

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.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

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 also enclose a donation of £.....

Name

Address

Postcode

Country

Overseas subscription £15 Sterling

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:

Membership Secretary
Jewish Socialists' Group,
BM3725, London WC1N 3XX
js@bardrose.dircon.co.uk
www.jewish-socialist.org

JEWISH ★ SOCIALIST

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

No 47 Winter 2002/2003 £1.50

THE BOYCOTT DEBATE

SOCIALISTS AND SPORT

REFUSING HOLY ORDERS

ISRAEL'S INTERNAL OPPOSITION

© 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.

Israel and Palestine ■ Gypsy history ■ Heine's radicalism ■ Poetry and art

NEWS

- 3,4 Walk for Ta-ayush, Prague Floods, York campaign, Refuseniks support

FEATURES

- 5 When words fail us**
David Rosenberg looks at how slogans and symbols can undermine opposition to Israeli oppression
- 7 When a right is wrong**
Michael Rosen argues for a focus on the Law of Return
- 8 We don't buy it**
Diana Neslen and Charlie Pottins debate the boycott campaign
- 11 Think again**
Charlie Pottins puts analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict under a Marxist microscope
- 14 Jew-ish**
Dave Renton looks beneath the politics of identity
- 16 Shared sorrows**
Extracts from Toby Sonneman's book about Gypsy and Jewish suffering under the Nazis
- 18 Heine the radical**
Bob Archer tells the story of Heinrich Heine
- 21 Out of step**
Philip Mendes recalls Paul Merker's downfall
- 22 Nothing to Bragg about**
Paul Collins takes a swipe at nationalism
- 24 Playing on the left wing**
Roni Gechtman looks at the Bund's part in radical sports history

REVIEWS

- 28 Mark Gertler exhibition
- 29 Jewish locations by Lisa Tessman and Bat-Ami Bar On
- 27 The Last Chance by Leon Rosselson

POETRY

- 15 Sonnet Against making Blood Speak Out by Meir Weiselter
- 20 The Electoral Asses by Heinrich Heine
- 27 My Father's Jewish World by Leon Rosselson

REGULARS

- 3-4 Wisewords, Eye on Zion
- 23 From where I'm standing
- 27 Dybbuk's diary

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

EDITORIAL

Bertolt Brecht wrote: General, man is very useful. He can fly and he can kill. But he has one defect: he can think ... I am not an especially gifted or courageous soldier ... But I am capable of thinking. I can see where you are leading me. I understand that we will kill, destroy, get hurt and die and that there is no end in sight ... I can see that if "military needs" lead us to lay siege to, hunt down, and starve a whole people, then something about these "needs" is terribly wrong. I am therefore forced to disobey your call. I will not pull the trigger.' This is what Israeli army reservist, Yigal Bronner wrote to his General as he began a 28-day confinement in a military prison for refusal.

'The voice of conscience and the lessons humanity should have derived from countless similar situations in the past leave me no choice but to refuse ... the oppression known by the peoples of the area at the age of empires, the torment of the slaves and the Indians in North America, Algiers' War of Independence, and apartheid in South Africa – all these have made my refusal inevitable. My grandfather's actions in World War II, in his fight against Nazi fascism and his belief in humanism – these too lead to my refusal ... In the face of such evil as one may find here and now, there is no other way.' (Haggai Matar, 18-year-old Israeli draft resister.)

Twenty years ago when Israeli politicians allowed themselves to be drawn ever further into Lebanon's quagmire, on the rash advice of a bullish general, the first open acts of refusal were experienced in Israel's armed forces. A small number of soldiers – politically active leftists – formed Yesh Gvul (There is a Limit) and refused to go to Lebanon to fight a war that they believed was neither necessary nor just. Five years later, their ranks swelled again as reservists refused to take part in the heavily armed repression of a largely unarmed civilian uprising – the first Intifada. Refuseniks were denounced as 'traitors' and 'enemies of the state' but they broke a taboo. From Israel's birth, its conscript army has played a central role in the society, provided a gateway to later employment and its generals have been heavily over-represented in government.

Today, many emulate Yesh Gvul's pioneers, from reservists refusing certain orders, to those refusing service throughout the Occupied Territories. A still newer phenomenon, and one that is most threatening to Israel's leaders is a refusal to take part in any army activities, on either side of the Green Line, while Israel is occupying another people's land, and there is a growing conscientious objector movement among Israeli pacifists. Whatever the degree of refusal they share a commitment to mutual support.

The new refusal shatters one of the Israeli ruling class's abiding myths: the national consensus. The army had met many refusers halfway and posted them inside the Green Line. Some high ranking officers even declared their respect for those refusing service in the West Bank and Gaza, but a refusal to wear the uniform at all goes one step beyond the margins of consensus.

It should also alert the Left to the potency and importance of Israel's internal opposition. For too long socialists' rhetoric towards this issue has consisted of empty and sloganistic denunciations of 'Zionism' and a romantic elevation of Palestinian nationalist struggle with hardly any appreciation of the real schisms within Israeli society, over security, the economy, and religious coercion, and the equally significant stratifications within Palestinian society. Strident and militaristic rallying cries in the name of solidarity have not addressed the bread and butter demands of the most impoverished Palestinians which cannot wait until the day of liberation and may have to be fought for and gained under capitalism. How the left understands, relates to and intervenes effectively on these issues, ought to be a subject for serious debate. Several of the articles in this issue seek to offer just such an analysis and open these debates.

In recent weeks, a number of young Israelis, who have braved hatred, hostility and imprisonment for their personal stand, have toured Britain to talk about the reasons for their refusal and to seek support for their actions. Their tour had a flying start in the packed Red Rose Club in North London. It would be good if mainstream Jews took the trouble to listen to *seruvniks* (Refusers) – the Board of Deputies has refused to meet them and the Chief Rabbi diplomatically realised he didn't have time. What a busy bee he is! It would be equally good though if socialists, pacifists and internationalists, including 'Middle East experts', came to hear, to learn new information and to support them. As for the bullish general. He didn't stop at Lebanon. General Sharon moved into politics and today, as he draws in elements even further to the right to rescue a crumbling coalition, he is continuing a path that is, as one commentator described it, both murderous and suicidal.

Cover picture: Israeli army refusenik, Rami Kaplan. Photo: Chen Mika

Shops to overshadow the tower

Campaigners in York are trying to halt a huge retail development that would dwarf Clifford's Tower, the site of an infamous 12th century Crusaders' massacre of the city's Jews. A decision on the Coppergate II Riverside project may now rest with Environment Minister John Prescott, after the public inquiry obtained by protestors ended quickly without halting the plan.

On 16th March 1190, a mob led by Crusaders laid siege to the tower, the keep of the Norman castle, where Jews had sought refuge. The mob set a fire in the base. Many of the Jews took their own lives, fearing forcible conversion. The rest were killed by the mob. Altogether 150 Jews died in this English pogrom.

Today Clifford's Tower has a museum and memorial, and Jewish students have gathered by the mound in recent years to commemorate its grim history. But York Council backs a property developer's plan for a massive shopping complex straddling the River Foss – which once provided the castle's moat – and dominating the

castle area. Objectors say the city does not need this monster, that it will ruin the area's historic character and totally obscure the landmark Clifford's Tower. Local people polled on alternatives much preferred a green open space between the tower and the riverside. The inquiry ended in July after the council said it would sue objectors for costs if it succeeded.

Land Securities, taken over by Harold, Lord Samuel in 1944, made its post-War fortune working with local authorities rebuilding blitzed city centres. It is now the UK's biggest property company, and landlord to some government departments as well as to British Telecom and the BBC. Protestors say they won't bow to council pressure or powerful interests, though these

may weigh with government. The Castle Area Campaign Group has won support at home and abroad. Opponents of the plan range from the Archbishop of York to the Union of Jewish Students. The Jewish Socialists' Group and Jewish Socialist are proud to add our voice to the campaign.

Send letters to the Secretary of State for the Environment, John Prescott, and to your own MP. Land Securities might care to

hear your opinion – their head office is at 5 Strand, London WC2N 5AF, or you can email: landsecurities@landsecurities.com

More information from www.yorkcastle.com/

There's an online petition at: www.cliffordstower.com/petition/index.htm

Please send donations, made out to 'Castle Area Campaign', to Castle Area Campaign Group, c/o Stuart Wilson, 6 Vesper Drive, York YO24 3HT.

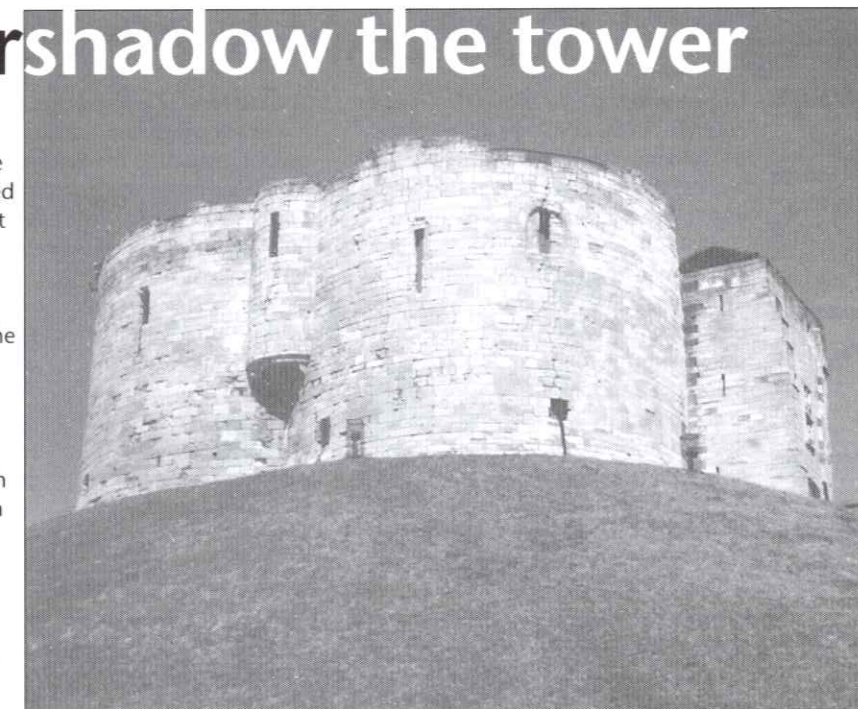


Photo: Charlie Pottins

A HARD RAIN



The floods in Prague in August caused severe damage to several historic synagogues including the Alt Neu Shul – the oldest synagogue in Central Europe. The libraries and archives of the Jewish Museum were also damaged. The damage to archives at Terezin were also left in a very bad state. Many people were left homeless including a number of Jewish families. Bejt Simcha, a progressive Jewish community in Prague has been in the forefront of rescue work. It helped in the rescue and preservation of archives in Terezin and is providing for the homeless. Donations can be made to them. Account name: Bejt Simcha. Account No 000086-8959 5602 17/0100 SWIFT: KOMBCZPP

Support the refuseniks

Soldiers who are refusing to serve in the Israeli army are receiving longer prison sentences than ever before. Letters of protest on behalf of the refuseniks should be sent to the following addresses:

Lt Gen Shaul Mofaz
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Tel Aviv 61909
Israel

Email: sar@mod.gov.il
or pniot@mod.gov.il
Fax: ++972 3 696 27 57
or ++972 3 691 40
or ++972 3 691 79 15

Copies can be sent to
Brig Gen Menachem Finklestein
Chief Military Attorney
Military Postal Code 9605
IDF, Israel
Fax: ++972 3 569 43 70

Commander of Military Prison No 4
Military Prison No 4
Military Postal number 02507
IDF, Israel
Fax: ++972 3 957 52 76

For draft resisters and conscripts
rather than reservists send appeals to
Deborah Chassid
Commander of Induction Base
Tel Hashomer
Military Postal Code 02718
IDF, Israel
Fax: ++972 3 737 67 05

Messages of support to all
imprisoned objectors can be sent by
email to dash@seruv.org.il

EUROPEAN JEWS FOR A JUST PEACE

Fifteen Jewish peace groups from eight countries in Europe have joined forces to condemn Israeli government actions against the Palestinians and demand an end to the occupation.

On 19th and 20th September, at a conference in Amsterdam entitled 'Don't say you didn't know', a coalition of European Jewish groups adopted a statement (full text and signatories below) calling for

- an immediate end to the occupation and recognition of the June 1967 borders
- complete withdrawal of Jewish settlers from the Occupied Territories
- an independent and viable Palestinian state with the guarantee of security for both Israel and Palestine
- recognition of the right of both states to have Jerusalem as their capital
- recognition by Israel of the responsibility for its part in the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem and of the right of Palestinians to return or receive compensation.

The statement says that a just, fair and practical solution must be negotiated, and must include the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel or Palestinian territory, or to compensation. The Amsterdam conference called on the international community to support these demands and insisted that only a just peace could guarantee safety for Israelis and Palestinians.

There was concern about antisemites and racists exploiting the Middle East conflict, but also condemnation of those pro-Israel groups that engage in harassment and violence against Jews who speak out against Israeli policies.

The conference agreed to support all the Israeli peace and human rights groups, including the Refusenik soldiers, and called on Jewish organisations to promote constructive discussion on how to achieve a just peace in the Middle East.

The Amsterdam meeting was hosted by the Dutch-based group Een Ander Joods Geluid (An Other Jewish Voice),

The statement

We, representatives from 15 Jewish peace organisations from eight European countries, gathered together at the conference, 'Don't say you didn't know' in Amsterdam on the 19th and 20th of September 2002, call upon: **the Israeli government** to change its current policy and implement the the proposals in the following declaration and **all other governments**, the United Nations and the European Union to put pressure on the Israeli government to implement the proposals in the following declaration.

We believe that the only way out of the current impasse is through an agreement based on the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state and the guarantee of a safe and secure Israel and Palestine. This requires:

- 1 an immediate end to the occupation of the Occupied Territories: West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem with recognition of the 4th June 1967 borders;
- 2 complete withdrawal of all Jewish settlements in all the Occupied Territories
- 3 the recognition of the right of both

states to have Jerusalem as their capital; 4 the recognition by Israel of the responsibility for its part in the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. Israel should recognise in principle the Palestinian right to return as a human right. The practical solution to the problem will come about by agreement between parties based on just, fair and practical considerations. It will include compensation, the return to the territory of the State of Palestine or of Israel, without endangering Israel's existence. We call upon the international community, especially Europe, for political and financial support.

An Other Jewish Voice (The Netherlands)

Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique – UPJB (Belgium)

Network of Jews Against Occupation (Italy)

Friends of the Israeli Palestinian Coalition for Peace (UK)

Just Peace UK (UK)

Jews for Justice for Palestinians UK (UK)

Jewish Socialists' Group (UK)

British Friends of Peace Now (UK)

Rabbis for Human Rights UK (UK)

Jewish Manifesto (Sweden)

Jews for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (Sweden)

Jüdische Stimme für einen gerechten Frieden zwischen Israel und Palästina (Switzerland)

Union Juive Française pour la Paix – UJFP (France)

Le Cercle Français de Juifs Diasporiques de Gauche Cercle Gaston Crémieux (France)

New Outlook (Denmark)



More than 50 people joined a historical walk around the radical Jewish East End as a fundraiser for Ta'ayush – a joint Israeli-Palestinian organisation that sends convoys of humanitarian aid to villages in the Occupied Territories. The walk was led by David Rosenberg of the Jewish Socialist editorial collective. It raised more than £200 for Ta'ayush. Photo: Ian Saville

WISE WORDS

‘Revolutionary activity and profound humanitarianism – they alone are the true breath of socialism. A world must be turned upside down. But each tear that flows, when it could have been spared, is an accusation, and he commits a crime who with brutal inadvertency crushes a poor earthworm.’

Rosa Luxemburg, Polish-Jewish revolutionary, from *Against Capital Punishment* written just after her release from prison in 1919. Later that year she was murdered.



Have you read a quote that's got your goat or inspired you? Send it to us and we may share it with our readers. Our address is JS, BM3725, London WC1N 3XX.

