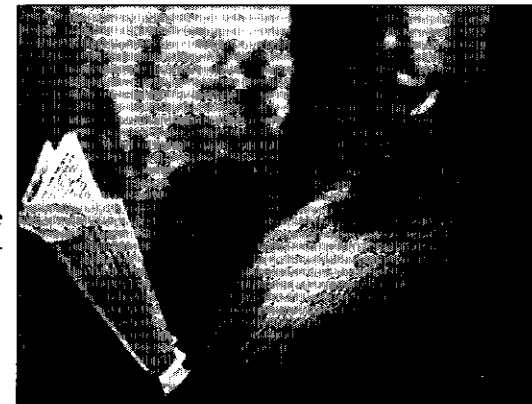
## OVERSTEPPING THE MARK

At Ariel Sharon's visit to the White House – he gained a considerable, but by no means unlimited, freedom of action vis-a-vis the Palestinians. The press reports at the time were rather bland and uninformative; however, a clearer idea of what was and was not agreed between Bush and Sharon could be gleaned from the events of the following month.

For several weeks, there was virtually no reaction from the White House or the State Department while Sharon undertook steadily escalating military measures against the Palestinians. It started with the reintroduction of bombings and bombardments by helicopter gunships, tanks and naval vessels – which Barak already did in the early stages of the Intifada, but now on a much larger scale. Then came systematic assassination of Palestinians deemed to be terrorists ('pinpoint pre-emptive measures' in military parlance, 'liquidation' in fiery news reports of the Israeli mass media, 'extra-judicial executions' in the reports of human rights organizations).

This was followed by 'search-and-destroy' military incursions into 'Area A', the enclaves handed over to full Palestinian control in the course of the Oslo process. The largest such incursion, into the Khan Yunis Refugee Camp, lasted several hours – in the course of which the Israeli forces destroyed dozens of houses and left some 500 people homeless. The tacit American acceptance of these actions

encouraged Sharon and the generals of the IDF High Command to take what may have seemed to them the logical next step – capturing and holding for an indefinite period a piece of Palestinian territory in the northern Gaza Strip, making of it a 'security zone' like the one Sharon created at South Lebanon in 1982, and holding over the Palestinians' heads the threat of further such conquests. But from Washington's point of view, a forcible change of the territorial status quo – as distinct from raids, however extensive and destructive – was a strategic move with wide-ranging repercussions. It might have aroused the anger in the masses in the Arab World to a point threatening the stability of the pro-Western Arab regimes, or forced these regimes themselves into a militant position they did not really want to undertake. A terse public reprimand of Israel by the State Department spokesperson and a single phone call from Washington to the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem were sufficient to get the invading force immediately withdrawn, with the Sharon cabinet denying that there had ever been any intention to keep them on the spot for more than a few hours. Public blame for 'the misunderstanding' was placed on the army, to the generals' great displeasure. While the extreme right criticized Sharon for 'caving in to American pressure', opinion polls indicated that



ISRAELI SOLDIERS  
HAD JUST DUG  
A DEEP TRENCH  
RIGHT  
THROUGH THE  
BIR ZEIT  
RAMALLAH  
HIGHWAY.  
STUDENTS AND  
FACULTY AND  
SOME OF THE  
INHABITANTS  
OF VILLAGES  
AND SUBURBS  
NORTH OF  
RAMALLAH –  
WERE  
SUDDENLY  
WITHOUT  
WARNING CUT  
OFF FROM THE  
MAIN CITY OF  
THE DISTRICT.



Opposition from the Israeli Left remains – as it was under Barak – confined to radical groups. The activists of such groups are becoming increasingly militant, ready to undertake acts of civil disobedience with Palestinians and risk detentions and the violence of army and police. But that cannot replace the mass peace rallies which characterized the times of the Lebanon War and the first Intifada. This state of affairs can be attributed to the pernicious legacy of Barak, who convinced many in the peace movement's grassroots that 'peace is impossible' and that 'violence is due to Palestinian intransigence'. Another major factor is the Labour Party's participation in Sharon's cabinet; in particular the willingness (indeed, eagerness) of Shimon Peres to serve as Sharon's Foreign Minister and place his prestige and diplomatic skills entirely at the PM's disposal. True, former minister Yossi Beilin, once Peres' disciple and protégé, heads an inner-party opposition, making public criticism of



As long as Sharon goes no further than to allow Peres some tactical diplomatic gestures, the PM's right flank remains secure; grumble as they might, the settlers and extreme right are unlikely to seriously threaten him. By the same token, it would take far more than soft-spoken Peres statements to make the Palestinians stop shooting. In particular, the Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip have now

The collapse of the negotiations and of the Barak

The Trotskyist group *Maavak Sotzialisti* (Socialist Struggle) recently observed that the lower classes of both societies bear most heavily the burden of the ongoing military conflict and economic crisis; that refugees have the highest unemployment rate of all Palestinians and are often the targets of Israeli tanks and helicopter gunships, while those Israelis who use public transport and frequent marketplaces are the most likely to fall victim to random terrorist attacks by desperate Palestinians. However, so far neither *Maavak Sotzialisti* nor anybody else made much headway in forging workers' solidarity across the ethnic divide. So far, only one phenomenon with any claim to be a grassroots mass movement has emerged in Israeli society in response to the ongoing crisis – the protest movement of reserve soldiers.

Adam Keller, is the editor of The Other Israel, pob 2542, Holon 58125, Israel and spokesperson for the radical peace movement Gush Shalom. He has been arrested for acts of civil disobedience and imprisoned several times for refusing to serve in the occupied territories. Contacts: [otherisr@actcom.co.il](mailto:otherisr@actcom.co.il), [www.gush-shalom.org](http://www.gush-shalom.org)

**MICHAEL  
BILLIG** explores  
rock 'n' roll's  
forgotten  
Jewish history

**'H**ave you heard about the Jewish origins of rock 'n' roll? It sounds like the start of a Jewish joke. Surely, you could not get anything less Jewish than early rock. As everyone knows, rock combined the music of poor whites like Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis, who were steeped in the Christian traditions of America's deep south, and the music of even poorer Blacks raised on the blues and gospel. Just imagine Woody Allen wiggling about in an Elvis-style gold lamé suit, and then you'll get the implausibility of any Jewish origins.

The histories of rock – whether they are heavily academic or glossily popular – tell the familiar tale of rural whites and Blacks. There is the shy teenage Elvis wandering into Sam Phillip's Memphis recording studio and ripping into white cowboy music with all the gusto of a black boogie singer. And within two years in 1956, there is Elvis sitting at number one in the US charts for an amazing 11 weeks with 'Hound Dog'. Popular music was never to be the same again.

Today, professors of cultural studies argue whether Elvis merely copied authentic black music or whether he was an innovator. The politically correct line now views Elvis as an exploiter who 'blanched' African-American music. But one thing seems constant: there's little space for a Jewish dimension in these histories of rock. Chuck Berry's fictional wannabe rock 'n' roller was the poor country boy, Johnny B Goode. It couldn't have been Jonathan B Goldstein, studying for his barmitzvah.

But that's precisely the point. Early rock 'n' roll demanded an aggressive masculinity that conflicted with the prevalent stereotype of the Jew. It was a bit like Hollywood in the '30s and '40s. Jews owned the big studios, wrote the scripts and produced the films. But the big stars were all suitably Anglo-Saxon. Even by the 1950s, Hollywood's Jewish stars, such as Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, had to change their names, accents and hand gestures. They were only acceptable if they could 'pass' as proper Anglos.

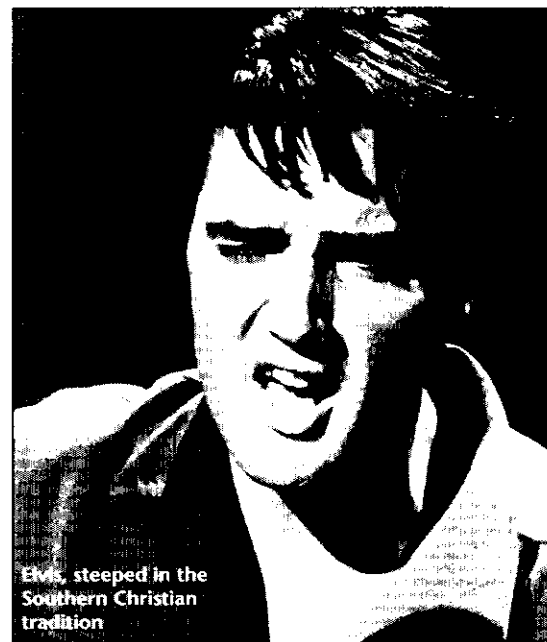
In the world of early rock, there were plenty of Jews operating behind the scenes. It will come as no surprise that there were Jewish managers, agents and impresarios. In fact, it was a Jewish promoter, Alan Freed, who claimed to have invented the term 'rock 'n' roll'. Certainly, Jews owned many of the small record companies that recorded the black rhythm 'n' blues singers, some of who were able to break through into the lucrative white market. For instance, Art Rupe, who owned Specialty Records and produced Little Richard's classic recordings, was Jewish. So, of course, was Jerry Wexler who was to produce Aretha Franklin's great soul music at Atlantic Records.