WHEN WORDS FAIL US



Photo: Simon Lynn

The mass demonstration in London last May in support of the Palestinians drew remarkably broad support, not least from among the ranks of the Jewish community. Growing numbers of Jews have become alienated from Israeli policy, but it was a big step to express that alienation by actively marching against Israel with people many of whose sadness and anger at Israeli policies has turned to contempt and even hatred.

Many of our fellow demonstrators were young people who have grown up knowing only the Israel that is a colonialist, occupying power. The tortuous journey made by the Israeli people, the anti-Nazi, anti-imperialist past of some of the State's founders, or their democratic, socialist dreams, mean little to them. What they see are bigoted, racist settlers and brutal oppressors.

Taking part in a pro-Palestinian demonstration was nothing new for the Jewish Socialists' Group, the expatriate Israeli Marxists of Matzpen, or the Jewish fundamentalist anti-Zionists of Neturei Karta, who stood silently, in traditional black religious garb

around the plinth at Trafalgar Square, holding anti-Zionist placards in one hand and Palestinian flags in the other, providing a striking image for the cameras.

Newer groups such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians and JustPeace UK, though including individuals who have long made their stand on this issue, also brought behind their banners Jews who were marching for the first time alongside Palestinians, Muslims, socialists and others supporting the Palestinian cause. JustPeaceUK's contingent included some individual members of British Friends of Peace Now, which remains avowedly Zionist. There were many others who had hitherto kept their criticism of Israel within the bounds of the Jewish community. For these Jews taking their first tentative steps 'beyond the pale', it was a revelation when people from whom they expected hostility or mistrust instead made them feel welcome and supported.

Others experienced much less comfort. Even political veterans felt at times that this was not a wholly anti-racist demonstration, nor one which

Clumsy analysis and crude slogans are undermining the unity of the movement for Palestinian justice, says **DAVID ROSENBERG**

clearly united progressive forces against those of reaction. Partly it was because of the large Islamic contingents with religious slogans, and the way some on the platform, at a demonstration organised by the supposedly secular Palestine Solidarity Campaign began their speeches by sharing a chant with the crowd of 'Allah akhbar' – 'God is great' without a hint of disapproval from the organisers. In contrast, when an Israeli speaker from JustPeaceUK, echoing remarks made by Yasser Arafat that week, said suicide bombings were setting back the Palestinian cause,

case is not unlike the myriad other national conflicts where one people's rights are taken away by the other in the name of nationalism, freedom, or the longstanding historical claims. If we are looking for similar cases we can find plenty: Serbia and Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Britain and Ireland, India and Pakistan, Turkey and Kurdistan. So why, in the Israeli case, do people reach so readily for Nazi Germany?

It hardly seems accurate. Nazi Germany attempted world domination through conquering a host of countries, and as it tore through them it initiated the industrialised, bureaucratised, mass slaughter in death camps of millions – *millions* – of Jews and gypsies.

Israel's repression of the Palestinians is relentless and often murderous. It makes life miserable and wretched for ordinary Palestinians, subjecting them to many restrictions and daily humiliations, but it is a long, long way from genocide. If we call what Israel does now, 'Nazi', what will we call it when current Israeli policy becomes harsher? And if Israel was truly 'Nazi', what does that make Palestinians who would willingly negotiate with it? Those who sought to do that with Nazi Germany were condemned as collaborators, as bad as the Nazis themselves.

Could it be that making this equation is seen as uniquely wounding to Israel's supporters amongst ordinary members of the Jewish community, many of whom have been conditioned by Zionist propaganda to see the survival of the Jewish people in terms of defending Israel's survival as a nation? An attempt to harness longstanding anti-racist sentiments among Jewish people to fighting Zionist racism will not succeed by using crude Holocaust analogies.

One theme that comes through strongly is the suggestion that Israelis/Jews are doing to the Palestinians what was done to them by the Nazis. The simple conflation of 'Jew' and 'Israeli' was clearly evident on a placard held on 18th May referring to 'innocent Palestinians in Jewish concentration camps'. And whereas some placards depicted an Israeli flag as equivalent to a Nazi flag, other simply drew the Star of David – a centuries old symbol of Judaism – as equal to the Nazi swastika.

Of course in historical terms there is a connection. But the complexity of the connection must be understood if supporters of the Palestinians are to avoid colluding with antisemitism and harming the very campaign they wish to support. In the crudest portrayals, Jews who survived the Nazi genocide coined the phrase 'Never Again' and drew the conclusion that for their protection and survival they must have their own state. They have allegedly attempted to create a pure Jewish-only state in Palestine along ethnic/religious lines. And, in this simple view, world powers supported them in this either because of powerful Jewish lobbying or because they felt guilty that they were unable to prevent the Holocaust. In this version the victims have directly become the perpetrators.

The actual relationship is far more complex. Most of the Jews in Europe who became victims of the Nazis had rejected the Zionist idea that Jews could not remain as minorities in various countries. Until the Holocaust, Zionism remained a minority movement in Jewish life, most popular among the emerging middle classes, but with little relevance or attraction to the majority of working class and poor Jews. The Jewish Holocaust survivors who ended up

in Israel were not those who early in the 20th century had identified this piece of land as site of a future Jewish state, they were not the ones who bought up the land and expelled those who worked it. The political and military leaders who established the Israeli state and took the key political and strategic decisions which set the scene for today's conflict had either settled in Palestine before the Holocaust, or their parents had.

Even after the horrors of Hitlerism, many survivors remained unconvinced of the Zionist argument. They settled in Israel only because the doors of so many countries were shamefully locked to them as they languished in Displaced Persons camps for years after the end of the war. While some were still young and fit enough to engage in military action on behalf of the newly formed Jewish state, many arrived in Palestine/Israel as broken people. It would take many years before they could emerge as human beings actively shaping their own destiny. Some of their children did indeed become ardent Zionists but others became the strongest advocates of liberal and left wing politics and human rights activism.

Outsiders' perceptions of the relationship have been deliberately clouded by Israeli politicians and Jewish Establishment spokespersons in the diaspora, all too ready to compare any attack on Israel – verbal

or physical, – to Nazism; and to identify Arafat or Saddam Hussein as Hitler's successors.

These leaders have adopted a political ideology – Zionism – as an essential feature of modern Jewish identity, and falsely equated anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Such cynical rewriting of history might contribute to lazy thinking by progressives about the relationship between Jews and Israel and the Palestinians, but it does not excuse it.

In many different countries today Jewish attitudes are polarised. On one side there is growing Jewish support for peace with justice between Palestinians and Israelis, and increasing questioning of the basic foundations of Zionism. That should be welcomed and nurtured. It undermines the key Zionist claim that diaspora Jews are united behind Israel's actions, and challenge Israel's use of this to maintain support from other governments. Now is the time for all people who are committed to human rights and justice to raise their voices loudly for the Palestinians. But the movement for justice for the Palestinian people should base its slogans and symbols on a sound political and historical understanding. It should not allow those with cruder standards, or more dubious motives, to risk alienating a key element in the growing movement, and dragging down the cause.

WHEN A RIGHT IS WRONG

One of the absurd things about Zionism is that most Zionists don't live in Israel. If we were talking about a kind of benign longing, say as Irish Americans talk of Ireland, this would be worth no more than a cynical gag or two. Instead, we are talking about a unique phenomenon: millions of people who claim that they are exiles from a land they themselves weren't exiled from, talking of a homeland they would hate to have their home in. As a sub-plot to this, the idea that Jews like me of Eastern European origin are linked genetically to ancient Jewry has been shown to be quite wrong. Of course there is some religious continuity but no more than a Christian's claim on Nazareth and Jerusalem as the respective birth, death and resurrection places of their godhead. In fact, if the history of Christianity can be believed, the first Christians were in fact converted Palestinian Jews. The most likely candidates for any 2,000 year right to live in Palestine are the Palestinian Christians! Jews like me are the product of conversions and intermarriage that has been going on across Europe for at least 1,000 years.

In the present context, the whole world can see that Israel's policies towards the Palestinians have become unrelenting state terror. It's becoming clearer by the day, that the solution Sharon's government has in mind is analagous to the solution Begin and Shamir came up with in 1948: terror will engender flight and the land will be free for us to occupy. It's also clear that the USA has a massive interest in sustaining Israel as its one and only safe ally in its quest to secure Middle East oil, and virtually no interest in helping bring any justice to the

Palestinians in the form of full citizenship in a secular Middle Eastern state, or even a single Palestinian state on the West Bank.

In my conversations with non-Jews I find a great deal of reserve about criticising Israel in case they themselves will be seen as antisemitic. Often I see non-Jews as assuming that all Jews are Zionists. Since The Guardian published our letter, many non-Jews have told me they had no idea there were any Jews who thought this way. The success of the Zionist monolith can't be underestimated. Non-Jews see what they imagine to be a unity of diaspora, with Zionism and Israeli policies.

I think it is absolutely crucial we use whatever means at our disposal to show the Zionist monolith to be a lie. This will strengthen the resolve of anyone, Palestinian or Israeli Jew, fighting for a just solution in the Middle East. It will undermine the claims made by Zionists in and outside Israel that there is a world unity of Jews backing Israel. It will strengthen us in the Stop the War movement who are pointing out that there is a country with known human rights abuses, with massive stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, with a fanatical leader in power with designs on appropriating more territory – and that country is Israel.

Declaring our refusal to 'return' to Israel, also says something about the kind of diaspora society we want to live in – a multicultural, fair and equal place. We are saying that we live where we live and if there are problems facing minorities, our solution is not any kind of national, tribal or clan one, but a solution to be found in the place where our home actually is.

Several diaspora Jews recently signed a joint letter renouncing their right of return to Israel.
MICHAEL ROSEN
explains why they took this step



Photo: Simon Lynn

she was booed and heckled by a section of the crowd, and disgracefully the chair distanced herself and the demonstration from these comments.

I spent the day as a steward, protecting the plinth at Trafalgar Square from unwanted infiltrators. In doing so I had to deal with antisemitic abuse from some young Muslims seeking to attack the Neturei Karta members on the plinth. 'Why are there fucking Jews up there when there should be Muslims?' they shouted. Most of my fellow stewards were not secular socialists but religious Muslims. Judging from conversations we had while waiting for the march to arrive, they were unsympathetic to the politics of the left, and unhappy that the cause they were supporting was identified with the left.

But it wasn't just a matter of religion. Even more alienating and gut-wrenching for many Jews on the march were the ubiquitous symbols on the placards equating the Israeli state with Nazi Germany, and in many cruder versions, the Star of David with the swastika. Politics by analogy is generally a symptom of intellectual laziness, and lack of confidence in the argument in its own right. This particular analogy has sharp edges that make it extremely questionable as any kind of progressive statement, and probably indicates motives that are quite the opposite.

The daily facts of Israel's repression of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the discrimination against Palestinians within the pre-1967 borders, the history of a state founded on the expulsion of another people, the destruction and Hebraisation of their villages do not need embellishment to evoke a proper response. The Israeli

WE DON'T BUY IT

The campaign to boycott Israeli goods has provoked bitter reactions from Zionists but has also proved controversial among liberal and left circles. DIANA NESLEN draws on the lessons of the South African experience in support of the campaign

It was the action of Professor Mona Baker of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) that brought the simmering row about the boycott of Israeli goods to the surface. The boycott was launched in response to the military reoccupation of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Professor Baker is the editor of a small academic magazine which had two Israeli contributors. She asked them to withdraw from the board of her magazine in response to the boycott call. One of the contributors is Miriam Schlesinger, a notable peace campaigner in Israel. The response of the Jewish community, normally extremely sanguine about constraints on Palestinian academics, was electric. Fine sentiments were expressed in the media about 'academic freedom' but this did not extend to protesting against the simultaneous closure by the Israeli Minister of Education of Al-Quds University and the targeting of its high profile Professor, the renowned dove, Sari Nusseibeh, nor to the threats to the livelihood of those Israeli academics who supported the boycott.

However a positive consequence of Mona Baker's action is that it brought into the forefront of debate the strategy of using boycott as a means of influencing the politics of the region. The tactic of boycott has been used in many different situations. In the 1930s, Nazi Germany called for a boycott of Jewish-owned shops and the publisher Victor Gollancz called for a boycott against Germany. Neither boycott was effective. The Nazis found that they could easily use their laws to destroy Jewish businesses, while the boycott against Germany fizzled out with the onset of the Second World War. Those campaigning for Jews to be allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel tried to use the boycott tactic against the Soviet Union and would often disrupt Soviet cultural events. Eventually the regime changed and Jews were allowed to emigrate to Israel but the boycott itself had no impact on that change. It did, though, bring the issue to national attention.

The main and most longstanding use of boycott as a tactic was that adopted by the Anti Apartheid movement against South Africa. Beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s, activists in Europe and America initiated a boycott against South Africa and combined this with education, financial aid and cultural events to pressurise their governments to withdraw from South Africa. The UN initiated a mandatory arms embargo. The voluntary oil embargo, cultural boycott and attempts to isolate South Africa intensified the pressure.

The question remains as to whether these actions had any effect. Clearly the sports boycott had a demoralising effect on a country where sport was like a religion, second only to the Dutch Reformed Church. It deprived a generation of Anti Apartheid activists and black sportspeople of the chance to develop their skills at an international level. Even Paul Simon the singer was caught in the net when he tried to market his music without considering the boycott.

However this boycott did not stop the Market Theatre from staging its plays documenting the lives of black people in South Africa because that educated the larger public. Economically, South Africa was not too badly affected until disinvestment became a reality and banks like Barclays found to their cost that they were losing money by supporting South Africa. What is undeniable is that the boycott, together with the other strands of the strategy, undermined South Africa's public image and made white South Africans pariahs on the world stage. The boycott was instrumental in raising awareness about the nature of apartheid and in recruiting activists to the cause.

A number of arguments have been used against the strategy of boycott. The first is that there are many other oppressive nations that have invaded and colonised other nations' territory. China, for example, has colonised Tibet and has been guilty of massive human rights violations against the inhabitants. The failure of the world to campaign effectively in support of the Tibetan people does not negate the call for a boycott of Israeli goods. Rather it perhaps demonstrates that Tibetan campaigners should consider their tactics in respect to Tibetan freedom and decide whether they wish to pursue this option.

The second argument is that the working class of Israel and of the Palestinian territories will suffer if the boycott strategy is pursued. This is similar to the argument advanced by Helen Suzman, a brave fighter within the system against apartheid, that the black poor would suffer. The answer was always that the representatives of the black community, the ANC, had called the boycott in the full knowledge of its implications.

In Israel the situation is somewhat different. Palestinian academics have called for a boycott, as have other representatives of the Palestinian people. However neither Arafat nor the Palestinian Authority (PA) have echoed this call. The PA does not want to allow the development of grassroots organisations that are out of its control and therefore has not put itself at the head of an alternative grassroots resistance, thus leaving the

way open for the violence of the suicide bomber.

The Israeli working class are in a similar situation to the white South African miners who, after the Second World War, fought pitched battles against the government to protect their own privileges against black miners. They do not see that they have a common struggle – and, indeed, they don't have a common struggle. The Palestinian struggle is one for self-determination. The Israeli struggle is one to maintain the status quo. The Palestinians do not have even the luxury of work as Israel is importing labour to do the work that the indigenous Palestinians would otherwise perform.

The third argument is that we should be supporting the courageous refuseniks instead of allowing our energies to be diverted into the boycott. This is an argument without merit. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Then there is the argument that Israel is not like South Africa in terms of its treatment of Palestinians. The Palestinians in Israel have had 85% of their land expropriated by the state. Because all land is now state land it is possible to discriminate against Palestinians in Israel proper by making settlement available only to those who have served in the army or have had dispensation for religious reasons. Palestinian Arabs cannot fulfil these criteria. There is no need to spell out the discrimination. It is available for all to see. The state spends only half on Arab education what it spends on Jewish education. Many jobs are reserved for those with army service, another method of discrimination. The 'unrecognised villages' that existed before the state of Israel are bypassed when there is any prospect of development. The state establishes priority areas for development and the Arab areas are never priority areas. In fact, in budgetary terms, the Israeli Arabs are second-class citizens.

The innate racism was demonstrated most overwhelmingly at the time when the second Intifada occurred and 13 protesting Arab students were killed. Israel would not dream of treating protesting Jewish citizens in that fashion. As the state of the Jews, Israel claims to be the state of many people who are not its citizens, while not being the state of many of its citizens. And now it even removes citizenship from some people because it rejects their political affiliations, something no other state does.

In the West Bank and Gaza, the situation is even worse. The Palestinians are corralled into small separate Bantustans, subject to house demolition, denial of water rights and a supply of electricity, and also to closure and a form of pass law as well as being forbidden to use roads, something even

South Africa in its worst period never accomplished. It would seem that although there are differences, particularly in the fact that Israel is sufficiently aware not to commit its discrimination to paper, there are sufficient similarities for a good case to be made.

However that is not the reason that the boycott was called. It was called fundamentally as a tactic to get Israel to the negotiating table, which Sharon has refused to do. It was called to put pressure on governments to rein in their arms shipments to Israel and to show Israel that until there is some movement towards a sustainable peace, there will be some unpleasant consequences.

There is also the vexed issue of the targeting of Jewish shops. If Marks & Spencer imports Israeli produce, it is as legitimate a target for boycott as Safeway and Sainsbury's. The problem arises if Jews are specifically targeted. If this is happening then it is absolutely wrong and representations should be made to the organisers of the boycott. I have not been able to find any evidence of this. If it does arise, it could be because self-styled leaders of the Jewish community act as apologists for the Israeli state, thus implying that all Jews are of one mind.

There is, though, an important issue that cannot be sidestepped. In the days when the South African boycott was in operation, those who supported the struggle recognised that they could perhaps suffer for their principles and were prepared to tolerate this in the interests of the larger objective. They could be targeted as white South Africans and this was seen particularly with respect to the sports boycott. White South African Anti Apartheid campaigners also recognised that they had to operate under the guidance of the oppressed, the Black South Africans. Anything else left them open to the charge of colonial paternalism.

Of course there were disagreements, but public dissent on agreed principles set the scene not for mutual debate but for divide and rule strategies to be employed by our adversaries.

Times are different now, but this is a useful guide for those concerned about the boycott's impact. The boycott is a blunt weapon, it does not discriminate, and its efficacy depends on factors well beyond its remit. Many people, while sympathising with the boycott as a strategy, are concerned that it will alienate potential supporters of Palestinian self-determination. They also have tactical quarrels with the organisers. But it's a tactic, not a strategy, and one of its by-products is an increased awareness of Israeli behaviour. The onus is not on its proponents to defend it but on its opponents to offer an alternative.



THE PALESTINIANS ARE CORRALLED INTO SMALL SEPARATE BANTUSTANS, SUBJECT TO HOUSE DEMOLITION, DENIAL OF WATER RIGHTS AND A SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY, AND ALSO TO CLOSURE AND A FORM OF PASS LAW AS WELL AS BEING FORBIDDEN TO USE ROADS, SOMETHING EVEN SOUTH AFRICA NEVER ACCOMPLISHED



CHOOSE THE RIGHT TARGET

CHARLIE POTTINS argues for a smart boycott that will avoid hitting those Israelis who are working for peace

Controversy over whether to boycott Israeli goods, companies and institutions has turned into confusion recently. Israeli policies are as repugnant as those that led us to boycott South Africa, and a boycott campaign can enable everyone to do their bit, without violence, in showing the Israeli government and its backers that crime will not pay. But there are drawbacks and dangers.

An economic boycott may hit ordinary Israeli and Palestinian workers rather than just right-wing settlers, big companies and warmongers. Marks & Spencer's historic special relationship with Israel does merit attention, although pickets on stores like M&S may be mistaken as anti-Jewish, with disturbing historical echoes not realised by the demonstrators.

But what has most discredited the current boycott movement is its misapplication in the cultural and academic fields, where we might expect some subtlety and intelligence. Having seen Israeli troops besieging campuses and smashing theatres, we don't buy sanctimonious hypocrisy about culture. Nor do we doubt that Israeli academic institutions, like their British and US counterparts, cohabit with the government and military. But when US imperialists attempted to bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age, nobody in the worldwide protest movement advocated that we boycott Joan Baez, Noam Chomsky or Dr Spock.

Yet Israeli singer Noa, a peace campaigner, was heckled at the Barbican in London by protestors who boasted that they reduced her to tears. Does this help the Palestinians? Does it encourage Israelis to oppose their government? Or does it

reinforce an Israeli (and Jewish) siege mentality that is used to generate support for Ariel Sharon?

Professor Mona Baker, of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST), has ousted two Israeli academics from the board of a journal she edits. One of these, Miriam Schlesinger, a former chair of Amnesty International in Israel, has supported solidarity convoys taking food and medical supplies to Palestinian communities under siege. Perhaps

Professor Baker did not know this. Anyone can make a mistake. But as we write,

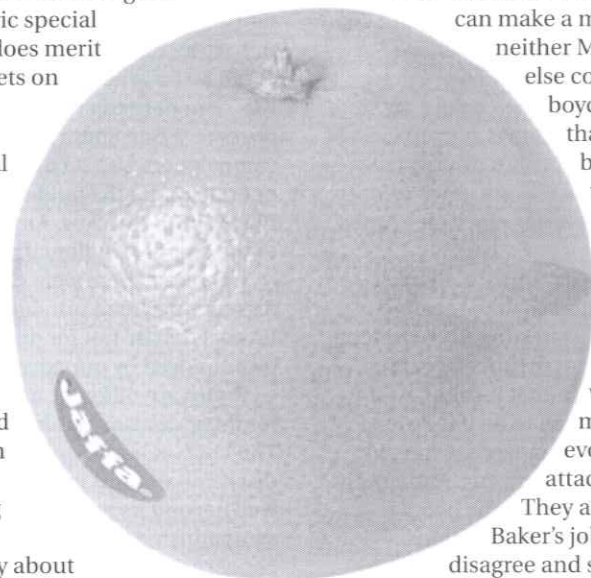
neither Mona Baker nor anyone else connected with the boycott has acknowledged that an injustice may have been done. Once again, who does this help? It certainly does not damage Ariel Sharon.

Those for whom Israel can do no wrong seize on such absurd actions to attack the whole solidarity movement, just as they evoke suicide bombings to attack Palestinian 'violence'.

They are gunning for Professor Baker's job. The 'sacked' Israelis disagree and so do we. We are especially opposed to any attempt by government to interfere with the right to boycott.

But we can recognise the right to resist without endorsing indiscriminate bombings; and we can discuss tactics, including boycotts that are applied selectively, not used to 'punish' people for their nationality.

Sympathy with the Palestinian people is not enough. Really useful solidarity needs intelligence. It might even turn away from negative gestures towards supporting positive actions, like those relief convoys.



WHEN US IMPERIALISTS ATTEMPTED TO BOMB VIETNAM
BACK TO THE STONE AGE, NOBODY IN THE WORLDWIDE PROTEST
MOVEMENT ADVOCATED THAT WE BOYCOTT JOAN BAEZ,
NOAM CHOMSKY OR DR SPOCK.

THINK AGAIN

Pensioners murdered at a seder; Palestinian children gunned down while cycling home; migrant workers blown up in a Tel Aviv street; a family slaughtered in their home by rockets from a helicopter gunship. These days we dread the word 'Israel' on newspaper placards or the TV news. Only some years ago it looked as though the Israel-Palestinian conflict was slowly edging towards peace. Now it seems to be spiralling down to war without end.

While we fear the repercussions if America attacks Iraq, Sharon and other right-wing Israeli leaders rub their hands. They can't wait for the first scud before talking about 'transfer', their word for 'ethnic cleansing'.

Perhaps this is not the world's worst conflict. There are too many contenders for that title, and some rarely make headlines. But it is a special tragedy, for the victims, and for humanity. If Jews and Arabs, traditionally kinspeople, with so much shared history and cultural heritage, cannot live together, who can?

It is a world issue, too, and not just because Israel-Palestine forms a strategic pivot between continents, and in proximity to so much oil. This is not an 'age old conflict', as some ignorantly allege. Its original cause was not even in the Middle East. As Afif Safieh, head of the Palestinian Delegation to the United Kingdom, reminded a Trafalgar Square rally, it was European antisemitism which brought misery for Jews and Palestinians; 'It was after witnessing the Dreyfus trial that Theodor Herzl wrote The Jewish State.' Even so, Zionism had a minority appeal, while many Jews were internationalists. Had socialism succeeded, had we stopped Hitler, or even opened the doors of the great democracies to Jewish refugees, Herzl's vision might today be a forgotten dream. But from the 1917 Balfour Declaration to the UN's 1947 Palestine Partition plan, world powers preferred, for their own reasons, to give Zionism crucial support.

We do not wish to excuse Zionist policies or responsibility for the Palestinian Nakba, nor to exonerate Arab regimes' treatment of Palestinians, or of Jewish communities. But we must place everything in perspective. Now the conflict has returned to affect the world. In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen's fascists have profited as young Arabs and Jews fight instead of uniting to confront the common enemy.

Only Israeli Jews and Palestinians can solve their problems. But to help them, and strengthen ourselves, we must take a stand. At one time many people on the Left, knowing Jews as victims and fighters against racism, admired the socialism of the kibbutz, and sympathised uncritically with Israel (an Israeli socialist, Eli Lobel called this error the internationalism of fools).

For a while the Palestinians were ignored. But after Israel's 1967 victory and seizure of Arab lands, and in the heady post-1968 days of romantic revolutionism, the keffiyeh-swathed Palestinian commando was iconised alongside other 'Third World' fighters.

Looking back, we can see that even when we despised Kremlin diplomacy, we tended to shadow its turns when taking sides in the world. Today, when

post-Soviet, postmodernist, ideological confusion should compel some serious independent thinking, there is sentimental harking back: witness the 'Che-Leila Brigades'. What's more, a new 'socialism of fools' treats not only Arab nationalism, but Islamic jihadis as allies against imperialist capital, and substitutes for the international movement of the working class.

'Workers of the world unite'. That should be *alef-beis* for socialists. It is our compass, without which we are lost. But by itself, it does not take us very far. Capitalism has not created a level plain where national economies develop equally, but a complex of relationships, incorporating old oppressions with new problems. Merely preaching 'peace' and 'unity' while ignoring causes of conflict would make us pious hypocrites and accomplices of oppression.

Back in the 19th century, Karl Marx thought at first that workers gaining power in Britain for socialism would solve the Irish question in passing. But he came to the view that to free itself from its rulers, as much as to help working people in Ireland, the British workers' movement must support Irish freedom. Marx did not romanticise Celtic dreams, or the Catholic church, and he did not restrict his outlook to that of the nationalists. By supporting Irish independence, trust and unity could be gained, and 'after the separation there may come federation'. We can imagine some socialists today deriding this as absurd. How could separation be a step to unity, wouldn't an 'independent' Ireland be a step backward, wasn't Marx 'capitulating' to bourgeois nationalism, and postponing the aim of a socialist British Isles?

Fortunately, unlike some of today's 'Marxists', old Karl could change his mind and admit he'd been mistaken. He could not content himself with citing past 'examples', recycling phrases as arguments, and quoting himself for every occasion. He had to develop his ideas by studying and being part of changing history.

Faced with complex situations and the need to act, without sufficient knowledge to make an analysis, we often make do with analogies, liken one country's historical circumstances to another, which we assume, sometimes erroneously, that we understand. No situation is completely unique, or without comparisons. The trouble is, that in comparing different situations, we remove them from the historical process of which they were part. Comparing countries, we select certain features, ignoring others, and may end up with a distorted picture, understanding neither country properly. Analogies may help interpret the world, but you need analysis if you want to change it.

Discussing dangers that might accompany a 'two state solution' between Israel and Palestine, someone evokes James Connolly's phrase, 'a carnival of reaction'. Connolly was warning against partition in Ireland. Some socialists recalled the Irish socialists' phrase in 1947, before Palestine partition and war. But over half a century since the State of Israel established itself, and three decades after it seized the Occupied Territories, the warning

Political perspectives on Israel and Palestine should be informed by social analysis rather than false analogies, argues **CHARLIE POTTINS**



Last May's huge demonstration in support of the Palestinians

Photo: Simon Lynn

is somewhat anachronistic! Against the current bloody events it is empty and surreal.

Britain withdrew from 26 of Ireland's 32 counties, recognised an Irish state, and continued accepting Irish immigrants, who immediately obtain citizen rights in the United Kingdom. So much for the argument that 'separation' must mean 'transfer'. Maintaining an Ulster statelet with privileges stored up conflict. But the British state could withdraw from Ireland completely, without surrendering its very existence. Similarly, Israel can withdraw from the Occupied Territories, allowing the Palestinians to establish their own state. To oppose this 're-partition' means accepting that the 35-year occupation must continue until you can overthrow, or somehow reform the whole Zionist state. Those who decry the 'two state solution' are imposing quite a burden on the Palestinians.

Another analogy is often made with the struggle against Apartheid rule in South Africa. This reminds me of a Belfast socialist's comment after an outsider compared the struggle against protestant Loyalist dominance with that against white supremacy in South Africa. 'Anyone who thinks it's the same must be unable to tell the difference between a backyard swimming pool and an outside lavatory'.

Swimming pools are an issue in occupied Palestine. Jewish settlements enjoy privileged use of scarce water resources, denying Palestinian adequate accessible water for their necessities. But there is a difference between the subsidised luxury of these settlers and the slum conditions endured by many poor Israelis, Jewish workers who have to pay for the settlements with their taxes, and possibly their lives when serving in the military, or targeted by bombers. Hamas are understandably not interested in such distinctions. But nor, it seems, are some western radicals whom we might expect to understand the matter of class solidarity. Even the French bourgeois revolution proclaimed 'war on the palaces, peace with the cottages'.

The Israeli Knesset discussed comparisons with South Africa after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. Supporting the international boycott that was

launched, unionised (Histadrut) dockers refused to work two South African ships. Herutniks wanted Israel to stand by the South African regime. Ben Gurion told them 'If you'd had your way in the orange groves we'd have the same problem here'.

South Africa's Nationalists introduced Apartheid after coming to office in 1948, the same year Israel was established, but its prehistory dates back to 1922, when the Rand workers' uprising was crushed. The white mineworkers' banner had read 'Workers of the World Unite - For a White South Africa!' The Chamber of Mines made a deal with the white unions. Black labour would be employed in the mines, but the higher-paid skilled and supervisory jobs would be reserved for whites.

Palestine had no gold, just oranges, but the early Jewish settlers, on land which wealthy families like the Rothschilds had purchased from absentee Arab landlords, became like other colonists, exploiting the local fellahs in single-crop agriculture for export. This did not suit the Labour Zionists, who wanted to establish Jewish labour on Jewish land to lay the foundations for a nation state. The Histadrut - its full title then translated as General Federation of Hebrew Labour in the Land of Israel - fought for Jewish labour to replace Arab workers wherever they could. The Zionist Right, followers of Vladimir Jabotinsky, resenting the labour monopoly, and modeling themselves on Mussolini's blackshirts, hired themselves to the landowners as strike-breakers. But as new waves of immigrants reinforced the Jewish labour force, it was the Histadrut which prevailed, and with its co-operative economy built in partnership with foreign Zionist capital, laid the Jewish state's foundations. Hence Labour Prime Minister Ben Gurion's contemptuous jibe that had the Right had its way, they'd have had South Africa's problems.

As Jewish settlements grew in the 1920s, Arab villagers no longer found themselves working for new employers, but driven from employment and land. When hard times came, the Arab landowners who had sold the land and people were able, with help from religious leaders like the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el Hussein, to turn the peasants' anger on Jews. The 1929 Arab uprising saw bloody pogroms, and massacres of the innocent at Hebron and Safed. As it also undermined British order, the Labour government in London sent out two commissions. One reported that Arab peasants driven from the land were becoming a dangerous class, the second blamed the Histadrut's 'Hebrew labour' policy. The then leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union in Britain, Ernest Bevin thought this part of the report was complimentary to the Histadrut's effectiveness as a union, protecting Jewish labour. The Histadrut's man in London, Dov Hos, had to explain to him that not everyone would see it this way.