The Jewish contribution was not confined to the business side, nor even to the production side. What is often overlooked is the fact that Jews wrote many of the classic rock songs. Two young Jews, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, had written 'Hound Dog' for the black blues singer, Willie Mae Thornton. Even today, you can find academics accusing Elvis of stealing Willie Mae's black music

by recording 'Hound Dog'. The Jewish contribution seems to slip out of sight.

Leiber and Stoller, who met at high school in Los Angeles, had written for a number of black artists. 'Kansas City' has been recorded by just about every major rhythm and blues singer from Muddy Waters to James Brown. The Coasters achieved international success with a series of Leiber and Stoller songs, such as 'Poison Ivy' and 'Charlie Brown', which combined humour with social comment. Leiber and Stoller also wrote for, and produced, the softer sound of the Drifters, who likewise crossed the colour boundaries with their mixture of Latin rhythms, soulful vocals and string backings.

But as Elvis's songwriters Leiber and Stoller scored some of their biggest hits. Not just 'Hound Dog', there was also 'Jailhouse Rock', 'King Creole', 'Don't', 'Treat Me Nice' and so on. Again and again, when Elvis wanted a new song, his manager, the notorious Colonel Parker, would turn to the Jewish songwriters who were turning out the new rock music. Aaron Schroeder, with a variety of partners, wrote 'Stuck On You', 'Good Luck Charm', 'Big Hunk O' Love' and many others. Schroeder also co-wrote



Elvis, steeped in the Southern Christian tradition

with Wally Gold the English words of 'It's Now Or Never', which was originally an Italian ballad and which became Elvis's first massive hit after leaving the army in 1960.

Doc Pomus, mostly in collaboration with Mort Shuman, provided Elvis with classic songs such as 'Little Sister', 'His Latest Flame', 'Suspicion' and so on. Doc Pomus, who was born Jerome Felder, had written for a variety of black rhythm and blues singers. The blues was to remain his first love, but it didn't stop him writing a veritable playlist of teen hits for black and white artists: 'Teenager in Love', 'Save the Last Dance for Me', 'Sweets for my Sweet'...

Wherever one looks amongst the early hits of rock – whether it is the rocking songs or the slower ballads – one finds the hand of Jewish song-writers.



Simon and Garfunkel had misgivings about using their Jewish names

At first sight, this represents a continuation of the great tradition of Tin Pan Alley's Jewish songwriters, such as Gershwin, Rogers and Hammerstein, Irving Berlin and so on. But in another sense this was different. The songwriters of that earlier age had been celebrities in their own right. Songs were marketed then as the latest George Gershwin or Irving Berlin number.

In the age of rock, however, the Jewish songwriter had become an anonymous figure as all attention was directed on the performer. The singer, not the songwriter, sold the records. The required image was Elvis singing directly from his soul. No one wanted to know that he might be repeating the words of a short, fat, Jew like Doc Pomus, a polio victim who had to hobble on crutches. The good Pomus – a generous man, the wrong side of 30 – just didn't fit the image.

When rock calmed down in the early 1960s, just before the explosion of the Beatles, American culture remained decidedly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. The order of the day was teenage ballads sung by pretty boys such as Bobby Vee or wholesome girls like Connie Francis. So many of their songs came from a group of writers based in the Brill Building in New York – writers such as Neil Sedaka, Howie Greenfield, Carole King, Gerry Goffin, Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil and the incomparable Phil Spector.

The overwhelming majority of the Brill writers were Jewish, writing for non-Jewish singers, although this fact is hardly ever mentioned in the rock histories. Had the writers been of Italian origin – or had they been Londoners – one can bet that their music would have been known to the world as the 'Italian sound' or the 'London sound'. Instead, the Jewish angle has almost passed without remark.

Neil Sedaka's career provides an interesting glimpse into the attitudes of those times. He had originally been hired at the Brill Building as a young writer. He made demo discs of his songs, for the pluggers to play to the agents of the stars. Soon the Brill Building management realized that Sedaka's demos were superior to the hits that were finally released.

And so Sedaka started to make records himself. Even after several hits in the late '50s the Brill managers didn't want to present Sedaka publicly. As Sedaka recounts in his autobiography, one manager told him 'Neil, I'm sorry – I'm just scared to death that your record sales will stop after people see you performing.'

Sedaka just didn't look right – a classically trained

pianist, with a baby face that was, dare one say, a shade too Jewish. The management sent him down to South America to perform. Slowly he worked his way northwards, finally playing successfully in the United States.

Unlike Sedaka, most of the other Jewish Brill composers tended to stay behind the scenes, at least in the early days. Phil Spector, himself firmly in the Woody Allen style of weedy looks and uncomfortable angst, changed the sound of pop music with his famous 'wall of sound'. Laying track upon track in the studio, Spector realised, long before anyone else, that records no longer had to sound like live performances. Just as Leiber, Stoller, Pomus and other Jewish rock composers had crossed the lines of colour, so did Spector, hiring black singers, like the Ronettes and Tina Turner, for the vocal parts of his mini-symphonies.

What is the significance of this hidden Jewish contribution to rock? On the one hand, it shows the how antisemitism continued to be a force in the United States in the 1950s and even into the 1960s. Jews still feared being too visible as Jews – better to stay behind the scenes, writing and producing, than appear on stage as the focus of attention. Even in the supposedly freer atmosphere of the mid-'60s, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel had misgivings about using their real, Jewish-sounding, names for fear of an antisemitic reaction.

There is a further significance. The late '50s and early '60s were a time when Jews and Blacks were forging a political alliance to combat segregation in America's deep south. Young Jews were prominent in the protest marches and in the moves to register black voters. Partly this was idealism and partly it was self-interest, for the Ku Klux Klan was as antisemitic as it was racist.

Popular music reflected this alliance, between the last century's two most oppressed groups. Not only were Jews writing for black singers, but the music of the Drifters and Coasters broke through the rigid race barriers of the music industry. Young Blacks and whites were buying this new music. Segregation in the music industry seemed as threatened as segregation in the restaurants of the deep South.

However, the Jewish-Black alliance could not last. Even at its high spot, the fractures were there. A number of the Jewish composers, including Leiber and Stoller, formed their own record companies. They rarely if ever took the black singers as business partners. Increasingly, Blacks started founding their own companies, where they would not need Jewish composers and producers.

And this again, reflected wider social currents. By and large, Jews were on a three-generation trajectory from poor immigrants to suburban security. For the vast majority of African-Americans, there was no such passage to comfort. For a time, however, the histories of the two groups were running in parallel. That time may have passed, as today the American Black-Jewish relationship is filled with mutual recrimination. But it wasn't always so. The history of early rock bears witness to a time, when Blacks and Jews combined to create a new sort of music.

Michael Billig is professor of Social Sciences at Loughborough University. His book 'Rock 'n' Roll Jews' last year by Five Leaves Press, price £7.99.



# LONDON UNDERGROUND

While Britain's claims to be a haven for refugees are largely mythical, London nevertheless did at one time provide asylum for political refugees who would have a great impact on its politics and culture. **BEN GIDLEY** shows how their paths crossed in London

In 1918, an Italian poet named Silvio Corio wrote an article in *The Workers' Dreadnought* – a suffragist and socialist paper published in East London – called 'Karl Marx in Fleet Street'. While Europe was gripped by the bloodlust of the Great War, while Canning Town, Bethnal Green and Smithfields were shaken by riots against foreigners, the East Enders who published the *Dreadnought* were celebrating a different English heritage: an England that opened its doors to refugees, an England where foreign worker-intellectuals met in smoky rooms and wrote manifestos.

The events that Corio wrote about took place in London's West End, in Soho and Fitzrovia. The story began with the exotically named League of Outlaws, formed in Paris in 1834. This soon split into factions, one of which was called the League of the Just, described by Francis Wheen in his recent biography of Marx as, 'an altogether livelier outfit run by self-educated artisans who spent many a happy evening plotting putsches and conspiracies.' After the failure of the 1839 Paris uprising many fled to London, where they set up the German Workers' Educational Association. They included: 'Karl Schapper, a burly typesetter and sometime forestry worker who had won his revolutionary spurs during the storming of a Frankfurt police station in 1833; Heinrich Bauer, a witty little cobbler from Franconia; and Joseph Moll, a watchmaker from Cologne of medium height but huge physical courage.' The League became the Communist League and commissioned a 'Confession of Faith' from Marx and Engels. Engels originally wrote one in catechism form (the usual style for conspiratorial and clandestine artisan radical brotherhoods) and Marx adapted this into the Communist Manifesto in time for its second congress above the Red Lion pub on Great Windmill Street.

The Soho they moved in was an outpost of a trans-European network of artisan radicals: itinerant skilled craftspeople who tramped around the cities of Europe carrying their tools – but also carrying new ideas, new demands, new forms of proletarian organization. Some of them left their home countries out of wanderlust or curiosity; many more had no choice: they were fleeing police and prison.