The 1936-39 Palestinian revolt began with a general strike. Arab workers on the railways did not join the strike, fearing they would be permanently replaced by Jews. Not only did the Histadrut encourage members to take the jobs of strikers, but the Jewish sector of the economy actually grew, as the food distributor Tnuva benefited by absence of Arab produce, and Tel Aviv's new port replaced strike-hit Jaffa. In October 1936 Arab leaders persuaded the workers to end their strike, although

guerrilla insurrection continued in the countryside, until ruthlessly crushed by British troops.

Palestine's economy grew during the Second World War, when it was the rear base and workshop for British forces. The Histadrut's building company Solel Boneh, nowadays a capitalist multinational, gained its first big contracts building British army bases. With the end of the war the Zionists began organising massive 'illegal immigration' into Palestine, making sure the desperate 'displaced persons' and camp survivors included plenty of fit young people for the workforce and armed forces like Hagana. Now it was the turn of Jewish Palestine to fight the British.

Led by the United States, which wanted to keep Europe's Displaced Persons from its own shores, and supported by the Soviet Union, the UN voted to partition Palestine. Thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homeland, and remain refugees, while Ben Gurion was able to declare after the 1948 war 'thanks to the Israel Defence Forces we have an Israel that is bigger, and more Jewish.'

As the State developed, thousands of Jewish immigrants from Iraq, Yemen and Morocco were brought in, a so-called 'exchange' partly achieved by some dubious tactics, the truth about which remains to be fully uncovered. Whatever their previous status, these immigrants were treated as culturally inferior, Jewish Arabs, placed in camps like the Palestinian refugees, then assigned the worst jobs and housing. Since Labour was in government all this time, many of these 'Orientals' hit back at the Ashkenazi officialdom that treated them like dirt by voting for the Right. As the 'poor whites', they could also show they were not Arabs, by supporting nationalist demagoguery. Despite this 'false consciousness', social conflict erupted. There were riots in Haifa's Wadi Salib and Tel Aviv's Hatikvah quarter, strikes by Ashdod's mainly-Moroccan dockworkers demanding parity with Haifa. Within the Histadrut unions new militant leaders emerged. Born in street demonstrations, the Black Panther movement still has a Knesset member, Charlie Biton, who sits with Arab Communists.

The 1967 war and occupation brought changes in Israeli society, as Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories became a new 'bottom' layer, migrant workers hired by the day and not allowed to stay, doing the dirty jobs that no one else wanted.

With thousands travelling back and forth each day, not allowed to stay overnight in the city, and Jewish workers promoted to overseers and sub-contractors, this did resemble South African apartheid. The chief difference is that whereas South Africa's economy rests on a predominantly black workforce, Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories remained Israel's reserve army of labour, employed in construction, agriculture or hotel trades, or clothing sweatshops sub-contracted to Israeli firms. These are difficult places to organise, let alone to launch a general strike. In fact, the Israeli state has launched a general lock-out, replacing Palestinian workers with migrant labour from as far afield as China, and using closure and curfews to destroy the economic life of the Occupied Territories.

Without denying similar features, the pressures on the Zionist state are not the same as those which forced South Africa's white rulers to change. Without conceding anything to Zionism or even discussing the State of Israel's 'right to exist', it must be obvious to any materialist that an Israeli-Jewish nation and working class exists, and must be taken into account in any realistic and human policy, consistent with democratic and socialist principles.

The guerrilla groups which took leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1968, spurred by success at El Karameh, drew inspiration from the liberation wars in Algeria and even Vietnam. But they soon realised they were not fighting some remote colonial power or settlers whom they could drive out. Recognising Israeli Jews might be there to stay, the PLO took a step forward, then back (or sideways), reflecting contact with left-wing Israelis and discussion within its own ranks, with the formula 'A democratic secular state for Palestinian Muslims, Christians and Jews'. The sting, skimmed over by western socialists, was in the tail, attempting to get around the problem of two nations by pretending it was just a matter of three religious communities.

The experience of Black September in Jordan, followed by the October 1973 war, and the oil crisis, led to other ideas. Having suffered as badly at the hands of Arab regimes as from the Israelis, the Palestinians did not wish to lose out if Israel was forced to withdraw. The Palestine National Council resolved in 1974 to set up 'an independent national authority' on 'any part of liberated Palestinian soil'. In the same year Arab states accepted that the PLO

WAITING GAME

Some years back, around the time of the first Intifada, a civil uprising, Israeli general turned dove Matti Peled accompanied Palestinian West Bank mayor Mohammed Milhem on a lecture tour in the United States. In San Francisco they were invited to meet some émigré Palestinians, who had a luxury penthouse suite, and were 'rejectionists', opposed to any compromise. Afterwards, looking back at the smart premises, Matti Peled said: 'You know, I didn't like to say anything, but when we were fighting the British it wasn't like this.' Mayor Milhem laughed.

'Now you know why these people are prepared to wait for as long as it takes for their Return, and a secular democratic state in the whole of Palestine!' he said. Then added: 'My people back in Halhoul cannot wait so long. They want piped water, decent sanitation, electricity supplies. And they expect me as their mayor to deliver these things now.'

Today, when Sharon is doing everything to destroy such reasonable expectations and hopes, and has driven some youth into desperate suicide actions, we must act in solidarity with those who dare to hope for a better life in spite of everything. And perhaps remind some comrades in comparative comfort here that it is easy to cry 'All or nothing!' if you are not the one required to give your all, for nothing.

Charlie Pottins

was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and Yasser Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly, holding, as he said, the freedom fighter's gun and the olive branch.

The way was opened to the two-states policy, which was spelt out by Said Hammami, the PLO's London envoy. He was to pay with his life, killed by Abu Nidal's gunman, but before this he had opened talks with Israeli peace activists that helped sow the seeds for today's peace movement in Israel. If we wish this movement were stronger, we should be looking for ways to strengthen it, not pretending we can do without it. Besides, the relative size of peace demonstrations in Israel, the Israeli/Palestinian initiatives like those of Ta'ayush, who take food and medicines into the Occupied Territories, and the rebellion of conscripts and reservists, are something campaigners in other countries can only envy.

Things are not looking hopeful. Sharon and

Hamas engage in a dance of death, exchanging atrocities at the expense of innocent people. Israeli forces are destroying every stick and stone of Palestinian society and possible statehood. Opinion polls show the average Israeli as ready to countenance all-out war as withdrawal. This apparent contradiction is understandable. The ordinary Israeli worker is neither a fanatical settler nor a flower child, in fact not much different from people elsewhere. They want peace to go to work, or shopping, or for entertainment, without being blown to pieces. If this can be assured by withdrawing troops and settlements, and letting Palestinians form their own state, it could lead step by step not just to peace but to justice. But every bomb that kills and maims ordinary people says people cannot live alongside each other and reinforces Sharon's war drive. Most Palestinians know and understand this. It's a pity some people outside don't get the message.

SONNET: AGAINST MAKING BLOOD SPEAK OUT

by Meir Wieseltier

If I die one day from the bullet of a young killer –
a Palestinian who crosses the northern border –
or from the blast of a hand grenade he throws,
or in a bomb explosion while I'm checking the price
of cucumbers in the market, don't dare say
that my blood permits you to justify your wrongs –
that my torn eyes support your blindness –
that my spilled guts prove it's impossible
to talk about an arrangement with them
– that it's only possible to talk with guns,
interrogation cells, curfew, prison,
expulsion, confiscation of land, wisecracks, iron fists, a steel heart
that thinks it's driving out the Amorites
and destroying the Amalekites.
Let the blood seep into the dust: blood is blood, not words.
Terrible – the illusion of the Kingdom in obtuse hearts.

Translated from the Hebrew by Shirley Kaufman
Published in The Nation, April 2002

JEW-SH

**DAVE
RENTON,**
a socialist
historian and
active anti-
racist asks:
what makes a
Jewish Socialist?

For many readers, the difficult word in the title of this magazine is probably the second. The word socialism is so little heard today, it seems to hark back to another era – of flying pickets, composite motions, beer and sandwiches at number 10. Even on the far Left, most young revolutionaries prefer to call themselves 'anti-capitalist'. But for me, the more difficult word is the first. What constitutes a Jewish socialist? And more to the point, do I get in?

Seeing members of my family this spring, conversation turned to the first signs of an old fear. One aunt, Carole complained that her partner had become an antisemite. Another relative, Margaret, perked up, 'Mine too'. Her theory was that Ariel Sharon was to blame for making the position of Jewish people vulnerable. One aunt spoke up for 'plucky little Israel'. A week earlier, some 40,000 Jewish demonstrators gathered in the traditional rallying place of the Left: Trafalgar Square. Tribune called it a 'peace rally', but given that one speaker, Benjamin Netanyahu, has been calling for the state murder of Yasser Arafat, the term seems generous. The march was called on the basis of two slogans – defend Israel and fight antisemitism. The latter matched the feelings of the people on the march. More than just long-standing anxiety was at stake.

Meanwhile, writing in The Guardian, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has accused anti-Zionist campaigners of paving the way for antisemitism. It is a brutal claim, aimed most pointedly at Jews on the non-Zionist left. The old taunt, 'self-hating Jew', has also gained new currency.

I was brought up in a multi-faith environment, and reached adolescence without identifying with religion. My father was born Anglican, converted to Catholicism and for years has been a Buddhist. My mother's parents were Jews who lived in Austria and escaped in 1938. Family stories told how my grandparents Kurt and Olga fled Vienna. As they left Austria, their few valuables were sewn on the underside of the train seats so they would not be captured. Determined not to stand out, their children were sent to Christian schools in Melbourne, their only religious upbringing being occasional discussions with their parents'

overwhelmingly Jewish friends. My education was the equivalent of my mother's translated from 1950s Melbourne to 1970s London. I did not have a barmitzvah and I have never stood in a synagogue.

If the Jewish religion is irrelevant to me, then why have I described myself as a Jew? As a child, my aunt did not hesitate to explain to me that any value I had in society came solely as a product of my Jewish parentage. She told me that this quality was heritable and divisible, but not infinitely so. I might be half-Jewish, but there was no such thing as a quarter-Jew. Minor fractions, quarters, eighths and sixteenths were not allowed. If I failed to marry someone of my grandparents' religion, then my child could not be Jewish. This approach always seemed odd to me, and my later knowledge of the convoluted attempts, in the 1930s, to isolate a Jewish 'race', have left me suspicious of all theories in which race plays more than a minor role.

If not race, and not religion, what else marked me out? Where did it come from, this magical quality of being-a-Jew? For my cousins, the best evidence of their devotion to Judaism has been a loyalty to the State of Israel. All three have spent holidays working on a kibbutz; all know Jerusalem well. I dislike oppression in all forms, and Israel has never been a positive example to me. When I first had the chance to visit the Middle East, during a two-month holiday in the summer of 1994, Palestine took precisely three days. One day was enough to take in the wealth of Jerusalem, another for the West Bank, the third day was spent under the scrutiny of teenage Israeli soldiers after my partner and I attempted to make the overland crossing to Egypt at Rafah. Alongside us the Palestinians were treated like animals: some were allowed through, others stopped without reason. Soldiers made the people who were crossing wave their passports in the air so that their papers could be checked without the soldiers coming close. All were laughed at, all were made to wait for hours. One young soldier asked me: 'Why are you with them?' For me and my partner, this brief visit marked the point at which a dislike of injustice taking place in another country of which we knew little, became a living contempt for a racist state.

Through my teens and early twenties, I looked for left-wing models, people who had already worked out their own solution to the problem of being a secular Jew. Those of my heroes who were Jewish, seemed to have the least to say about identity – neither Luxemburg nor Trotsky considered what made them Jews. Friends advised me to read Albert Einstein. In his famous saying, 'God does not play dice', God was a code for the laws of physics, which were rational, simple and open to human understanding. His divinity was the God of the Dutch philosopher Spinoza, 'the God who is nature'. Apart also from his occasional admiration for the Old Testament prophet Moses, Albert Einstein was otherwise an agnostic. In the absence of a religious test of Jewishness, Einstein fell back on the common sense and cultural definition that many others of his generation also adopted. Jews were those who shared a common culture, originating in religion but transcending it.

Reading Einstein, it became clear to me that in the conditions of the inter-War crisis, this cultural definition became in practice ever more vague. With Hitler and antisemitism both on the rise, in such a time when a self-definition was absolutely necessary, a Jew was anyone considered by his enemies to be a Jew. This was the same definition of Jewishness adopted by non-Jewish students in France '68. When Daniel Cohn-Bendit was attacked by the French right as a foreigner, supporters responded in the street, 'We are all German Jews'. Arguing with another Jewish Socialist (calling him a Socialist-Zionist would capture his politics better) in Oxford in 1995, I repeated this point – let the racists worry about what makes a Jew. He was shocked, and he left me less convinced.

Taking up the theme of enmity, David Cesarani has suggested that the experience of suffering has become the litmus test of contemporary Jewishness. Cesarani points out that the most common reason for Jews to identify ourselves as Jews is the Holocaust. This point was made throughout my childhood: any disobedience could raise the reply, 'Remember what the Germans did'. It was always the Germans, never some Germans, as if the children and grandchildren of murderers,

should continue to shoulder the blame for generations to come. No doubt some of this lesson rubbed off. Loyalty to my grandparents and their generation is for me still an absolute ethical rule. It is an injunction to loyalty which I do not feel for the memory of my father's parents, traditional rural English Tories. I remember again in 1995, an attempt by my student union to commemorate the Holocaust. When the proposal was made that the memorial should be sited in the college chapel, that brought me to tears. Is that memory of shame and hurt enough to define me a Jew?

I worry that the Holocaust has become the touchstone of contemporary Jewishness. To create an identity on the basis of suffering is a route only to creating further suffering. For Theodor Herzl and the early Zionists, the terrible experience of the diaspora was ample justification for 'return'. The evils of one historical situation justified a peculiar vengeance, which was met on a different people and at a different time. The result was the dispossession of an innocent party, the Arab Palestinians. The logic of an overwhelming fixation on Holocaust is to repeat the blood sacrifice that undid the trauma of the gas chambers. But that Arab sacrifice has been a terrible crime indeed. Any attempt to create a social identity based on suffering must act to stunt the humanity of those who adopt that identity. The need to live implies at some stage a need to move on.

If neither religion nor race, not Israel and not the Holocaust, then what makes me define myself as Jewish? The best reason I've found for calling myself a Jew is contained in a poem by Mike Rosen, *I am a Jew because my mother and father told me I was I am a Jew because I don't believe in God I am a Jew because I am told not to be so Jewish ... I am a Jew because I am looking forward to the time when there will be no high places.*

This kind of Jewish identity, more about socialism than religion, leads to support for the Palestinians in the current conflict. A cultural loyalty, an arbitrary feeling, a loose identification with a historical people, a vague social memory with no basis in contemporary fact – if that's the best identity I've found, I'll live with it.

SHARED

SORROWS

In a new book Toby Sonneman travels from America with Reili Mettbach Herchmer, a Sinti Holocaust survivor to meet members of Reili's extended family in Southern Germany. She listens to and records their memories and places these stories in the wider context of the Nazi Holocaust, the *porajmos*, against the Sinti and Roma people. She interweaves the stories of this Sinti family with her own Jewish family's experience and reflects on these linked histories.

Here is an extract from Toby's interview with Rosa Mettbach. Rosa is a native speaker of Romani and German but chooses to tell much of her story in English. Rosa was 16 in 1940.

Rossauerlande – all of them knows it.

The Rossauerlande Police station and jail in Vienna was a holding area for the Roma and Sinti facing deportation to Lackenbach, a *Zigeunerlager*, or internment camp for Gypsies, established in November 1940. In late 1940 Gypsies were taken to this collection centre and jailed.

The police and the SS put us in there – a big area with barbed wire around it. Rossauerlande – everybody: Jews and Gypsies, Sinti or not Sinti – they take all of them. Or go to work or not go to work – egal. Equal. All of them. We were in there for six, seven months.

I ask her if she can describe the day that the police came to her home to take her family away. She shakes her head and her eyes cloud with pain.

Oh. Her voice cracks. I no can think of that.

Then, Lackenbach, she continues bluntly. We all cried.

What did you think was happening?

We cried. Kill 'em, kill 'em, all of them.

Lackenbach was in Austria, near the Hungarian border. It was located on the site of a former pig farm and, in 1940, the camp was utterly unsuited for human habitation. While the officials took over the walled storage buildings, the Gypsy prisoners had to sleep in damp stables, often sodden after rain. As many as 200 people were pushed into one room. Water and sanitary facilities were lacking, and prisoners had to clean the latrines with their bare hands.

One prisoner recounted: 'We were taken there from ... our clean houses and caravans into poverty and dirt.' Only in late 1941, after a typhus epidemic made guards vulnerable to the disease, did living conditions improve to the standard of other internment camps, with dormitory barracks, a sanatorium and toilet and washing facilities.

Lackenbach was run by the Vienna Kripo, Criminal Police rather than the SS and thus it was never classified as a Concentration Camp. But as Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon write in *Gypsies under the Swastika*, 'Conditions hardly differed. No high voltage electric fence was built but the usual roll-calls, corporal punishment and forced labour



went on. The prisoners were permitted however to stay in family groups.'

One of the more difficult realities of everyday life at Lackenbach was the poor food, served in meagre portions. Soups and stews made from turnips or rotten cabbage. Inedible cheese. Peas and beans full of maggots.

We ate food intended for pigs. My sister and her children cried for a piece of bread. But what you going to do? Nothing.

And there was the Camp Commandant, Franz Langmuller. Rosa remembers him striding through the camp with the whip that he always carried. Arbitrarily, he would stop to beat the prisoners. He showed no mercy. At his trial after the war, Langmuller was accused of responsibility for 287 deaths, including an incident in which 35 to 40 children were poisoned, probably as a result of a medical experiment.

After nearly a year in Lackenbach, an announcement came. The prisoners were to be transferred to another camp. Another work camp, the prisoners thought. Probably not too far away...

Again they were loaded into a cattle car. It was a November day – cold and bleak. Inside the cattle car it was almost totally dark, warm and airless



Far left: Rosa Mettbach in Vienna, 1940

Left: deportation of Sinti and Romani to Auschwitz in 1943

Below left: Rosa's sister and her children, all of whom died in Lodz
Below: Rosa's great aunt and uncle in the 1920s



from the density of bodies crammed together. This transport was headed for Poland, to a place the Germans called Litzmannstadt.

My people goes with the Jewish people to Litzmannstadt – Lodz, you say today. Lodz.

The guards packed the train car tightly for maximum efficiency.

So many that we thought we would suffocate. Everyone – children, old people.

Rosa must have suspected that the place they were going would be even worse than the place



they were leaving. Otherwise, she could not have left her family. But just before the train started moving, Rosa and a few other girls escaped by crawling through an air hole on the opposite side from the loading doors.

I ran away. I crawl up – and go.

She would never see any of her family again.

Further reading: *Gypsies under the Swastika* by Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon (University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995).

Shared Sorrows: a Gypsy Family Remembers the Holocaust (University of Hertfordshire Press) available from Sue Mariscal. Email: s.m.mariscal@herts.ac.uk Tel: 01707 284654

HEINE THE RADICAL

Reuben Goldberg was a member of the Jewish Socialists' Group who died of cancer at the age of 45. In the months preceding his death, he had been researching Heinrich Heine, a figure he believed had been neglected by the Left. At a memorial meeting for Reuben, **BOB ARCHER** spoke about Heine's life and work

Harry, Heinrich or Henri Heine – the variations on his first name are significant – was born in Düsseldorf on 13th December 1797. It was a time of social, political and intellectual turmoil. Before 1789, most of Europe had been governed by an emperor, kings, princes, archbishops and dukes. They held sway over their subjects much as they had in the feudal Middle Ages, even though modern capitalist society had already developed in Britain and the Netherlands, and was forming under the skin of the Bourbon monarchy in France.

In Germany and Austria, absolutism was particularly crass and repressive, typified on one hand by Frederick II ('The Great') of Prussia, on the other by the many petty despots ruling tiny scattered patches of land. People were expected to adopt the religion chosen by their sovereign. All public utterances were subject to censorship. Social relations were extremely conservative, with hierarchical feudal 'estates' subordinating commoners to the clergy, the army, and above all the nobility. Jews were barely-tolerated outcasts.

Germany's lower and middle classes had suffered dreadfully in the social and religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries. They were hardly in a condition to challenge absolutist power. Instead, revolutionary energy was drawn into the flowering of music, literature and philosophy from the 1770s onwards which produced the *Geniezeit* (Age of Genius). Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* showed a servant outwitting a greedy and lascivious landowner. The poet and dramatist Schiller published (in 1788, a year before the French Revolution) a history of the Dutch struggle for independence from Spain.

German officialdom still tried to control artistic and intellectual expression. The philosopher Kant was one of the great minds of the age, but the Prussian monarchy funded a university at Frankfurt am der Oder with the express purpose of opposing his 'dangerous' views.

When the revolution broke out in France in 1789, all the reactionary forces of Europe united with France's main competitor, Britain, to crush it. They were thrown back by the revolutionary zeal of the French people. Later, Napoleon Bonaparte seized power and consolidated the bourgeois state for which the revolution had paved the way.

In the first few years of the 19th century, war again flared up between European reaction and Napoleon's France. At the battles of Austerlitz and Jena, Napoleon delivered shattering blows to the Austrian and Prussian monarchies. He set about reorganising Germany, particularly imposing many modern social reforms on a series of client states in western and southern Germany. It was in one such area that Heinrich Heine grew up. He was therefore accustomed to far more liberty, democracy and enlightened administration than were normal under Prussian control. Napoleon planted on German soil the concepts of a civil society, which had been born in revolutionary France, including the idea of 'citizenship' transcending social class, religion or (more problematically) ethnicity. It was

quite normal for Heine to look to France for models of progressive thought.

By 1812, Napoleon had both over-extended French power and aroused nationalist opposition in countries he had conquered. The Russian campaign of that year was a disaster, and his forces were losing the war in Spain. Defeats at Leipzig in 1814 and Waterloo in 1815 put an end to his empire.

Heinrich Heine's family were business people, but he appears to have shown little talent in that direction. The academic career for which he was better fitted was a less attractive alternative, because it mainly prepared people for one form or another of public service, where a Jew would have few prospects. However, a prosperous uncle from Hamburg was prepared to help, and Heinrich went off to study, first in nearby Bonn, then in Göttingen and finally in Berlin.

The world in which Heine grew to manhood was dominated by the Congress System. The victorious powers – Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia – were each determined for their own reasons that there should be no further revolutions in Europe. The iron-willed Austrian statesman Prince Metternich personified the system which tried to restore absolutism right across the continent. There were limited reforms, which came to an abrupt end by 1820. But the young people in the universities were not prepared to tolerate this apparent return to the old despotism. They continued the fervent, radical German nationalism which had inspired the war of liberation against Napoleon. A student association was established, the *Burschenschaft*, which organised a great national rally.

The authorities regarded these activities with great alarm. When a young fanatic, Carl Sand, murdered the dramatist Kotzebue because of his reactionary political stance, the governments enacted a series of measures against 'agitators', known collectively as the Karlsbad Decrees. Radicals could be whipped and imprisoned, and their activities and publications were banned. These measures ushered in the 'Biedermeier age', where the middle class abandoned political ambitions and devoted itself to amassing wealth and comfort. This was a quite different conception of citizenship from the one proposed by the French Revolution and certainly did not involve any concept of civil society. 'Ruhe ist die erste Bürgerpflicht' ('the citizens' primary duty is the maintenance of order') is how one Prussian king saw the matter.

In this society, Heine's initial success was as a poet. The strength of his early verse lay in his ability to evoke romantic moods which then burst like bubbles. The (almost) facile construction of romantic situations, rich in poetic associations, nostalgia, longing, the reflection of the poet's innermost feelings in descriptions of nature, is turned inside-out by his intelligence, wit and irony, expressed in a dazzling marshalling of vocabulary. The same mixture, plus an unrivalled eye for description and the ability to weave into the narrative questions of emotional and intellectual interest, made his travel writings a great success, above all 'The Harz Journey'.



Heine's cheerful love of life and humanity and his contempt for all forms of backwardness and infamy echo the students at the outset of modern German society in the early years of the 16th century who penned the 'Epistulae obscurorum virorum', the great satirical shafts aimed at clerical backwardness.

Heine could not, however, succeed on his own terms in this society. A Jew could not advance to the first rank, and while some turned to a reform of the Jewish religion as a way of coming to terms with wider society, Heine chose a conventional conversion to Christianity in 1825.

The year 1830 saw a partial recovery by the more radical bourgeoisie. The restored Bourbon ruler of France was replaced by the 'Citizen King' Louis Philippe. In the new and somewhat more liberal atmosphere, and with a working class developing for the first time as an independent social force, utopian socialist ideas developed.

Meanwhile in Germany, the heirs to classical German philosophy were diverging more and more sharply from those in power. If Hegel could seem, as Professor of Philosophy at Berlin University, to view the Prussian Monarchy as the embodiment of the absolute idea, his successors had to view its imperfections in a different light. The 'Young Hegelians' carried out as thorough as possible a theoretical critique of existing conditions in Germany, starting with a critique of religion.

Repelled by reaction, Heine was increasingly attracted by the emerging radicalism. He remarked at one point that 'the Rabbi and the Priest both stink the same', and he satirised the old Jewish scholars who could not see that the old religious texts had lost their validity.

It is instructive to contrast Heine with a non-Jewish near contemporary, the dramatist Georg Büchner, an academic from Hesse-Darmstadt. Büchner studied abroad under the famous zoologist Louis Agassiz, who later moved to the United States, became the father of American natural history, and developed the racist anthropology subsequently exposed by Stephen Jay Gould in *The Mismeasurement of Man* (New York, 1960). While abroad in Strasbourg, Büchner formed links with radicals, and when he returned to Hesse he helped to form the *Gesellschaft der Menschenrechte* (The Society for Human Rights). This society produced the *Hessische Landbote* (Hessian Courier), an impassioned manifesto calling on the local peasantry to rise against their ruler. When copies were pushed under farm doors at night, the peasants promptly took them to the authorities, and the authors were arrested and treated with great

brutality. Büchner evaded capture and became professor of zoology at Zurich University.

Before his early death from typhus in 1837, Büchner produced the plays *Danton's Death*, *Woyzeck* and *Leonce and Lena* and part of a novel, *Lenz*. Not until the very end of the 19th century did these works receive the recognition they deserved. The plays were published and staged, and celebrated as forerunners of the naturalist and expressionist movements in drama. *Woyzeck* was set to music by Albin Berg and *Danton's Death*, the subject of a veritable obsession by one Polish playwright, was filmed in France in recent years.

Heine avoided direct forms of political involvement such as the *Hessische Landbote*. Indeed, he prudently moved to Paris in 1831. However, the struggle between the mass of society and absolutism was heating up. Satirists and philosophers were dangerous people. Heine began to turn his attention to a serious critique of the kind of religion and philosophy the authorities found acceptable. Soon his works were banned throughout Germany, along with those of the 'Young Germany' group of writers.

In the early 1840s, Germany's growing industrialisation brought an upsurge of social struggle. The cottage weavers of Silesia, squeezed by mechanised competition, entered into a struggle with the middle-men who sold them yarn and bought their finished cloth. The government sent in the army, and the weavers were violently suppressed. Heine wrote an indignant poem in support of the weavers. Frederick Engels translated it into English and put Heine in touch with Karl Marx. Up to and including 1848 and 1849, there was growing contact between Marx and Heine.

When the European revolution broke out in March 1848, the working class was already a strong, and to some extent conscious, contestant for power. The middle class democrats now balked at an all-out confrontation with absolutism, fearing they would be overtaken on the left by more radical and democratic forces, orientated towards the workers.

The bourgeoisie's conservative pusillanimity doomed the revolution to failure. In France, the eventual winner was Napoleon's nephew, Louis Bonaparte, who suppressed the people of Paris and established the Second Empire. In Germany, after trying to establish a pre-parliament in Frankfurt which would unite Germany and open the door to a civil society (or 'bourgeois society', to give the phrase its proper English translation), they handed power to an Imperial Administrator who ensured that the Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs remained in charge.

The German Communists were dragged through the courts by the Prussian government. Marx, in exile in Brussels and London, concentrated on writing *Capital*. The formerly radical bourgeoisie turned to backward German nationalism as the form of their anti-working class alliance with absolutism. They had chosen a most reactionary path, as was reflected in the biting satire of Heine's poetry.

The year 1848 also saw the onset of Heine's illness. Paralysed and confined to bed, Heine suffered from horrendous open sores and needed constant care. This lasted until his death on 17th February 1856.

By then the revolutionary wave of 1848 had long since receded. The radicals were scattered across the globe and exhausted their efforts in unrealistic

OUT OF STEP

schemes. Former radicals like Wagner became bitter antisemites. Indeed, all Heine's attempts to gain status and acceptance in society had run up against this apparently immovable obstacle. Ill and left stranded by the receding revolutionary wave, Heine continued to write. He composed poems in his mind at night, since he found it difficult to sleep, and they were written down from dictation during the day.

One of his last poems, 'Enfant perdu' ('Lost Child') gives vent to his feeling of exhaustion and political isolation. Two others, 'Princess Sabbath' and 'Yehuda ben Halevy' express a renewed interest in Jewish tradition and spirituality, which are evoked in terms of the utmost respect, love and identification. It is as if Heine has abandoned his

attempt to seek an equal place in a secular bourgeois society (which is in any case headed in a reactionary direction) but has also been left out on a limb by a retreat of the revolution, which could have led to a communist future, clearing away religious and racial discrimination.

Socialists have often read and enjoyed those Heine poems which come most easily to them: the snook-cocking at authority; the denunciation of Hohenzollern high-handedness; the justification of the weavers. Indeed they have a rightful place in the culture any socialist should be proud to possess. It is also important, however, to see Heine's creative life and work as a whole and to learn from his adventures as a citizen of bourgeois society.

The Electoral Asses by Heinrich Heine

They'd had enough of freedom now,
The republic of animals clamoured
For one single regent with absolute rule,
Of this they were enamoured.

Every species assembled itself,
Proceeded with fevered devotion,
Parties were organised, ballots drawn up,
Intrigues were set into motion.

The steering committee for asses was
By the Old-Long-Ears directed,
They had upon each of their heads a cockade,
The Schwarz-Rot-Gold, affected.

A little horse's-party there was,
Yet they did not dare be voting.
They feared the cry of the Old-Long-Ears,
The thought filled them all with foreboding.

As one, however, the candidacy
Of the horses put forth, a bit later,
An Old-Long-Ears in a fury broke in
And cried: Sir, you are a traitor!

You are a traitor! There's not one drop
Of donkey-blood in you, really,
You are no donkey, I almost believe
You were foaled by a Latin filly.

You come from a strain of zebra, perhaps,
Your skin is striped zebräic,
And also the nasal tone of your voice
Sounds somewhat Egyptic-Hebräic.

And were you no foreigner, you would be just
A secular donkey, a cold one,
You don't know the depths of the donkey mystique,
How the tones of its psalter enfold one.

But I have immersed my soul in that
Sweet mystery that surpasses,
I am an ass, and upon my tail
Is every hair an ass's.

I'm no little Roman, I am no Slav,
I'm a German ass forever,
Just like my fathers, they were so upright,
So unassuming, so clever.

They did not play with gallantry,
They sought no vice nor thriller,
They trotted each day, frisky, faithful and free,
Bearing their sacks to the miller.

The fathers are not dead! The grave
Can only hold the carcass.
They look down upon us from heaven above,
It gives them pleasure to mark us.

Transfigured asses in heavenly light!
We'll follow you forever.
And not a single finger-breadth
From duty's path shall we waver.