Like Marx, Rudolf Rocker was a bearded Rhineland German, but from a Catholic family. His hometown, Mainz, was the city of Gutenberg: the cradle of bookprinting. His father was a music printer, his stepfather, uncle and older brother bookbinders. Rocker himself was apprenticed as a bookbinder, and followed that trade for many years. A socialist and then anarchist from a young age, he was soon faced with police harassment in Germany, leading him to leave for Paris. It was there, in 1893, that he first came into contact with the Jewish workers' movement in Paris. He was attracted to it because its warmth and hospitality, and also because of the equal relationships between the sexes; the Jewish anarchist women, he later wrote, were 'conscious of their own equality and of their human self-respect.'

In these circles, he met Sh. Ansky, now known for his *The Dybbuk*, then involved in Russian émigré politics in Paris. Rocker did not have a place to practice his craft at the time, and Ansky was also a bookbinder and offered to share his workshop. Ansky's bookbinding skills were limited, but Rocker was deeply inspired by Ansky's tales of revolutionary struggle and peasant life in Russia.

Rocker's wandering eventually took him to London. He immersed himself in the West End émigré scene. He became the librarian of the same Communist Workers Education Union that Corio's article described, and moved in a bohemian world of Paris communards, Italian bomb-makers and German conspirators. However, he soon came into contact with the Jewish movement again, and began to attend the meetings of the Yiddish anarchists in Stepney. Before long, Rocker moved to Shoreditch and learnt Yiddish.

During his time in London, he met and fell in love with Milly Witcop, a Jewish anarchist from a very frum family. They became permanent 'comrades-in-life'. When they made an early visit to the US in 1897, they were refused entrance by immigration officials as they were not legally married. If they would marry, they could have entered, but their libertarian principles wouldn't allow this. It was Milly's garment industry wages, rather than Rudolf's, which were the couple's main source of income through most of their London years.

In 1906, with the veteran anarchist-communist Kropotkin in attendance, the Yiddish anarchists started the Workers' Friend Club, also known as the Jubilee Street Club. All accounts portray Rocker as a very charismatic figure, and it was partly this that seems to have drawn a variety of people from outside the ghetto into the activities of the Yiddish anarchists. Emma Goldman, for instance, would frequently speak at its events after meeting Rocker at an anti-militarist meeting at the South Place Institute (now Conway Hall). Kropotkin and the Italian anarchist Malatesta were also very important figures for the movement. The maverick anarchist-communist Guy Aldred (whose 'comrade-in-life' was Milly Witcop's sister Rose) frequented the Club, as did Tsarist secret agents, future Soviet ministers (like Chicherin) and terrorists (including the Latvian revolutionaries involved in the Siege of Sidney Street). Lenin was frequently seen sipping hot tea there. It was also a centre of Yiddish culture: the Yiddishists and cultural nationalists Chaim Zhitlovsky and Ber Borochov both spoke there; great Yiddish poets read there. So many of these people were asylum-seekers. The Yiddish anarchists fled the pogroms and persecutions of Tsarist Russia; Kropotkin, Lenin and the Russian revolutionaries were seeking refuge from the Tsar's secret police; Malatesta was a wanted man; Emma Goldman would find asylum here after the war when she was expelled from America.

Before the turn of the century, the heart of the exiled radicals' activities in London had been in the West End, in Soho. The 'new unionism' (industrial militancy of unskilled workers, including many female, Irish and Jewish workers), which peaked in 1889, caught the imagination of these intellectuals and the centre of the émigré radical colony began to shift to the East End, where it had found a home in the Jewish ghetto. Rocker symbolised this shift.

1912 was a high tide of labour struggle in the East End. As with 1889, the Jewish tailors and the gentile dockers were the twin vanguard of the low-skilled, casualized, low-paid sections of the proletariat – in alliance with the (mostly non-Jewish) tailors of the West End. This wave was triggered by a dock strike starting in 1911 which spread to transport workers throughout London and low-paid workers throughout the East End. The

dockers and tailors held joint meetings. Stepney's Jewish families (both religious and secular) took in some 300 dockers' children (this was organized by Milly Witcop). Jewish bakers brought vanloads of bread to the docks. East End historian Bill Fishman believes that the years of joint docker-tailor militancy, 1889 and 1912, made possible the later alliance between the East End's Catholic and Jewish proletarians which defeated Mosley.

Around this time, on the north eastern edges of Rocker's East End was the East End of Sylvia Pankhurst. Born to a middle-class suffragette family, Pankhurst lived in Bow and immersed herself in the lives of working class women there. Her movement (originally called the East End Federation of Suffragettes, later the Workers Socialist Federation) was strongest in white and Irish parts of the East End like Hoxton and Poplar. In contrast to the official suffragette movement, the Federation promoted a homespun working class feminism, intertwining analyses based on gender and class.

In 1914, Rocker was heavily involved in the anti-war movement and, as a German, was interned as an enemy alien in Alexander Palace. Adopting the methods of industrial unionism he led his (mainly right-wing and pro-Kaiser) fellow internees in to fight for better treatment, as well as giving extremely popular lectures on European literature. The War led to heavy repression of the East End movement, which was vigorously anti-militarist and also seen as dangerously foreign. Milly was imprisoned for her anti-war activities. Guy Aldred was imprisoned for refusing to serve. In 1918, Rocker was deported. In the same year many of his Eastern European comrades departed for Russia to participate in the new world being built there – only for many to meet their deaths in the purges.

The war marked the end of London's great age as an asylum for political refugees. But it was also a time when the alternative British tradition of international solidarity flourished, and Pankhurst's comrades were a symbol of that. Pankhurst was the editor of the *Workers' Dreadnought*, the paper in which Corio's article on Marx appeared. This was an extraordinary paper. Both cockney and cosmopolitan, it had articles detailing local rent strikes, sweatshop conditions and the plight of housewives, factory girls and soldiers' widows. It also had articles on Russian refugees, Jewish nationalism and anti-colonial movements.

To give an example of this balance between localism and internationalism, one of its contributors was Claude McKay, the gay Jamaican poet usually associated with the Harlem Renaissance. In 1919, McKay came to England, looking (as his biographer describes it) for 'some respite, however brief, from the pressure-cooker tension of living black in white America'. McKay's world spanned the black public sphere of the West End – subterranean jazz clubs frequented by African, African-American and Caribbean boxers, students, servicemen and sailors – and the proletarian public sphere of the East End – such as the International Socialist Club in East Road, Shoreditch, which he later described as a hotbed of 'dogmatists and doctrinaires of radical left ideas: Socialists, Communists, anarchists, syndicalists, one-big-unionists, and trade unionists, soap-boxers, poetasters, scribblers, editors of little radical sheets which flourished in London'. In the *Dreadnought*,

McKay reported on East End life, especially the multi-racial maritime proletariat of the dock zone where he lived, as well as 'race' issues, naval mutinies, Welsh miners and Marxist theory.

The work of Pankhurst and her comrades contributed to the internationalist and anti-racist tradition in the East End that made Cable Street possible. Sylvia herself – and Silvio Corio, who became her lover – became more and more involved in anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles – in the movement against Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, and for Ethiopia's independence. The Pan-African movement became her life's main cause. After World War Two, Pankhurst and Corio moved to Ethiopia; on her death there in 1960 she received a full state funeral.

These intertwining stories celebrate an underground England, and especially an underground London: Marx, Rocker, Pankhurst and McKay constitute a hidden tradition in our political culture, a tradition of internationalism, openness, border-crossing and asylum. Their politics were marked especially by alliances between oppressed groups – between foreign refugees and British trade-unionists, between Caribbean poets and Spanish peasants, between Irish dockers and Jewish tailors – the kind of alliances we need to develop today.

As Jewish radicals, these people are our precious heritage. But they are also part of English heritage. What traces are left of them in the metropolis? There are blue plaques, if you know where to find them – and how to read them. London was where Marx spent the largest part of his life, nearly half a century, yet official ideas of Englishness make it very clear that the likes of Marx, Rocker, the Witcops and McKay do not belong here. By excluding the refugees of our past from our national heritage, official history makes it easier to exclude less illustrious refugees in the present.

The World War One interments and expulsions of aliens, including refugees and the 1914 and 1919 alien legislation that brought Jewish migration here to a halt: these represent a different British tradition, one that is hostile to refugees. The dominance of this other tradition was to reveal its tragic consequences between the wars, when Jews fleeing here from the Nazis were denied the refuge received by those fleeing the Tsars a generation earlier. This tradition's war-time internment camps have turned out to be rehearsals too for today's 'detention centres', like Group 4's Campsfield House, which, together with prisons like Haslar and Rochester, hold about 1,000 asylum seekers. And its war-time expulsions have turned out to be rehearsals for the thousands of asylum seekers kicked out of Britain each year to face today's pogroms. Who knows if, amongst the faceless many who are detained at Campsfield or who suffocate in the back of freight lorries, there might be another Marx, another Rocker, another McKay?



**NORMAN JACOBS** describes a visionary attempt to come to terms with the past and overcome stereotypes in and beyond Poland today.

Polish-Jewish relations is an overwhelmingly complex, perplexing and emotionally laden issue. What happened in Poland can never be forgotten. Before the Holocaust that was where the nucleus of European Jewry lived. However it was not just the Nazis who committed racist atrocities against the Jews. Shortly after the war, pogroms took place in Jedwabne and Kielce. And, Communist laws introduced in the 1960s denied the existence of ethnic minorities – in the Polish context, that meant Romanies and Jews.

Hence many western publications focus on the negative realities of Poland's past, inculcating a sense of wariness and enmity that sees present-day Poland most accurately represented by the elderly woman in Warsaw, mentioned by Stephen Cang (Jewish Quarterly, Winter 1998-99) who, on seeing a man wearing a *kippah* mutters, 'Jews shouldn't be here. Jews should go to Palestine. The Jew is poison.' Similarly, Eva Hoffman points out in *Exit into History* the 'cognitive disjuncture' between what Poles say to Jews about Jews.

Virtually to the letter of Hoffman's model, a young woman I met reeled out a list of 'generally known facts' about Jews. She did so with no apparent apprehension that what she was saying could be considered offensive or, much worse, totally misconceived. The fact that she had one grandmother who was Jewish (who had converted to Catholicism) did not appear to alter things for her. In her mind, 'the Jews' are still argumentative, clever and intolerably rich. Anecdotes like these are not difficult to find. So what do such stereotypes really say, other than highlighting one group's limited and inaccurate impressions of another?

Concerning the deficit in the accurate representation of Polish history, I would like to consider for a moment Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*. Although phenomenally insightful and educational, *Shoah* does not, and perhaps cannot, say what was happening in Poland at the time it was made. Instead, it should perhaps be seen as a film to instruct Poles and non-Poles about the degree of rethinking of old assumptions that is necessary. Unfortunately, it is more likely that Jews see the film as a collective indictment of Poland, while many Poles see it as an offensive parody of Polish identity. Focusing as it does on the non-Jew as a bystander or witness to genocide, it bypasses the fate of the three million Polish non-Jews who were also the victims of Nazi policies.

Of course, *Shoah* can (and must) be considered in a much more constructive way, informing today's Poles about the genocide which Communism largely eroded from public apprehension. Similarly, even though some people might see the film as circumventing Polish history, I don't believe this was Lanzmann's intention. For the subject of *Shoah* is to focus on the Jewish

Holocaust and the reticence that still surrounds it in some circles. However, what is needed from both Jews and Poles is a determination to focus on and integrate both Jewish and non-Jewish pasts. This is of course difficult in a Poland where, according to one report, there are less than 10,000 Jews, which may be one reason why the phenomenon of 'antisemitism without Jews', remains ingrained.

Two years ago, on my first day in Poland, I met Bernard Offen. Born in Krakow, in 1929, the Nazi invasion led to the deaths of over 50 members of his family, including both his parents and his sister Miriam. Having suffered the Plaszow, Julag, Mauthausen, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Dachau-Landsberg concentration camps as well as the ghetto, only he and his two brothers (who were in Gusen) survived.

Bernard Offen first returned to Poland in 1981. Since the country's political change in 1989, he has returned to Krakow for several months in each of the last 10 years. In this time he has worked with over 2,000 people. His task, the imperative to tell others what he witnessed, has neither been easy nor comfortable. What is quite distinct about Offen's approach is that he has actively sought to meet and talk with both young and adult Polish people, visiting secondary schools and assisting wherever and whenever he is asked. He considers that, as well as providing information about the past, this work may help heal the wounds of the past for individuals like himself, and begin the process of forming better relations between two communities.

The Polish-born novelist Jerzy Kosinski once suggested that, rather than asking what the Poles did for the Jews, the question should also ask what the Jews did for the Poles. His point was that both questions are more or less futile. Of course, some individuals as well as several convents, assisted Jews during the war, a point which is neglected in some accounts. Another commonly disregarded fact is that non-Jews were warned that if they attempted to help Jews they would face execution. The Catholic Cieslik family knew this when they took in and fed the young Bernard Offen. Though only for a day, this act assisted in his survival.

Recently, Bernard Offen advertised in the local Krakow newspaper for anyone who would be interested in discussing and working with him in his education projects. He received some 30 replies, mostly from young people but also from some born during the war. In addition, several teachers as well as individuals from Austria and Germany have regularly attended group meetings. Volunteers are translating his trilogy of documentary films *The Work*, *My Hometown* Concentration Camp and *Process B-7815* into French, German, Hebrew, Polish, Russian and Yiddish.

As a consequence, the Krakowskie Klub Dialogu (Krakow Association for Dialogue) is being founded

by the members of the present discussion group. The Association's aim is to repair relations and take responsibility for the past. But this does not mean concealing the reality of either the past or the present, nor inflaming what remain as sensitive issues. Some of the discussions have been impassioned, but following discussion and consideration of each other's perspectives, people from both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds have come to a more informed understanding of a series of problematic issues. The Association has led members, including myself, to rethink some of our previously sustained ideas, and to move towards a clearer understanding of each other's perspectives.

Dialogue is the means by which the group achieves a more coherent understanding of such issues. Outside Poland, the fundamental facts of Polish history are 'forgotten'. Students learning about 'the Holocaust' may know that Nazi concentration camps existed in Poland. But how many are taught anything tangible about a nation which, except for a brief period between the world wars, experienced centuries of persecution and oppression from its neighbours? Among the results of the nascent Association's dialogue forums, one stands out in my mind. In Bernard Offen's most recent documentary film, *Process B-7815*, he expresses some feelings about the role of the Catholicism. When a volunteer suggested that these references to the church tended to highlight only the negative role of the church he decided to re-edit the film. Since some individuals within the church helped Jews, it was considered that it would be best to omit any unbalanced reference in the film to the role of the church for fear of causing



offence to people on an issue that was not the main point of the film.

Krakow's Jewish quarter

The central focus of the film and of the Association is education, in the fundamental meaning of the word: a bringing out of understanding of different perspectives in a mutually respectful way. When Offen says in one of his films that 'in order to fully confront and comprehend our world [we need to] remove our blinkers and look together', he is referring to all of us. Following the conversations I have had with the volunteers in Krakow, the essential first step has been made in the psychological healing process between the two communities and their dual but not incompatible perceptions of history.

For information about joining Krakowskie Klub Dialogu or to receive a copy of the book *My Hometown* Concentration Camp, contact Norman Jacobs at: [NCJacobs@hotmail.com](mailto:NCJacobs@hotmail.com)

A YOUNG WOMAN I MET REELED OUT A LIST OF 'GENERALLY KNOWN FACTS' ABOUT JEWS. SHE DID SO WITH NO APPARENT APPREHENSION THAT WHAT SHE WAS SAYING COULD BE CONSIDERED OFFENSIVE OR, MUCH WORSE, TOTALLY MISCONCEIVED.

## SET IN STONES

To judge by recent articles in the Jewish Chronicle and elsewhere, looking for ancestors in corners of Eastern Europe is in vogue. I have long known about a family tree which traced one part of my family back to Southern Germany where they were rabbis in small towns and villages. Names such as Gunzenhausen and Furth, Wurzburg and Wallerstein appeared. The most frequent name was Kleinerdingen. I looked for Kleinerdingen on a map but couldn't find it. However I formed a personal project to go to Southern Germany to see if there were any traces left.

Two years ago, via a relative, Nicholas Landau, I came into possession of an article in a German newspaper which indicated that the gravestones of David Weiskopf, of his daughter Judith, and son in law Mordecai (Marx) Michael Kohn were in the Jewish cemetery in Wallerstein. Both Weiskopf and later Kohn had held the post of Landrabbiner (District Rabbi) for the rabbinate of Wallerstein and Oettingen.

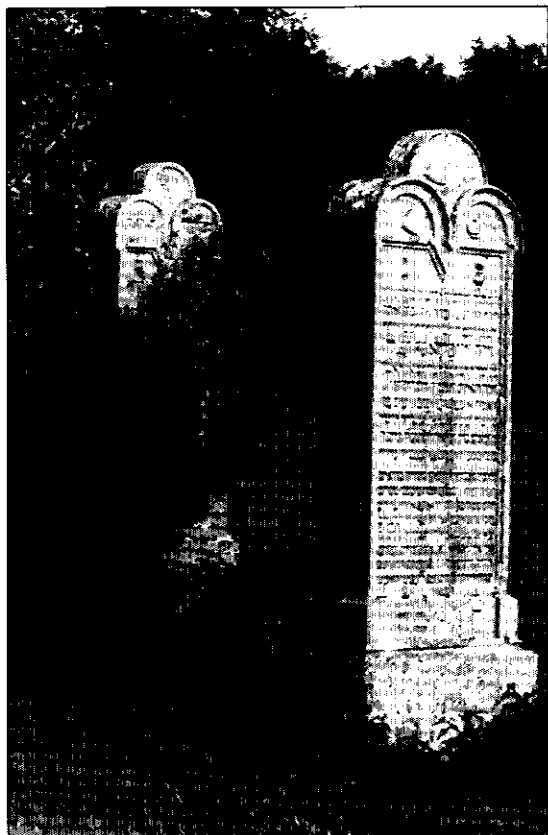
I located Wallerstein as a village seven miles to the North West of Nördlingen, a small town in the West of Bavaria. Which is how in June last year I

found myself in Nördlingen a town with a circular plan and perfectly preserved medieval walls. What I found was a fascinating microcosm of the personal and the political and the historical processes expressed through the life of small communities.