And oh, what rapture, to be an ass!
To be born to the Long-Ear classes!
From every rooftop I want to cry:
I come from a line of asses.

The mighty donkey that sired me
Was German, and no other,
And I was suckled on ass's milk
By my German ass of a mother.

I am an ass, and will faithfully
Adhere, like my fathers before me,
To the dear, old asininity,
To the fabled donkey glory.

And as I'm an ass, I advise you to choose
An ass as the king of the land here;
We're founding the mighty donkey-realm,
Where only the asses command here.

We all are asses! Hee-haw, hee-haw!
We'll never be horse's flunkies.
Down with the stallions! Long live, hurrah!
The king from the race of the donkeys!

So spake the patriot. In the hall
Applause rang to the ceiling.
The asses were all nationalists
And stamped their hooves with feeling.

They placed upon the speaker's head
A wreath of oak so timely.
He mutely beamed his gratitude
And wagged his tail sublimely.

In December 1952, Paul Merker, a leading East German communist was arrested and charged with acting as an agent for American imperialism and Zionism. Three years later, Merker was secretly tried and sentenced to eight years in prison for espionage. But Merker's real crime was his friendship with the Jewish people, and particularly his belief that opposition to antisemitism should be a central component of the communist struggle.

Born in 1894, Merker joined the German Communist party (KPD) in 1920. He was a member of the Prussian Parliament in the 1920s, served as a Comintern agent in the United States in the early 1930s, and was later a member of the German communist underground in France. Merker then fled to Mexico City where he remained until 1945 whereby he returned to Germany. He became a member of the Central Committee of the new Socialist Unity Party (SED) and Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, but was expelled from the Party in August 1950.

During his stays in the USA and Mexico, Merker became acquainted with numerous Jewish communists, and particularly appreciated their fervent opposition to all forms of racism. He developed a strong compassion for Jewish victims of persecution, and a belief that opposition to antisemitism should be central to the anti-Nazi struggle. However, Merker's attempt to place the Jewish question at the centre of communist concerns provoked contention since it overtly contradicted communist orthodoxy.

The KPD had always opposed antisemitism in principle, but in practice its stand was qualified. Firstly, the KPD offered solidarity to only working class Jews, not to Jewish capitalists. Secondly, the KPD viewed antisemitism as a marginal instrument of Hitler and the ruling class, rather than as a significant end in itself. Thirdly, the KPD denied the Jews were a nation, and hence rejected any definition of Jews as a persecuted or oppressed nationality per se deserving of collective restitution.

In contrast, Merker moved beyond the conventional interpretation of class conflict to argue that all Jews including capitalists were victims of fascism and entitled to communist support. He regarded attitudes to antisemitism as the clearest barometer of political positions. All progressive individuals had an obligation to stand in solidarity with Jews.

Merker also argued that Jews were a nation, and

that all Jewish survivors of the Holocaust were entitled to financial restitution. In addition, he offered strong support for the creation of the State of Israel, viewing it as compensation for the 'immeasurable injustice done to the Jewish people by Nazism and fascism'. In June 1948, the SED Central Secretariat issued a statement written by Merker describing the Jewish struggle in Palestine as 'a progressive struggle supported by the Soviet Union and by all of progressive humanity'.

Merker's position in the German communist leadership was undermined by the increasing Soviet campaign against cosmopolitanism and Zionism. The notorious show trial of the Czech, Slansky, in November 1952 explicitly identified him with espionage.

Merker was marked to be the 'German Slansky', although the intended show trial never took place. He was accused of defending the rights of Holocaust survivors only because American imperialists and Jewish capitalists had paid him to do so. Stasi interrogators repeatedly asked Merker if he had been a member of any Jewish or Zionist organisations. They also mocked him as 'the king of the Jews', and one who 'had been bought by the Jews'. His arrest was accompanied by the purging and/or arrest of many leading Jewish communists. Most Jewish communal leaders fled to West Berlin.

Merker was released from imprisonment and partially rehabilitated in July 1956. Shortly afterwards, he wrote a 38-page statement on the Jewish question courageously defending his original views. Merker began by clarifying that 'I am neither Jewish nor a Zionist, though it would be no crime to be either'.

He then proceeded to explain why he maintained such a strong sympathy for Jews. He outlined the significant contribution of Jews to progressive causes in Germany and elsewhere, the failure of the German working class to protect Jews from Nazism, and the understandable post-War Jewish concern for a national state. He rejected any association of his ideas with Zionist or imperialist influence, but communist policy had long since decided otherwise.

Merker was readmitted to the SED, but never returned to active politics. He died quietly in 1969. The East German communist regime remained intrinsically hostile to Israel and to Jewish interests until its dissolution in 1989.

Dr Philip Mendes is the author of *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War, 1965-72* (Lazare Press, Melbourne, 1993).

PHILIP MENDES recalls the case of East German communist Paul Merker, whose positive attitudes to the Jewish people precipitated his downfall

NOTHING TO BRAGG ABOUT

Fervent expressions of English national pride contrast with the reality for England's people, says **PAUL COLLINS**

Most people call me a soft romantic. The whiff of hot chips, the taste of a cream tea and the view across Hyde Park's Serpentine conjure pure English joy. So, with rugby's Six Nations contest, the cricket Ashes and football's Euro 2004 qualifiers to come, anyone who flourishes a red cross on a white background tends to evoke something deep and powerful in the pit of my stomach: vomit.

Six words explain the nausea. They adorned a T-shirt which for once bore neither some transatlantic place name nor covered Yankee sportswear whose low number denoted the wearer's IQ, but instead belonged to a yuppie at a London airport. 'British the best. Fuck the rest.' There is just one problem with Samuel Johnson's quote, 'patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'. In the UK it is often the first – not least for politicians who deny shelter to the persecuted.

Pleasure in your country's achievements can inspire delight in others. Witness the exuberant Brazilians at their World Cup triumph. Contrast such positive jubilation with Blighty's support for a team led by the Swedish-born Sven Goran Eriksson. Tabloid press headlines reflect many fans' internationalist feelings. 'Sour Krauts', 'Argy bargy' and 'Hop off you frogs'.

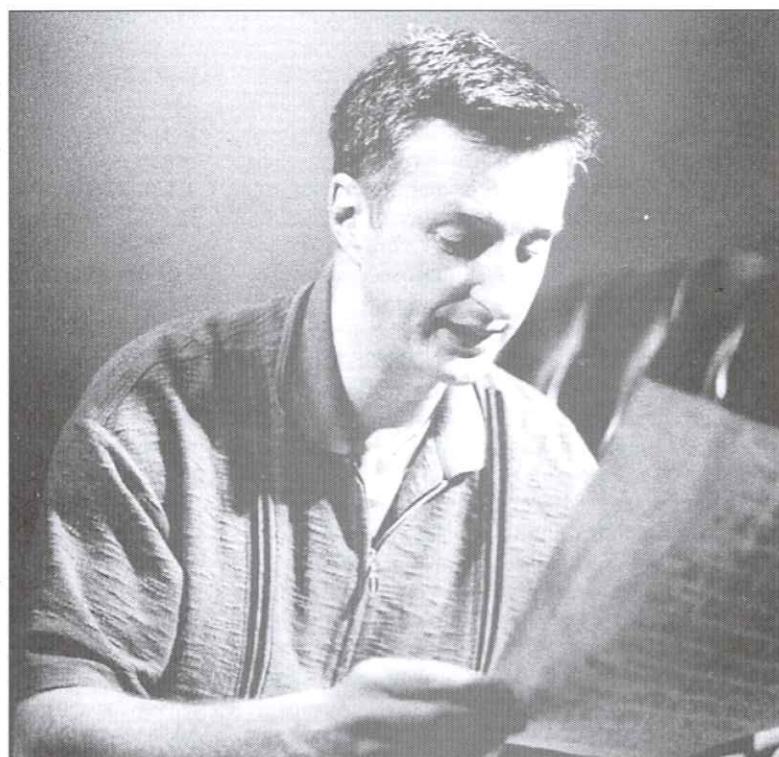
Of course, like Australian cricket or Latinos' football, Britain can point with pride to its own global distinction. The Beatles, the BBC or Shakespeare. How symptomatic, though, that attempts to 'rebrand' these islands by Downing Street and the disgraced Peter Mandelson saw the slogan Cool Britannia in the end derided by the Commons jibe: 'Ordure! Ordure!' Commentators' assertions that the slogan failed because of the decline of fashion and music miss the real message. Foreigners gave it a chilly reception for the same reasons more and more Britons shun the empty rhetoric spawned by the Tony-Mandy love affair. The West End theatre loses some lustre when your train arrives in time for the second act. The charm of Soho's café society at night palls amid the rough sleepers denied affordable homes and junkie beggars released from prison without education or the support to break their habit.

The special relationship between Britain and the United States transcends the poodle-puppeteer caricature. Despite America's cultural distinction, in song, film or Broadway, Bush competes with Blair to

lead the world's most jingoistic administrations. Longer working hours, fewer holidays and high rates of divorce, imprisonment and teenage pregnancy characterise these two low-tax, business-fronted regimes with increasing divides between the wealthy and the poor.

This free market harmony stinks rotten in the books written by Fran Abrams and Barbara Ehrenreich on their UK and US struggles to live on the humiliating minimum wage. In Abrams' chronicle *Below the Breadline* she describes how night cleaners at the Savoy hotel in London had to steal food to survive until pay day. Anna, a Zambian cleaner at the Savoy, would not bring her children to Britain due to the crime and violence. Abrams also describes how care workers toil 70 hours a week to buy toys for their children. A sauce factory in a former pit community betrays class-ridden boundaries as workers don 12 different caps according to status and only managers wear hard hats because 'their brains are more valuable'. As manufacturing has been allowed to die, ex-miners feign their erstwhile craft in heritage museums. In Nickle and Dimed, Ehrenreich quotes a description of a factory worker refused a break for six-hour stretches, forced to urinate into pads worn inside her uniform. The coercion of workfare straddles both states and is deepened with Gordon Brown's further crackdown on those claiming paltry benefits who resist poverty-wage jobs that he would never do himself.

While Billy Bragg deserves praise for targeting radical tunes at today's youth, his campaign to reclaim the Union Jack from the fascists sounds a



discordant note. Swapping white-right loyalty for chauvinism under a rainbow-coloured pennant resembled Bragg's feeble backing for the Liberal Democrats as diluted capitalist opposition to the Tories. And moving to monocultural Dorset suggests that he may have more in common with careerists like Trevor Phillips than progressive black alternatives like Guardian columnist Gary Younge.

Not that the former Essex warbler is barking up the wrong tree on the monarchy. Far better a republic than Dianamania, jubilee tosh or a Royalist government whose recalls of Parliament needed a mere seven days for its tribute to the Queen Mother and 92 to discuss war on Iraq. And it's small wonder young Jews desert synagogues in droves when services include prayers not just for Ariel Sharon's Occupied Territories but for Elizabeth II's sovereignty. Such boundless gratitude to the Queen of a state which restricted entry to fugitives from Hitler and licenses the Home Secretary's citizenship tests for immigrants. Taking up Blunkett's theme, *The Times* sought citizenship questions from a philosopher who penned the fitting hardback, *England: An Elegy*. The author, Roger Scruton, may have secured a job in Blunkett's policy unit with the challenge: 'Will you be loyal to this country in any crisis that would require it?' Calls from left MP Ann

Cryer for Asians to learn her native tongue ignore the lifestyles of expatriates worldwide, including those on the Costa Packet, where signs might as well read 'Spanish spoken here'.

For all its hunters' cruelty, the sheer numbers behind the 400,000-strong countryside march demonstrate how ridiculous it is to dismiss a timely backlash against rural decay. Hopes for mass left engagement with the public rest on the growing civil disobedience. This may enable activists such as peace campaigners to wrest the agenda from the self-interested, religious zealots and similar crude identity groups. Their success could lie with kinder, authentic compassionate politics that shames New Labourists and Duncan-Smithites and restores the fairness and decency Daily Mail columnist Lynda Lee-Potter misguidedly claims remain intact.

Nothing better symbolised mindless nationalism than the Zionist in a designer-label Duffer (sic) of St George jacket, roaring at counter-demonstrators against the massive pro-Israel rally in Trafalgar Square: 'You should have died in the camps.' The sight of Israeli and Palestinian flags aloft in equitable coexistence would gladden millions. My spirits would rise higher with one banner for a secular, democratic land. But, then, what room would that leave for hate, rather than love?

FROM WHERE I'M STANDING

This journal has a proud tradition of condemning the arbitrary division of peoples whether by ethnic origin, gender, religion or academic ability. Some in the radical wing of the party even take exception to sporting ability and want to see the dismantling of the Premiership. I remember one very angry members' meeting where one comrade argued: 'But unless I'm allowed to play alongside Viera and Bergkamp I'll always be crap at football!'

I've just returned from a New Year's service at my mother's north London United Synagogue and I can say how much more pleasant the service was because the men and women were separated. We came in through the door leading to the women's – sorry – ladies' – seating and I inhaled that wonderful aroma of expensive cosmetics and beautifully laundered clothes. I know for a fact that if I had walked into the men's section there would have been a smell, not an aroma. Several pairs of eyes glanced over us as we made our way to seats at the back but I'm in a denim skirt with no hat and no make-up so not worth a critical appraisal.

We take our place among the women and look down at the men who are arranged in rows around the Ark and can only see each other if they look straight ahead. We can stare unashamedly at the men because we're facing the Ark. Some of the men periodically turn their heads towards us as the murmuring and chanting goes on around them. They gaze at us like dogs tied up by the butchers window. The air is thick with erotic tension. All right I'm exaggerating but I'm in my 40s and get fruity when I'm bored. One or two are unshaven and look rough and dangerous with their prayer shawls sliding off the shoulder. There is a small

wooden partition that separates us. It just adds to allure of the forbidden and as I study the guys I know I am participating in a tradition that is as old as religion itself. Wherever people gather together for feast, festival or saints' days, men and women give each other the once over.

But even couples are still checking each other out. I find that quite touching. It's not often you can look at your partner for a period of time unless he's asleep or he's been arrested for shoplifting and you're on the other side of a two-way mirror. You can watch him in profile or as he shuffles after a lengthy period standing. 'He's losing his hair,' you'll think, 'and putting on weight.' And 'Why that shirt?' But next to some slack-jawed Melvyn he's looking good. Then he turns his head and catches your eye and smiles.

The murmuring of conversation is getting louder. The Rabbi stands up and admonishes the congregation. He is disappointed that at a time when our people in Israel need our prayers the most we are engaged in idle chatter. He is, of course, addressing the women. 'Rabbi, Rabbi,' I want to say, 'if you want silent prayer, do like the progressives and liberals and put families together. They'll have nothing to say to each other.'

But he won't change and neither do we. After several minutes the noise level is at the same as it was before. I sense defiance. You don't like our noise? Come over here and stop us. We are worshipping to your rules. You wanted the scrolls, the silverware and to mess around all day with that curtain and the doors on the Ark of the Covenant? Good. They're all yours. I like what we have much more.

Ruth Lukom

PLAYING ON THE LEFT WING

Sport cashes in on the activism and support of the working class. **RONI GECHTMAN** looks back at the Jewish Labour Bund's efforts to combine sport with socialist goals

The Morgnshtern, ('Morning Star' in Yiddish, also known by its Polish name, Jutrznia), was the sport organisation of the Jewish Labour Bund in Poland between the two World Wars. Founded in 1926 as the Polish-Jewish section of the Socialist Workers' Sport International (SWSI), the Morgnshtern achieved immediate popularity, boasting 5,000 members and more than 170 branches in cities and towns throughout Poland. In the 1930s, it was the largest Jewish sport organisation in Poland. The aim of the Morgnshtern was to put in practice the key Bundist principles – socialism, working-class consciousness, internationalism, Yiddish culture, and the rejection of militarism and nationalism in the specific area of sport.

The Morgnshtern's activities were inspired by the theory of workers' sport formulated by the Austro-Marxist Julius Deutsch, at that time chairman of the SWSI. In 1928, Deutsch published *Sport and Politics, a Manifesto of Workers' Sport*. This was soon translated into Yiddish and most other European languages. Deutsch was a Marxist, but he was neither deterministic nor overly optimistic: he believed that socialists must organise the masses of workers, especially the proletarian youth, and prepare them for the class struggle through education. For Deutsch, there was no greater error than to believe that the proletariat would bring the class struggle to a victorious end regardless of its moral and cultural situation. The first tasks of the socialist movement were to free the proletariat from the prison of ignorance in which it was kept by the bourgeois order, and to counteract the influence of bourgeois values transmitted through the media, the compulsory school system and the arts. The beneficial effects of sport activities on a mass scale would have a significant impact on the ongoing class struggle in society.

Class contradictions were evident in sport just as in the rest of society. Deutsch stressed that bourgeois sport reflected bourgeois culture and ethical principles. Sports were becoming increasingly competitive, individualistic and professionalised. Notions of quality and return in sport paralleled those of the stock market. Moreover, bourgeois sports federations at the time

were becoming increasingly nationalist and combative. In many countries sports clubs were coming to resemble fascist parties and even creating fascist militias, attracting some 'naïve' workers. Bourgeois sports organisations tried to promote a false sense of harmony between labour and capital and blamed the organised working class for disrupting 'national unity'.

Deutsch did not condemn professional athletes as individuals; on the contrary, he believed that they might be honest people earning their living in an honourable way, like artists or musicians, but that their performance was meaningless. The professional athlete could impress the audience but not act as its role model, since his or her achievements resulted from exceptional physical characteristics and a specialised training that was not desirable for everybody, since most professional athletes developed some muscles at the expense of others.

Deutsch concluded that it was imperative to create separate proletarian sport organisations operating under completely different principles: workers' sport must be 'collectivist,' and seek improvements in performance by means other than competition; it should not focus exclusively on the training of potential champions, nor make record-breaking its main goal, but offer everyone the possibility of practising sports. Workers' sport must have as its ideal the harmonious development and strengthening of the whole body; it should be practised in a communal and friendly atmosphere free from any manifestation of violence or brutality. Strategically, a crucial goal of proletarian sport was to mobilise the masses of young workers to join the socialist movement.

The Morgnshtern tried to organise its activities according to Deutsch's principles in the context of Polish Jewry. Though decidedly Jewish, the Morgnshtern was secular. Many of its activities were held on Saturdays and Jewish holidays, which was understandable in an organisation of workers with little leisure time during the week.

Bundists rejected any nationalism, including Jewish nationalism. Throughout its existence, the Morgnshtern produced no formulation equivalent to Max Nordau's famous call for a *Muskuljudentum* (muscular Judaism). The Morgnshtern membership – male and female Jewish workers engaged in physical work – did not need to prove their muscular and physical skills to counteract an abstract



conception of Jews as spiritual or intellectual persons with weak bodies. Moreover, neither the Morgnshtern nor the Bund wanted to transform the Jews into a warrior people. They rejected both nationalism and war, promoting international solidarity and the creation of a healthier and fairer society for both Jews and non-Jews.

Bundists saw Zionism as a manifestation of bourgeois nationalism and thus refrained from any collaboration with its organisations. The Morgnshtern was openly hostile not only towards (Zionist) Maccabi, but also towards (Labour-Zionist) HaPoel. The Yiddish editor of Deutsch's *Sport and Politics* greeted Deutsch's relative sympathy towards the activities of HaPoel in Palestine in the 1920s with an ironic remark: 'the "facts" provided by the author – that HaPoel also comprises Arab members – are as accurate as the "fact" that Jewish trade-unions in Palestine struggle for, and together with, the Arab workers.' The irony would not have been lost on Bundist readers, well aware that the Histadrut, the Zionist workers' federation, not only did not represent Arabs but, on the contrary, actively sought to take jobs from Arab workers and give them to Jews.

The Morgnshtern emphasised participation in non-competitive activities, and the majority of its membership belonged to its non-competitive sections. The most popular activity was gymnastics, and after that, the overwhelmingly female-dominated eurhythmic (ritmika). The incentive for the participants in these activities was not competition but self-improvement. The ritmika report for 1937 stated its main aim as the

democratisation of physical activity by giving children who could not otherwise afford it access to physical education. In the summer, the Morgnshtern rented a swimming-pool during certain hours to offer swimming lessons to its members.

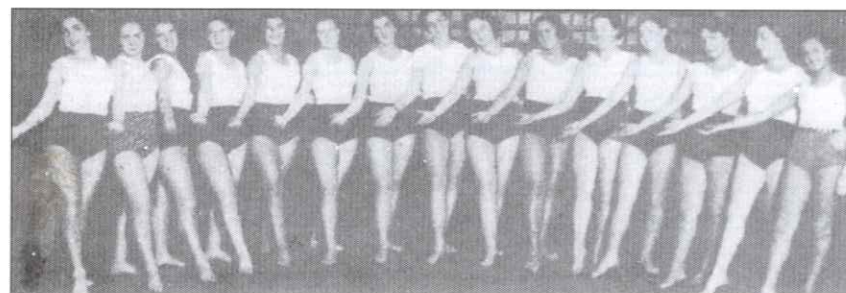
A popular winter activity was glitshn (ice-skating), and lessons were also offered at accessible prices, especially for children. Every year from 1933 onwards, the Warsaw Morgnshtern rented a skating rink for its members.

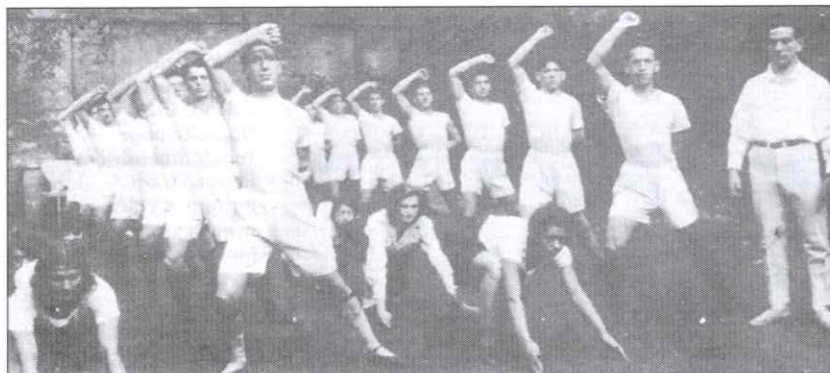
The biggest event in the Morgnshtern calendar was the turnfest, a sport and cultural holiday in which displays of harmonic movement of hundreds or thousands of gymnasts represented the proletarian force, unity and sense of solidarity. The programme of the 1932 turnfest in Kutno offers an indication of what these events might have looked like, with all the different gymnastic groups, from the youngest to the oldest, and alternating groups of males and females, performing gymnastic exercises in various styles. The last groups to perform were the adult men – performing the same programme presented by the Morgnshtern one year earlier at the Workers' Olympic Games in Vienna – and adult women, who performed a series of exercises to the rhythm of popular Yiddish songs. In the last part, all groups together performed a gymnastic piece called *Der Eybiker Korbn* (The Eternal Victim), which represented 'a symbolic image of the struggle between labour and capital'. Another major event in the life of the Morgnshtern was the International Workers' Olympic Games, organised by the SWSI.

Today, these massive events are almost

THE PROPOSAL WAS THAT, IN SOCCER COMPETITIONS, THE WINNING TEAM WOULD BE DECIDED NOT ONLY ON THE BASIS OF GOALS SCORED BUT ALSO THROUGH A SYSTEM OF POINTS REWARDING 'AESTHETIC AND FAIR PLAY' AND 'NICE COMBINATIONS'. IN THIS WAY THE INCREASING BRUTALITY OF BOURGEOIS SOCCER WOULD BE AVOIDED, AND THE GAME WOULD BE PLAYED ACCORDING TO HUMANIST AND SOCIALIST PRINCIPLES.

Left: poster announcing the second annual Morgnshtern Gymnastics Tournament in Kutno, Poland, 1922
Opposite page
Top: Morgnshtern football team
Bottom: a Warsaw women's group of the Morgnshtern





Morgnshtern gymnastics group between the two World Wars

completely forgotten but in the 1920s and '30s, their popularity matched that of the 'bourgeois' or 'official' Olympic Games. In 1931, 100,000 worker-athletes from 26 countries participated in the Second Workers' Olympiad in Vienna. By comparison, only 1,408 athletes participated in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles one year later. The Vienna Workers' Olympiad attracted a quarter of a million spectators, and easily surpassed the rival Olympic Games, not only in the number of competitors and spectators but also in the many cultural events it included.

Unlike the bourgeois Olympic Games, the Workers' Olympiad stressed workers' internationalism, solidarity and peace, and did not restrict entry on the grounds of sporting ability but invited all athletes, encouraging mass participation. The Morgnshtern sent 300 worker-athletes to the Vienna Olympiad, who proudly marched along the avenues of 'Red Vienna' displaying their Yiddish banners.

An even more monumental Workers' Olympiad was planned for Barcelona in 1936, in opposition to the Nazi Olympics in Berlin. However, the Barcelona Workers' Games never took place due to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War just as the Olympiad was scheduled to begin. So the Third Workers' Olympic Games were rescheduled for the following year in Antwerp. Despite intensive preparations, the Polish government banned the Morgnshtern from participation in this event.

In its early years, the Morgnshtern, while actively opposing competitive or violent sports (in particular boxing and soccer), simultaneously had to deal with their increasing popularity, in Poland as everywhere else. In the 1929 Congress of the SWSI, the Morgnshtern proposed a total ban on boxing in all the affiliated federations, and, in parallel, proposed that new rules be set for soccer to diminish its competitiveness and escalating violence. The proposal was that, in soccer competitions, the winning team would be decided not only on the basis of goals scored but also through a system of points rewarding 'aesthetic and fair play' and 'nice combinations.' In this way the increasing brutality of bourgeois soccer would be avoided, and the game would be played according to humanist and socialist principles.

A passionate argument arose in the Congress about this. Opponents of this proposal thought that soccer in its existing form should be used as a means of bringing the proletarian masses into workers' sports organisations. Besides, they claimed, soccer was so popular that if the workers' clubs did not organise it, they would lose their members to the bourgeois clubs. Similar

arguments took place within the Morgnshtern and eventually, purist ideals were set aside under pressure from below. The 'soccer question' was resolved by the Central Organising Committee of the Morgnshtern in 1930. In the text of the resolution, the leaders of the Morgnshtern rationalised that soccer – with the appropriate approach, organisation and treatment – can help open up the collective feelings and sense of solidarity of the athlete. Soccer greatly captures the interest of the young workers and it is possible to use it to draw the great mass of young workers into the socialist movement.

Following this precedent, other competitive sports were gradually incorporated into Morgnshtern activities, including table tennis, handball, basketball, volleyball and even boxing. Regardless of these changes, though, the non-competitive activities always attracted larger numbers of people. But Morgnshtern competitive sports teams tended to participate more and more in the general leagues in Poland. Some of these teams reached remarkable achievements; for example, a Morgnshtern member was part of the Polish national team in the 1938 table tennis world championship in London.

By the early 1930s there were several Morgnshtern soccer teams in the Warsaw area alone, some representing different Jewish workers' unions. In 1929 the Bundist daily Naye Folksdaytung sponsored the soccer tournament among the various Morgnshtern teams, offering as a prize the Naye Folksdaytung Trophy, a bronze sculpture of a worker by a well-known Polish sculptor. The winner of the tournament was the Czarny, the soccer team of the union of commerce employees. Two thousand people came to see this tournament. The Bundist press covered each game using the enthusiastic style that had become typical of this kind of reporting.

This is how the game between the soccer teams of the Warsaw (Central) Morgnshtern and the Kraft-Morgnshtern was described: 'Kraft played with extraordinary ambition and dominated the field throughout the game. It was possible to see among the players a friendly, collective and co-operative style of play; on the other hand, the Morgnshtern played chaotically, without any system, purposelessly kicking the ball around and reaching nowhere.'

Regardless of style and aesthetic, the Warsaw Morgnshtern team won 1-0, because they managed to score a goal in a 'suicidal' shot in the last minute of the game, when both teams were exhausted, to the great dismay of our unnamed reporter, who as early as the 1920s preferred controlled and tactical play over players' skills. The reporter of the Arbeter Sportler concluded with disappointment that the Kraft deserved at least a draw. As late as July 1939, a new soccer team was organised in the Warsaw Morgnshtern, and in the following weeks it played several friendly games with other Morgnshtern teams from Warsaw and Vilna. The team showed great promise. On 8th August 1939, it won two games against the older and strongest Morgnshtern teams, Czarny and Veker. A month later, Poland was under Nazi occupation. The Morgnshtern membership would share the fate of the rest of Polish Jewry.

MY FATHER'S JEWISH WORLD

BY LEON ROSSELSON

My father came here as a boy from Czarist Russia
From Vilkavishki in the Pale those reservations for the Jews
His schooling was the Talmud and the Torah
The writings of the rabbis and their laws.
And music was his door to freedom Yiddish was his
mother tongue
And home was just a dreamland in a song.
He told us stories of his gentle rabbi father
And of his mother who was fearless and the hardships
that they faced
And when the drunken peasants got together
And yelled 'Let's kill the Jews for killing Christ!'
His mother grabbed the rolling pin she used to make the
Sabbath bread
And ran to crack their skulls, my father said.

*It's not a nation, not a religion
This Jewish spirit is still unbroken
It's like the candle that mocks the darkness
It's like the song that shatters the silence
It's like the fool who laughs at the dragon
It's like the spark that signals rebellion
It's like the dance that circles unending.*

He lived in England, half belonging, half a stranger
Always feeling, much as I do, on the outside looking in
In time he grew to be an unbeliever
Religion had become a mental chain
Abandoned God, became a Jewish atheist and then
with pride
A Communist until the day he died.
So no more Bible but instead the Daily Worker
People came and people argued, asking questions, how
and why
Revolution, Stalin, Trotsky, Soviet Russia
Two Jews, three opinions, so they say.
God loves the poor and helps the rich, the Jewish father tells
his son
And so you've got to choose whose side you're on.

So many people have agonised about what it means
to be a Jew if you're not religious or a Zionist and
most of the answers they come up with are deeply
unsatisfactory. Leon Rosselson, in contrast, has
written a song that gives a real sense of the shifting
complexities of diaspora Jewish identity. Musically
quoting the Yiddish song, 'Papirosn', about an
orphaned ghetto child who is reduced to a life of petty
crime and hawking cigarettes, 'My Father's Jewish
World' highlights the radical tradition of fighting to
free the oppressed in the worst circumstances: 'it's like
the candle that mocks the darkness; it's like the song
that shatters the silence'.

Just one grouse about an odd choice of picture on
the sleeve, that portrays Hassidim demonstrating in
support of the Palestinians. It's an image that the
British press were fascinated with, but while they
have no quarrel with the Palestinians, these
fundamentalists are not interested in defending
human rights – certainly not those of women. They
reject the earthly creation of Israel and are waiting for
the Messiah to give 'us' back our promised land, in
contradiction to Rosselson's assertion that our legacy
is that strand of Jewish tradition that defends 'the
weak against the strong'.

Looking back to Israel in the 1950s, in a song which

It's not a nation...

He read the books of Jewish rebels like
Spinoza
And he sang songs that laughed at
rabbis in a language that's not mine
He loved the Yiddish stories and their
humour
The humour born from poverty and pain
Sleep faster for we need the pillows –
how else could the Jews survive
And keep their tattered dreams and hopes alive?
But now my father's Jewish world has gone forever
Burned in the flames of hatred, nothing left but ash
and dust
And Yiddish lingers on out of nostalgia.
How can I make some meaning from what's past?
And the state they say is Jewish carved from stolen land
brings only shame
By torturing and killing in our name.

It's not a nation...

Now it's my father's face that meets me in the mirror
And I wonder what to me his Jewish legacy has been
The state of always being an outsider
Of asking why then asking why again
That precious strand of Jewishness that challenges authority
And dares to stand against the powers that be.
Emma Goldman, Rosa Luxemburg, Bar Kochba
The Jewish anarchists and socialists who fought to free
the poor
The ones who meet injustices with anger
And will not let their dreams drown in despair
Who speak up for the refugees, defend the weak against
the strong
It's for these rebel Jews I sing my song.