When I got to Nördlingen I bought a map of the town. There on it was Kleinerdingen, outside the walls and historically a separate community. However first I caught the bus to Wallerstein and began searching for the Jewish cemetery. I spotted a cemetery in the centre of the village and went into it. A gentleman in his sixties confirmed that the graves were in the Jewish cemetery which was outside the village. I asked him, and some women who joined us, something about the Jews in Wallerstein. They told me about the community which had existed up to the 1930s. One woman remembered the Jewish funerals in the 1930s. I filmed some of them, feeling like Claude Lanzmann. However whereas he (in his film *Shoah*) had found antisemitism alive and well in 1980s Poland, in 1990s Germany I found only kindness and concern and a respect for my search. As they talked about the 'terrible times' of Nazi persecution of the Jews, I felt their genuineness.

**MICHAEL HEISER** visited Germany and learnt from local people about the community his family came from





The gentleman insisted on giving me a lift out to the Jewish cemetery. It was locked but it was not hard to climb over the gate. The graves were easily identifiable as they stood by their own in the middle of the graveyard. I took pictures and shot some video footage of the graves, before catching the bus back to Nördlingen.

It was a pleasant summer evening so I strolled down to Kleinerdingen. I walked through the village and found a cul-de-sac called 'Judenhof'. I walked in and my attention was drawn by an old house with a pitched roof. A small group was taking the evening sun. I asked them if they knew whether Jews had lived there. Their faces were blank. However a woman ran after me and

said I should talk to the parish priest. I called at his residence, a large house next to the church, but there was no answer. However I managed to speak to him the following day and made an appointment to see him that afternoon.

However first I went to see the head of the town archives, a Dr Voges, who has written the history of the town, including that of the Jewish community. It turns out that there was a Jewish community in Nördlingen in the Middle Ages but, from the early 1500s until the beginning of the nineteenth century the town which was a city state and a centre of the livestock trade had an edict that Jews were not allowed to live there. A Jewish community was reestablished in the 1860s and a synagogue in the 'Moorish' style was built. However this was damaged in the pogrom on 'Kristallnacht' in 1938 and was demolished in the 1950s.

The parish priest of Kleinerdingen was a mine of information. A large softly spoken man with gentle manners and a strong Bavarian accent, he turned out to have spent the last 15 years studying the history of the Jewish community in the village, which dated from around 1700. He knew all about the Kohns and the Weiskopfs. Among the documents he produced was a copied extract of the 1872 marriage record of Haya Kohn with Marcus Israel Landau (my great-grandfather).

He insisted on showing me round the village and pointing out the house where the Kohns and Weiskopfs had lived. Opposite it was the synagogue, in a building which dates from the 1690s and outwardly unchanged. It is now used as a farm store.

It is clear that the history of the Jewish communities of Nördlingen and Kleinerdingen form a mirror image of each other. Jews settled in Kleinerdingen when they were not allowed to settle in Nördlingen. Outside the Reichstadt they were under the protection of the Counts of Oettingen-Wallerstein. However Nördlingen, with its cattle

market was the commercial focus of the region. Kleinerdingen, which was a traditional, and, by the nineteenth century, poor community was eclipsed by the growth of the newly reestablished community in Nördlingen. This was more liberal and allowed for such heresies as carrying handkerchiefs on Saturday. The Kleinerdingen synagogue was not used regularly after the 1900s and the community was officially dissolved in 1935. All the Kohns and Weiskopfs moved away. None of the brothers and sisters of Haya Kohn, who were all born in Kleinerdingen were to die there.

Haya's younger brother, Pinchas Kohn (and my great great uncle) did not move that far, at least initially. He moved to Ansbach, thirty miles away, where there was still a flourishing Jewish community to become district rabbi and enjoyed a long and distinguished career (highlights of which included acting as rabbinical adviser during the German occupation of Poland in the First World War) and serving as President of the World Union of Orthodox Jews (the Aguda). He did not leave Germany until 1939. It is said that he got to the border of Switzerland and then hesitated, reluctant to leave what he considered to be his homeland. However his daughter prevailed upon him to step over the border to Switzerland from whence he went through London to Jerusalem, where he died in 1941.

The tragedy which overtook Jews in Germany during the Nazi period spared no community. Nördlingen's synagogue, like so many others was damaged in the so called Reichskristallnacht in 1938 (according to Dr Voges, progressive German historians now prefer to use the term 'pogrom'.) Where Jews were able to survive, it was either through being hidden by non-Jewish neighbours or disappearing into anonymity in large cities such as Berlin or Munich. In Nördlingen they had no chance. History records the shameful deportation of the last Jews in the town in 1942 to Dachau and thence to death camps.

Although little remained of the pre-war community, a number of Jews from DP camps settled in Augsburg, the regional centre, after 1945. They have recently been reinforced by Jews from the former Soviet Union. I visited the Augsburg synaogue, a vast mausoleum of a building originally built in 1913 and reopened around ten years ago. It contains a small Jewish museum. A few years ago in 1995 an exhibition was mounted on Jewish life in Swabia.

At the suggestion of Dr Voges, the head of the Nördlingen archives, I visited Dr Peter Fassl, who rejoices in the title of 'Heimatspfleger' or 'Homeland Guardian', with a brief for the different communities which live in or have lived in the area. He pressed upon me a complete list of documentary sources relating to Jewish communities in the area.

There are no Jews left in Kleinerdingen. The Nördlingen community fared no better. The remains of the synagogue were demolished in the 1950s to make way for a Protestant community centre. But in the region of Swabia as a whole Jewish life is enjoying a renaissance, particularly due to Jews from the former Soviet Union, of which there has been an influx in recent years. The Augsburg synagogue building is buzzing with small groups whispering to each other in Russian. Jewish life in Germany continues.

## REVIEW

### Fighting apartheid

The muted international reaction to the brutal Israeli attacks on Palestinians is remarkable. Similar violations of human rights by others have raised international condemnation. The apartheid Israel imposes on the Palestinians is as offensive as the old South African apartheid but there is no comparable international anti-apartheid movement.

The David and Goliath myth of Israel as victim, has helped Israel to commit many atrocities against Palestinians without attracting sanctions. Another myth is that Israel represents all Jews and that its actions are taken on their behalf. The corollary is that opposition to Israeli actions is antisemitism. Jews can contribute to debunking these myths by joining campaigns against Israel's unacceptable policies.

There is a dangerous alignment between the 'Israel represents all Jews' myth and the antisemitic myth of a 'Jewish conspiracy'. Advancing one reinforces the other. Equally, destroying one will weaken the other. Antisemitism draws sustenance from many sources, Israel is just one. Opposing Israeli policies is not the only way Jews should fight antisemitism; the Palestinian cause merits support in its own right, and we call on everyone to support it.

We do not believe that Jews who oppose Israeli atrocities play into the hands of antisemites. By condemning Israeli outrages directed against Palestinians, Jews will help to undermine antisemitism.

Israeli Jews are also victims of the Israeli aggression and occupation. Israel sends its soldiers to repress the Palestinians and arms the settlers who subject Palestinians to humiliation and even pogroms. The brutalisation of Israeli society and its isolation from its neighbours are part of the cost. Human casualties are another. Israel is seeking to hang on to ill-gotten gains. The only long-term solution has to be peace based on justice and correcting the wrongs inflicted on Palestinians.

The myth of Israel as victim is under strain. However, it is still powerful and must be challenged.

We support Israeli conscientious objectors who prefer imprisonment to collusion. This will help break down barriers between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

Branding as antisemites or self-haters all who criticise Israeli abuses strengthens antisemitism. Israeli aggression should be treated like that of other aggressors. The emerging anti-apartheid movement in Israel should become as forceful and international as the historic South African anti-apartheid movement.

**Yael Oren Kahn, Hanna Khamis, Mohamed El-Doufani**

*London and Warwickshire*

Jews Against the Occupation have a petition against Israeli occupation: [www.PetitionOnline.com/jv01/petition.html](http://www.PetitionOnline.com/jv01/petition.html)  
[www.geocities.com/NoApartheid/](http://www.geocities.com/NoApartheid/)

### Fault lines

After all the hype about the Finklestein book on The Holocaust Industry, encouraged by both its promoters and detractors, it was soothing to read Sue Lukes' balanced and thoughtful analysis (JS43). Nevertheless, having finally read the book after the hype had subsided, I felt it, too, was over-critical of a book of considerably more merit and courage than has been publicly acknowledged. No doubt in some of Finklestein's phraseology he employs literary shock tactics but the underlying arguments I found hard to fault.

People have questioned his motives, but having also listened carefully to his interview on Radio 4 by Fergal Keane, I regarded him as sensitive and vulnerable rather than mendacious, malicious and dangerous, as he has been widely portrayed. I would urge readers of Jewish Socialist to read Finkelstein's book and judge it for themselves.

**David Rosenberg**  
*London*

### The Battle of Cable Street

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/redweb/hcable.htm>

This is part of the Communist Party of Britain's history pages. There are three parts. One has extracts from newspapers of the time. Another contextualizes the story. The best part, though, is the oral history section, where you can read the memories of veterans Alf Salisbury, Harold Smith, Solly Kaye, Mick Mindel, Charlie Goodman and Jack Shaw. Avoid the repugnant Stalinist apologetics in the Spanish Civil War section, but visit the excellent anti-fascism page.

(Other good anti-fascist history sites include: the Fighting Talk Archives on Anti-Fascist Action's excellent site, [www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/5602/ftalkold.html](http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/5602/ftalkold.html), Revolutionary History, <http://boston.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backissu.htm>, whose

Summer 1988 issue was on the Spanish revolution, and two huge sites (one anarchist, one Marxist) on the Spanish Revolution at <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spaindx.html> and [www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/9820/](http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/9820/).)

### Hasidic New Wave

[www.klezmershack.com/bands/hnw/jews/hnw.jews.html](http://www.klezmershack.com/bands/hnw/jews/hnw.jews.html)

On a completely different note, this is a review on Ari Davidow's Klezmershack of Jews and the Abstract Truth by The Hasidic New Wave. On this record, traditional ecstatic melodies of the Hasidism intertwine with avant-garde downtown jazz in a very exciting way. If you have the right technology, you can listen to audio clips. If not, follow the links to related artists (like John Zorn), to the record label The Knitting Factory, or to Ari Davidow's other sites (including

the Virtual Ashkenaz on-line forum on Yiddish culture).

### Ber Borochov Internet Archive

[www.angelfire.com/il2/borochov/](http://www.angelfire.com/il2/borochov/) Writings of Marxist Zionist, Yiddishist and Poale Zion founder Ber Borochov who died in 1917. The site also hosts critiques of his work and links to various Israeli and North American labour Zionist sites. Borochov's work was flawed – such as the exultation of the dignity of physical work, the false distinction between 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour, the blood and soil ideology, and the internalisation of antisemitic and sexist stereotypes about the feminine neurotic diaspora Jew. But a lot of his writings, as presented here, are very valuable today – such as his critique of 'militant Hebraism', his pioneering work in Yiddish studies, and his subtle analysis of different types of nationalism.

## REVIEW

### BEN GIDLEY'S round-up of websites well worth a visit

# LOOKING BACK

**CHARLIE POTTINS** values the unique contribution that the Jewish Socialists' Group has made to the Left, to the Jewish community and to a large number of individuals



It's about 20 years since I joined the Jewish Socialists' Group. In October 1980 a bomb outside the Liberal Synagogue on the rue Copernic in Paris killed four people and injured two-dozen more. Jewish leaders here blamed France's 'appeasement of PLO terrorism'. Left-wing papers suggested the bombing could be the work of Zionist provocateurs. Few commentators (the Jewish Chronicle's independent columnist Chaim Bermant was one) considered that French antisemites, who hate both Arab and Jew, might be responsible.

Then neo-Nazis marching in west London clashed with anti-fascist counter-demonstrators. Police made several arrests. On the evening TV news a Dr Jacob Gewirtz, of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, said Jewish people saw both lots of demonstrators as an equal menace since they were all out to undermine democracy. Hearing this man equate socialists with Nazis who wanted to finish Hitler's work, I was outraged. What right had he to speak for Jewish people? Was there nobody to contradict him? There was an ad in the New Statesman for the Jewish Socialists' Group. I decided to give it a try.

Not having been near any Jewish organisation since my youth in Haddon, I was not sure what to expect. I'd occasionally fancied the idea of a left-wing Jewish group and publication. But the Jewish community offered no visible foothold for left-wing politics, while my left-wing acquaintances of Jewish origin, including anti-Zionist Israelis, did not understand my interest in Jewish issues. There was no longer a distinctly Jewish working class, the thought ran, so wasn't it a diversion from the class struggle?

A crowded living room in Ilford, a lively discussion, some things I could relate to. A young woman was studying the history of the Jewish workers' movement (I'd just read Bill Fishman's East End Jewish Radicals). An older guy had become disillusioned with Israel after Suez. Criticisms of my comrades on the left were hard to take, but they had a point. When we broke for refreshments, a young

JSG member asked what I thought, and made me feel I was among friends. He told me he had been at the anti-Nazi demo the day before.

I didn't join right away. But at my next meeting, I was asked to join a committee arranging guest speakers and activities, so I thought I'd better do the decent thing, and sent off my application form! Another new member, Alan Adler proposed inviting a speaker from the PLO. I suggested we invite a left-wing Israeli speaker. I hadn't met Alan before, but I recognised his name as translator of Nathan Weinstock's book, Zionism – False Messiah. A graduate of Oxford and the International Marxist Group, he went to work in France, then died tragically, still young.

The 1981 JSG national conference, at Cambridge, adopted a Middle East policy embracing the rights of Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian peoples and the principle of self-determination. Britain's biggest post-war Jewish demonstration had been against Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington meeting the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and here we were saying Israel should recognise it. Some people found this too much.

We had already come into conflict with the Jewish Establishment over an issue nearer home. There was a spate of swastika-daubings and desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Wherever it happened, Jewish people were told to keep quiet and avoid publicity, while community leaders pursued confidential talks with the Home Office. Jewish Socialists said the Board of Deputies should open its files so people could see what was happening and decide what to do. We urged Jews to join others fighting racism and fascism. On Radio Four's PM programme the Deputies' Dr Gewirtz said Jews mustn't 'cry wolf', and accused us of wanting to involve Jewish youth in street confrontations.

There was an exception to this 'softly-softly' policy. In Dundee, a left-wing Labour council had twinned with Nablus, and flown the Palestinian flag over the town hall for a visit by mayor Bassam al-Shaka (who lost both legs in a Zionist settler car

bombing). The Israel lobby was fuming. Some swastikas scrawled on Dundee synagogue made the Jewish Chronicle front-page. Delegations from the Board of Deputies and the Union of Jewish Students rushed to Dundee to show solidarity with its supposedly embattled Jewish community. Contrasting this with the Board's usual policy, the JSG said self-determination must include Palestinian local government, and we supported Dundee's right to twin with Nablus.

Although Jewish individuals were prominent on the Left, the Right dominated Jewish life. There were Jewish ministers doing Thatcher's dirty work and right-wing Zionists in the Reagan White House. Since 1967 Jewish leaders had identified with Israel's most expansionist phase. Jewish students were enlisted in the 'campus war', Jewish women mobilised for Soviet Jewry, but solely for its right to go to Israel. When Jews were 'disappeared' under a right-wing military regime in Argentina, little was said. The victims were usually left-wing Jews, anyway. 'Experts' told Jewish gatherings that right-wing antisemitism was no longer significant, the 'real danger' now was from the Left.

Unfortunately, these attitudes were sometimes mirrored on the Left. Sympathy for Jews as a persecuted people was giving way to simplistic support for Arab nationalism against Zionist colonialism, even to justifying terrorist attacks. Some US left-wingers excused the anti-Jewish rhetoric of Nation of Islam. The Anti-Nazi League evoked images of the Holocaust, but anti-racists, including young Jews, often assumed antisemitism was in the past, not understanding its place in the Nazi scheme. The Jewish community was seen as comfortable, established and bourgeois – wasn't that how it presented itself?

The Jewish Socialists' Group has had a two-fold task: to revive the progressive, socialist current in Jewish life, and to ensure that Jewish experience and concerns have their place on the Left.

Meeting JSG members on a Lambeth council workers' demonstration in defiance of the Thatcher government, I glimpsed an answer to my 'class question'. Jewish workers no longer confronted Jewish sweatshop bosses as they had in the heyday of the Jewish labour movement. But Jews in public services, education and the 'caring professions', and Jews fighting racism and other kinds of oppression, faced a reactionary government, which included Jewish ministers, and was fawned on by the Jewish Establishment, and the Chief Rabbi. Clearly, Jewish values had more than one interpretation. Lifting one's gaze, as socialists must, from purely economic to political, social and cultural struggles, the JSG's existence made good sense. JSG comrades encouraged me to participate in the GCHQ unions' protest, and in Jews Against the Clause (28 that is). I'm grateful for both.

At a Jewish Historical Society meeting, circa 1981, a man assured me Margaret Thatcher was 'the greatest prime minister this country has ever seen'. The evening's speaker, Manchester historian Bill Williams, regretted that Jewish immigrants had to give up their culture as the price of acceptance (a century ago Jewish children were punished for speaking their own language, in the 'Jews' School'). One person objected to any nostalgia for Yiddish. 'I don't know where this neo-Bundism comes from!'

thundered our Thatcher fan. Someone told me he was a *makher* in the Board of Deputies. I realised how relevant the JSG's interest in Jewish culture and history was. Acculturation of Anglo-Jewry early last century left it wide open later for reactionary influences which exploit people's ignorance and wish for identity. We want to reclaim a heritage that young people can draw upon to create the future.

The JSG's approach on Zionism and the Middle East gained strength from our positive Jewish alternative and from contact with others – the Israeli peace camp, the Palestinians, Jewish progressives in other countries. We heard from visiting American students about New Jewish Agenda. We met the Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique (UPJB) in Brussels, and took part in the meeting Maxim Ghilan called in Paris, to form the International Jewish Peace Union. Ariel Sharon had just launched his blitzkrieg on Lebanon. We joined a Palestinian demonstration in London. Some Israelis feared the JSG banner with its Star of David might provoke hostile reaction. But Arab students came to shake our hands. 'Wait till my uncle in Beirut hears that Jewish people are marching with us!' The BBC2 newsreader that night didn't hide her incredulity – 'The demonstrators included a contingent calling themselves Jewish Socialists!'

The Lebanon war shocked many Jewish people out of uncritical support for Israel. Massive peace demonstrations in Tel Aviv, coupled with open unrest among Israeli soldiers, boosted us. Working with others we held big public meetings in County Hall, including the historic one addressed by Issam Sartawi and Uri Avneri, and meetings in Manchester, and Redbridge. When General Rafi Eitan came for Jerusalem Day at an Ilford shul we demonstrated outside denouncing his racism. We also fought our corner, and won respect, in conferences of the Left.

When the Greater London Council announced funding for ethnic minorities, the ultra-orthodox were ahead of us in the queue. But we obtained funding for a Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project (JCARP). The Board of Deputies grumbled and protested, but Jewish people were delighted to see the JCARP stall at anti-racist events, and there was no shortage of customers for Yiddish classes. An exhibition on the 1905 Aliens Act linked Jewish experience with that of other immigrants, and helped establish alliances.

In 1985 my dream came true, when the first issue of Jewish Socialist appeared. It was the first left-wing Jewish publication in this country in three decades (the Communist Party's Jewish Clarion gave up the ghost in 1956). The cover showed a defiant young Charlie Goodman being arrested at Cable Street in 1936. It wasn't the kind of image the Jewish Establishment was promoting!

Things have changed over 20 years. The Wall has come down and so has Apartheid. We've got Tony Blair instead of Margaret Thatcher. Enough said. Some of yesterday's 'lefts' have deserted to the side of privilege. But more genuine socialists are rethinking the way we do things. The JSG, with its distinct traditions and outlook, can participate in this process. In the Jewish community, moods swing, but more doors and minds are open. Another hopeful sign I've noticed at recent events is JSG comrades' youngsters turning up, taking part, and enjoying themselves. We can look forward to the next 20 years.

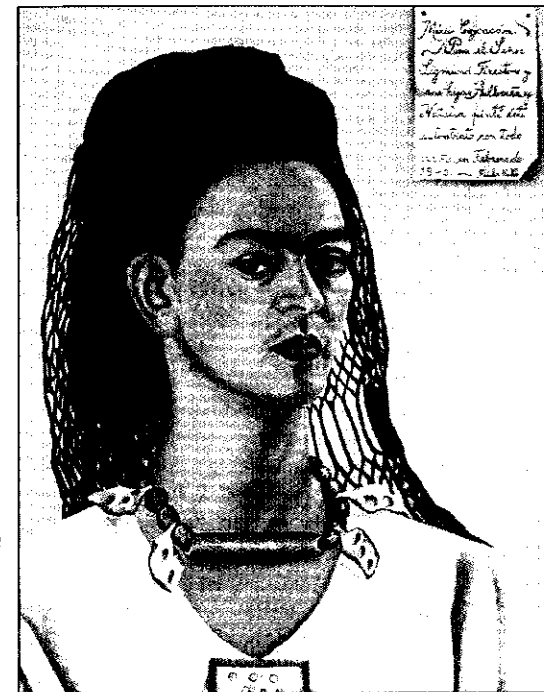
THE JEWISH SOCIALIST GROUP HAS MADE A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO REVIVING THE PROGRESSIVE, SOCIALIST CURRENT IN JEWISH LIFE AND TO ENSURING THAT JEWISH EXPERIENCE AND CONCERNS HAVE THEIR PLACE ON THE LEFT



## A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a row of white, angular, sculptural objects, possibly chairs or architectural elements, set against a dark background. The objects are arranged in a line, creating a rhythmic pattern of light and shadow. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the sharp edges and facets of the white forms. The background is dark and textured, providing a stark contrast to the bright white objects. The overall composition is minimalist and modern, emphasizing geometric shapes and light.

art in Britain both influenced and was represented by a later generation of artists such as Auerbach, Bloch, Feibusch, Uhlman and Freud - all from Germany, and Adler, Herman and Pilichowski - from Poland. Writing in the exhibition catalogue, art critic Brian Sewell, who is generally regarded as controversial within the Jewish community, writes with great warmth and appreciation of the artists exhibited by Ben Uri remarking on the extraordinary influence of the exiled Jews of the 1930s on all British culture. The Ben Uri story featured 76 paintings and sculptures by 45 artists representing all eras of the Ben Uri's lifetime. For me, 9 paintings stood out: Bomberg's 'Ghetto Theatre'; Gertler's 'Rabbi and Child' and also his study, 'Boxers'; Meninsky's 'Boy with a Cat'; Herman's 'Miner with a Cup of Tea' and 'Gamblers'; Adler's 'Mother and Child'; Kramer's 'Day of Atonement' and, from the newer generation, Breur-Weil's 'Head'. The catalogue contains a number of thoughtful essays, some of which raise the inevitable question about what makes art 'Jewish' beyond the artist's accident of birth. There is no easy answer. For some it is typified by a cosmopolitanism that reflects the breadth of Diaspora experience, a matter of intangible spirit rather than substance. What is evident is that many of the artists have had a difficult relationship with the Jewish community which cannot be

range of artists drawing on their own broad diasporas have contributed to the gallery's non-conformist traditions. Jewish artists are perhaps under-represented in the current exhibition, given their historical involvement, and the exhibition seems skewed towards more recent art. Nevertheless there are many gems to appreciate: Juan Gris' atmospheric *Still Life with Playing Cards* and Siphon; the bombardment of colour in Hume's *Purple Pauline* and Boyd's *Red dog*; paintings to confuse the eye – Riley's *shuttle 1* and Gormley's *Excuse Between Blood and Earth*; and self-portraits by Sonia Boyce and Frida Kahlo – the image chosen by the gallery to represent the exhibition in its publicity. Closer to Jewish interest is the sound and text work 'University of the Ghetto', located on the upper floor, with voice recordings of people who have used the gallery's nextdoor neighbour, the Whitechapel library, throughout its history. The library was built in 1892 and relaunched in 1901 when the art gallery was opened. Several contributors talk about the library's formerly



expansive Yiddish collection. According to Breuer-Weil, one of the younger Jewish artists in the Ben Uri exhibition, Jews in Britain today are very well represented in the art establishment, and as museum staff and collectors, but he laments that there are very few Jews represented in Britart's new generation, although he believes this may be to do with feeling out of kilter with current art trends as well as decreasing interest in and support for artists in the Jewish community. We now seem to be entering an age where Jewish diasporism and our connectedness to other minorities is more established and assertive. Perhaps this will be reflected in contemporary Jewish art in Britain.

**David Rosenberg**

روزنامه

**Levoye** is a funeral. And it is said that among the crowds lining the streets for Stalin's funeral there was a conversation: 'Some levoye! How much did it cost?' 'I'm told it was a million roubles.' 'A million roubles? Feh! For that they could have buried the whole central committee!

**Shmegege** – now in Yiddish there are many grades of fool and one person's *nar* is another person's *putz*. The way I see it, Portillo is an evil scheming paskudniak but Hague is a dozy pillock – a *shmegege*.

# ON THE SHELF

Searching for something to read on a long train journey, **RAF SALKIE** discovered some forgotten gems and some anti-Zionist skeletons in respectable cupboards

Let's start with a good book, in fact a great book – OK, let's be honest, one of the best books I have read in a long time. I'm ashamed to say that I had never heard of the Australian writer Patrick White when I came across *The Solid Mandala* (Penguin, sadly out of print) in a second-hand bookshop. I was looking for a serious novel to read on a journey, as I had already found some light-hearted gems (including a thriller about a quasi-religious group similar to the scientologists who were plotting to take over America – pure trash, nonetheless ideal for a 14-hour train journey, after which I threw it away... but I digress).

The cover said that the author won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973, so I decided this 1969 book was worth a try. Well, it's 316 pages long, and every word is sheer perfection. Apart from that minor detail, I mention the book here because of a Jewish woman called Dulcie Feinstein who fascinates the two central characters, the brothers Waldo and Arthur. Dulcie's family are from Central Europe and have

exotic relatives all over the world, rather than being grindingly dull Anglo-Australians like everyone else in the book. She therefore seems to Waldo – a would-be writer – to represent the culture and passion that he longs for. In fact, she turns out to be part of the well-off but arid suburban life that so many Jews in Hendon and Whitefield and Hove seem to love.

Typically, she can play the beginning of the fast movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, but then stops, 'unable' to play any more. I realise I am failing to convey the richness of this book, and I'm probably annoying Jews who live in Hendon etc, so please forgive me, but I urge you to track it down and tell me what you think of it. Incidentally, I also read Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* (Penguin, £7.99) on this journey, a superb book about antisemitism in Czarist Russia that would make it into my top 20 novels, but unlike White's, not the top five.

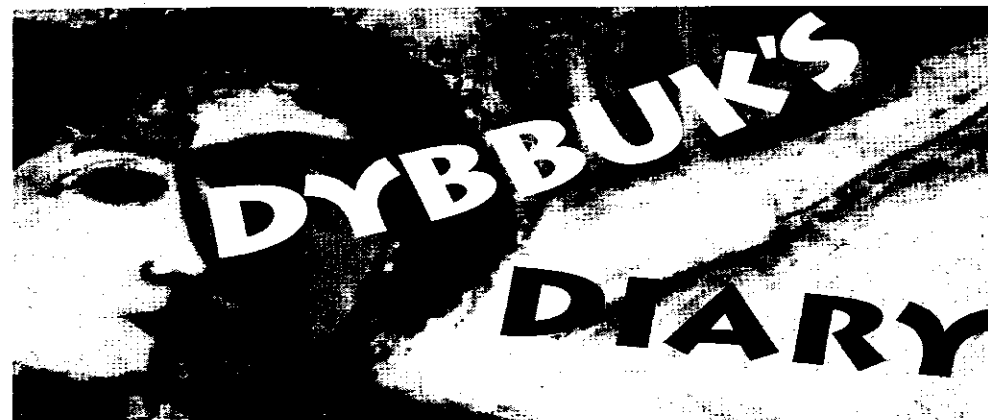
Moving on, let me mention *Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship* by Brigitte Hamann (OUP, £12.99). It's a scholarly but highly readable account of Hitler's stay in Vienna from 1906 to 1913, and also paints a detailed picture of the political, economic and cultural ferment of the last years of the Habsburg Empire. Hitler (who, remember, was trying to be an artist at this time) apparently met and genuinely admired a wealthy Viennese Jewish family, the Jahodas, so cultured and interesting compared to the dull provincial Austrians he had grown up with – not unlike the Feinsteins in an Australian book that I read recently, which I may tell you about some time...

Another interesting academic study is Rory Miller's *Divided against Zion: Anti-Zionist Opposition in Britain to a Jewish State in Palestine, 1945-1946* (Frank Cass, £39.50). I did not know that an organisation called the Jewish Fellowship was founded in 1942, campaigned against setting up a Jewish State in

Palestine, and included the President of the United Synagogue, several MP's and Rabbis, and other pillars of the Jewish community. The Fellowship was wound up in 1948 for the obvious reason, but Miller shows how until then its members were virulently attacked by Zionists: efforts were made to expel Fellowship members from the Board of Deputies, while leading Zionists put intense pressure on the Jewish Chronicle not to give them any credence. In fact, as Miller shows, JC reports about the Fellowship usually portrayed them as ridiculous fools, and editorials in the paper maintained a similar patronising tone, but even this hostility was clearly too mild for the Jewish Commissars. Scholarly though it is, the book irritated me in treating Jewish opposition to Zionism as a historical oddity because it failed (rather in the way that many people treat socialism these days). Now that we have a Jewish State we can watch our communal leaders (with the notable exception of a few Rabbis like John Rayner, long life to them) line up to defend the indefensible actions of the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza – and all this is supposedly a great success, of course.

Miller also does not mention the principled concerns about a Jewish State during this period by many left-wing Jews. It's good to see that the tradition he ignores is alive and well in Belgium, to judge by the 64th issue of the (French-language) journal *Points critiques: Revue de l'Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique*. There is an important article about the refusal of the Belgian state to acknowledge its role in the Holocaust – part of a wider reluctance by people in countries occupied by the Nazis to face up the past. I send our Belgian comrades a hearty 'Bon courage' (and, of course, encourage them to read *Le Mystérieux Mandala*, published by Gallimard ...).

Raf Salkie  
r.m.salkie@btton.ac.uk



## WALL GAME (A SEDRA FOR THE SEDRAIT)

Whomsoever sayeth Israel is no more the land of miracles, let them consider Arik, who was in opposition, and had fallen beneath 'Bibi ben Freebie' in the Likud poll ratings. For this Old Soldier would not fade away, but didst gird his loins and set forth, saying yea, though I walk to the Haram al-Sharif, I fear no evil, for two thousand armed troops art with me, my Barak and General Staff behind me'. And lo, but a few months did pass, and a few hundred people were killed, and Arik did reign as Prime Minister over Israel!

Some cried out at the slaughter, but the righteous elders of Israel said: 'If a Jew wants to visit our holy Wall, why shouldn't he?' And few questioned the pork fresser's newfound piety. And none recalled the day when Jews praying at the Wall were attacked, then arrested by the guardians of the peace of Zion. For, had not those attacked then been Masorti, yea even women in talethim, laying tefillin, which was an abomination in the eyes of Men in Black?

Whereas Arik, the Lily of Sharon, though he ate so freely of the flesh of swine as to resemble one, had slaughtered many people, and had much to pray for. And wise Rabbi Kavits, a leader among settlers, spake, saying: 'Killing Arabs is no problem. As long as it doesn't endanger Jewish life and you can get away with it.'

And though Sharon's invasion of Lebanon endangered Jewish life, as did

his triumphal procession to the Wall, it was OK because he killed more Arabim. Besides, yeshiva bochurs did not have to serve in the army. And Arik got away with it. And so there came Natan, of the tribe of Rus, he who had cleaved to the false gods Maggie and Ron, saying 'For we were slaves in Muscovy, but I shall lead you to a Land of Milton Friedman.' And he preached unto his flock, saying, vote for Arik, forget you want a flat in Tel Aviv, and remember you have a Wall in Jerusalem, lest our right wing forget its cunning! And Arik was anointed in Jerusalem.

And the men of Labour made haste to do his bidding, even Peres, called dove of peace, though the house he founded at Dimona, beat ploughshares into nuclear warheads. And they said: 'Let us serve Arik, for we can tame him and trim his claws.' And Arik laughed, for they had not dared try anything of the sort when they had power. So, after the usual squabbles over who got what, peace reigned among the rulers of Israel, though bullets, bombs and shells rained upon the children of the Land.

## DOG FIGHTS

Hartlepudlians still in denial over hanging a monkey for espionage can't deny they elected another to parliament. The man who, legend has it, mistook mushy peas for guacamole, accepted Geoffrey Robertson's home loan, made Heseltine's Folly his own, and welcomed the Hinduja brothers' donation for a Faith Zone could not be expected to remember every phone call. The brothers were being investigated over India's Bofors

arms affair, but that was long ago in another land, as I reflected in Oxford, passing the Wafic Said Business School. Haven't heard from Mrs T lately.

Meanwhile, trouble at Conrad Black's kennels. Black's partner Barbara Amiel once wrote in the Jewish Chronicle saying she liked dangerous dogs. Bill Clinton's pardon for fugitive financier Marc Rich brought the Telegraph hounds out barking at the outgoing president's supposed 'liberal admirers'. But we learn that for some reason, Ehud Barak and Shimon Peres lobbied the White House for Rich's pardon. Taki, in the Spectator, started yapping about Capitol Hill being controlled by Zionists who shoot kids. Proprietor Black, a born-again Christian, right-wing Zionist, didn't mind Taki attacking Blacks and Puerto Ricans, but says he won't tolerate 'anti-Jewish prejudice' in his publications. Some Tory journalists have discovered overnight they don't like billionaire Black muzzling the media. They urge us to defend poor Taki, the freedom fighter. But Teabag-Mountafury says the Canadian press baron is defending fair, objective journalism against antisemites. Was that why Black got rid of trade unionists and other subversives at the Jerusalem Post then? Not that I remember much solidarity for them from the likes of Taki and friends.

Deciding whom to back in this row is a painful dilemma. No, really (he, he, he!) it's killing me.

## 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.



Send this form to: Jewish Socialist,  
BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.  
(cheques/POs to Jewish Socialist Publications)

☐ Please send me the next four issues of Jewish Socialist starting with issue.....  
I enclose £7.50 (inc p&p).

☐ I enclose a donation of £.....

Name

Address

Postcode

Country

Overseas subscription £15 Sterling