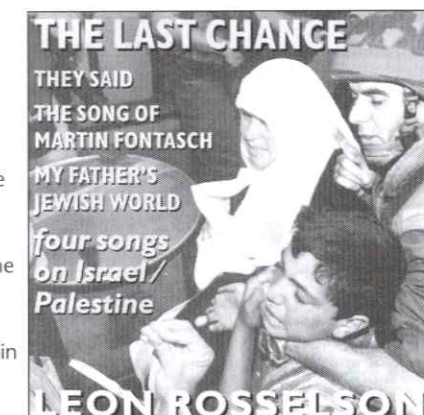
It's not a nation...

mixes spoken narrative with a haunting melody, The
Last Chance describes a nightclub in the Negev where
Rosselson met the 'shipwrecked characters' who were
washed up on Israel's shores from the devastation of
Europe: 'They came from nowhere, the lost, the
broken and the mad / As if from nowhere, they
blundered in like blind invaders...'

The tragedy is that the arguments that raged then
were never resolved, and the terrible stories that
'swirled about like dust on the desert wind' still taint
the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. Then, those
stories were raw and untellable. Now they have
become part of the lexicon – and supposed
justification – of the oppression of another people.
Rosselson, as always, refuses to sidestep the painful
and intellectually demanding task of untangling
these strands of history, but instead conjures up a
scene from more than 40 years ago that illuminates
the Israel of today.

These are two of the four songs on this short CD
that describe the Jewish condition today. Rosselson's
characteristic style is here but he never stands still
and the lyrics draw us into new understandings of
our world and demand that we face up to its truths,
however painful.

Julia Bard



THE LAST CHANCE by Leon Rosselson

The CD costs £6
and is available
from Fuse Records,
28 Park Chase,
Wembley Park,
Middlesex HA9
8EH. Website:
<http://wakeup.to/rosselson>

All profits from
sales of this CD will
go to Medical Aid
for Palestinians.

RONI GECHTMAN grew up
in Argentina, studied at
Hebrew University in
Jerusalem, and now lives in
Canada.

This article is reprinted with
permission from from
*Outlook: Canada's Progressive
Jewish Magazine*, #3-6184
Ash Street, Vancouver, BC,
Canada V5Z 3G9.

Top marks

MARK GERTLER: A NEW PERSPECTIVE, BEN URI GALLERY

GERTLER AND HIS CIRCLE, BOUNDARY GALLERY

With more than a whiff of war in the air at the moment, a Mark Gertler retrospective seems very appropriate. His masterpiece, *Merry-Go-Round*, painted at the height of the First World War and capturing the fear and hysteria, the inescapability of the military logic, and a world spiralling out of control, is certainly his best known picture and it has, unfortunately, more than stood the test of time. As a contribution to art it was admired; as a reflection of a yearning for peace, it has not been assimilated. It was however only one of many paintings of deep emotional intensity that mark the most productive period of a tragically shortened life. Mark Gertler – A new perspective, housed in the Ben Uri Gallery's rather cramped new venue in north west London, brings together nearly 50 of his paintings – a selection of exceptional quality.

Gertler was born in 1891 to immigrant parents in Gun Street, Spitalfields, a street with a famous connection for readers of this magazine. Some 15 years earlier, at No 40, the East European immigrant activist Aaron Leiberman held the first Jewish socialist meeting in Britain, a gathering of the Hebrew Socialist Union. Gertler's parents, finding the streets not quite paved with gold, moved the family back to Galicia briefly but by 1896 they returned to the East

End where Gertler began his artistic endeavours. By his mid-teens he was showing remarkable talent and in 1906 was able to develop this at the Regent Street Polytechnic. When he won a Bronze medal in a Board of Education National Art Competition in 1908, he applied to the Jewish Educational Art society for support for art studies. He entered the Slade School of Fine Art, an institution populated by young talents far removed geographically and culturally from the impoverished East End.

Undoubtedly he gained technically from his new training, but he lost something too. His early pictures, tender, anxious and sensitive portraits of family and friends and his beautifully executed still lifes focusing on simple domesticity, such as *Still Life with Apples*, and *Still life with Bottle of Benedictine*, with their dark colours and backgrounds have an intensity and power that is less obvious in his later paintings.

His subjects rarely seemed happy or at ease, probably more reflective of the artists' feelings than his subjects. His compelling *Family Group* (1913) illustrates his brother Harry with wife, Annie and a struggling baby, Renee, in a spartan room, their eyes angled downwards and to the side, emphasising a sense of anxiety.

Under the influence of an established painter William Rothenstein, he spent a significant period focusing on Jewish subjects. Two outstanding, intimate and expressive 'Jewish' pictures are represented in this exhibition, the *Rabbi and his Grandchild* (1913) and the earlier *Talmudic Discussion* (1911) (shown below), which is the nearest you will find to an animated picture. With one figure deep in contemplation you can all but hear his companion arguing his point.

Gertler's later pictures, of the 1920s and '30s, including his self portraits, allow paler colours and shades to surface, and his landscapes and subjects for portraits display softer edges. They seem to reflect a marginally more happy perspective but this was in fact a period where he was emotionally in decline. In 1921 he had his first six-month confinement in a sanatorium due to tuberculosis. It was a period when boredom, claustrophobia and depression manifested themselves. The depression was to return.

The 1920s was a productive period for Gertler, especially in his portrait work, some of which reproduce the same emotional intensity as his early family portraits. His subjects were varied, Russian peasant women, Gypsies and, in a very powerful portrait, *Head of a Basque Shepherdess* (1922).

A complementary exhibition just a few doors away at the Boundary Gallery, enables the viewer to see Gertler in the context of his contemporaries at the Slade School. Contrasts can be made with Nash, Nevinson and Spencer's work as well as with the other 'Whitechapel Boys' such as Bomberg, Meninsky and Kramer. While this smaller exhibition contains fewer gems, it is worth a visit just to see Gertler's striking and evocative *Harry Holding an Apple* (1913).

While never straying far from a few themes, Gertler's art developed through his own appreciation and assimilation of the perspectives of other artists both contemporary and past, but we are denied the full fruits of his labours. Failure of an exhibition and a disintegrating marriage sent Gertler into a deep depression. He took his own life in

Your place or mine?

Picture this: a big American Jewish family wedding; Roz Cron, a 60-something 'nice, quiet Jewish lady... short, sturdy, sweet' in her floral print dress and puffed hair. It is at this event that Roz's cousin Laurie Zoloth, an academic in her 30s, is told, at a whisper, that sweet cousin Roz had, in the 1940s, been a member of an all-black all-female jazz band, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm.

I had seen Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss' wonderful 1986 documentary, *The International Sweethearts of Rhythm*, as well as some of their other films: *Tiny and Ruby: Hell-Divin' Women*, a portrait of the Sweethearts' star soloist Ernestine 'Tiny' Davis and her life partner, drummer Ruby Lucas (Tiny, cherished as a jazz trumpeter by the likes of Louis Armstrong, has been written out of a jazz pantheon that prefers its gods male) and *Before Stonewall*, an account of American gay culture before the 1960s which features unearthed archived footage of the Sweethearts and interviews with class raconteur Tiny Davis. These films reveal the Sweethearts as a space of diversity, female solidarity and friendship (and often more than friendship), but what I hadn't known was that this black band had a Jewish member.

Since the Second World War, as many essays in *Jewish Locations* argue, American Jews have become white in a way they weren't before. When Roz Cron played alto sax in the Sweethearts of Rhythm, it was not difficult for a Jewish woman to pass for black in America. At 18, when the band went on a tour of the South, the director told her that she had to make a choice: 'If I was going to be in the band, I'd have to live on that side of the color line, with the Black girls.' Cron had to learn to sit at the back of the bus and the right section of the diner, and also to talk black. Being Jewish, she occupied a space neither black nor white, an ambiguous, ambivalent, in-between location – a 'buffer zone' as Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz puts it in her essay in *Jewish Locations*.

In another wonderful essay in this book, Naomi Scheman describes being taken, aged five or so, to a Manhattan 'progressive' party at which the guest of honour was black singer Paul Robeson. Young Naomi was somehow induced to sing to him, a song chosen from an album called *Little Songs on Big Subjects*. With a cringe, she recalls the chorus: 'You get good milk from a brown-skinned cow. The color of your skin doesn't matter no how. Ho ho ho, can't you see; the color of your skin doesn't matter to me.' After the party, Robeson wanted to take her parents to Longchamps, a famously fancy French restaurant; they were worried that he might not be served, but in fact he was recognised as a star and taken to the best table. Scheman writes: 'Longchamps was more Robeson's world than my parents', but if he thought their solicitude condescending, he certainly gave no sign of it – much as, I am told, he reacted with apparent

delight to my off-key assurance that I was deigning to treat one of the towering figures of the 20th century as my equal.'

Laurie Zoloth's cousin Roz Cron passing across the colour line to black in the Jim Crow South, young Naomi Scheman singing across the colour line in 'progressive' New York a decade later: these sorts of stories capture the complexity of the racial location of Jews in modern America. They record the ebb and flow of the racialisation of Jews (the process whereby Jews have been allocated to one race or another) and how this has touched people's lives. All the finest moments in Jewish Locations move between a very personal register and an exploration of the place of Jewishness in American race politics. Sandra Lee Bartky, in 'Phenomenology of a Hyphenated Consciousness', describes fleeing the Jewishness she was brought up with just after the war, dissolving herself into white America before returning as an adult to some kind of reckoning with her ethnicity. Richard Schmitt, in 'Reflections of a Half-Jewish Immigrant', describes his arrival as a refugee from Nazi Germany and the different ways he tried to belong. Katya Gibel Azouley describes her experience of being both black and Jewish.

In Britain, of course, things are different; the relationship between Jews and whiteness is not the same here. British whiteness takes its hue from an imperial past rather than from Jim Crow segregation laws. American blackness is based on the 'one-drop rule', whereby a single black ancestor qualifies you as black – while the category 'mixed race' is common currency in a UK where 'cross-racial sex is no more or less meaningful than multi-racial football', as Paul Gilroy wrote in a recent article. American immigration history created a patchwork of ethnicities (Italian-Americans, Greek-Americans, and so on) who, alongside Jewish Americans, could be conscripted into whiteness – whereas in Britain, Irish colonial subjects and Eastern European Jews were the only mass-scale arrivals until the Windrush era. The in-between location of American Jews – between black and white – might, then, not be the best way of seeing how Jews have been placed in Britain. This is particularly true today, when much migration to Britain is not from the 'black' global South, but from the off-white fringes of Europe.

Because of differences like this, we need to be cautious about importing American race theorising wholesale. The editors' introduction to *Jewish Locations* claims the book attempts to 'be less focused on the United States' and to include essays on non-US topics. Indeed, three chapters in the book look at non-American contexts: Hagar Salamon contributes a fascinating article on Ethiopian Jews in Israel; Edith Haddad Shaked and Bat-Ami Bar On contribute an interesting essay on Tunisian Jewish thinker Albert Memmi; and Naomi Zack

JEWISH LOCATIONS: TRAVERSING RACIALIZED LANDSCAPES, EDITED BY LISA TESSMAN AND BAT-AMI BAR ON, (ROMMAN AND LITTLEFIELD)

writes about Martin Buber. But most of the Jewish locations this book examines are in North America.

American race politics has a fraughtness that affects this book: many of the writers and particularly the editors seem somewhat squeamish about race. Sometimes they flagellate Jews for accepting the privileges of whiteness; sometimes there's a sort of 'me-tooism' which overmakes the claim that Jews aren't all that white after all; and sometimes there's a guilty disavowal of 'me-tooism'. The book works best where it moves away from these debates to look at the real texture of the 'racialised landscapes' Jews (with others) have

traversed. It also works best where it acknowledges the plurality, the 's' at the end of Jewish locations. As stories like Roz Cron's suggest, there have always been multiple ways of being Jewish, and each of these fits differently into the topography of race.

The project of this book is significant in moving away from immigrant success stories on the one hand and one-dimensional accounts of antisemitism on the other, towards a more complex understanding of the ways Jews have been racialised in the past and the present. However, that project must be seen as ongoing, with a great deal yet to achieve.

Ben Gidley

ON THE SHELF

RAF SALKIE explores the boundaries of the Israel/Palestine conflict

We Jews have various lines that each of us can't cross when it comes to Israel and Palestine. Let's look together at some recent books and you can try to locate your own personal line. First, a number of pamphlets by B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (www.btselem.org). They deal in calm, measured language with specific incidents like the shooting of a Palestinian child by the Israeli army; or repeated crimes like attacks on Palestinians by vigilante settlers; or long-term problems such as restrictions on movement in the West Bank, and the water crisis in Palestinian villages. I shudder to think of the risks that this group takes to expose injustice, and the abuse they receive from many Israelis. This is human rights work carried out with courage and dedication, and I assume that you are all in favour of it.

Let's see now if you're comfortable with Refugees in Our Own Land: Chronicles from a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Bethlehem by Muna Hamzeh (Pluto Press, £18.99). In a diary and in a series of articles reprinted from newspapers and magazines, Hamzeh describes the poverty, overcrowding, unpaved roads, routine humiliation and killing which 10,000 refugees in Dheisheh have endured for over 50 years – since the 40 villages from which they came were destroyed after 1948. Instead of statistics, the book shows us real people with names, personal problems (27 months in an Israeli prison without charge or trial, loss of an eye from a plastic bullet, and so on) and a determination to win justice and a

decent life for themselves. You probably agree with me that Israel should end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and should leave the people of Bethlehem to run their own communities and rebuild their lives.

There's just one problem: what about the refugees from Dheisheh who want to return to their original homes – like Aisha, a grandmother who has a tin container holding yellowish and tattered land deeds from her village of Zakariya? This question is discussed in detail by the contributors to Palestinian Refugees: the Right of Return, edited by Maseer Aruri (Pluto Press, £14.99). One of the most impressive pieces is by Salman Abu-Sitta, who gives a figure of 5 million refugees out of 8 million Palestinians in total: they came from 531 towns and villages, forming 85% of the people in what later became Israel. Today about 86% of them live in historical Palestine or within a 100-mile radius of it. Even more striking are his demographic figures for contemporary Israel: over 3 million Jews live in 8% of the country, and 78% of Israel's Jews live on 14% of the land. Stay with me, because the next figure is the crucial one: the vast majority of the remaining land in Israel is controlled by about 200,000 'rural Jews' – the kibbutzim, moshavim and private farms that dominate Israeli agriculture. Abu-Sitta writes that this small number of people 'holding 5 million refugees hostage, are obstructing all prospects of a just peace'.

Many of the refugees could return, he argues, without displacing more than a few

thousand of these Jewish country-dwellers, many of whom are struggling financially in any case, and finding great difficulty in persuading their sons and daughters to stay on their farms. He recognises that the demographic balance of Jews and Arabs in Israel would be changed if this happened, but argues that in any case by 2010 the Palestinians will be 35% of the population of Israel, and will be equal in number to Jews by 2050 if not before. The idea of a Jewish state – whether you agree with it or not – is looking rather temporary. Of course, the return of Palestinian refugees in significant numbers is off the agenda for most Israelis and for the Palestinian Authority. If it doesn't happen, though, the prospects for peace are probably zero.

If I haven't lost you yet, you deserve a bit of light relief, so let me mention Peretz Kidron's book *The Virgin Blushed – God Yawned* (Yaron Golan). My copy has a splendid signed message from the author to the original owners: 'To C and S: I hope this book provides the moral guidance you so obviously need'. As well as conversations between God and, in turn, Nietzsche ('Well, dead, huh?' – 'All right, so I was wrong.'). Moses, Don Giovanni and Faust, we get an interesting chat between Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene about whether or not the Holy Ghost was a good lover. My favourite, though is a wholly plausible dialogue between Abraham and Isaac on the way home from the drama on the mountain. Isaac calls his father a 'miserable abject slave', and concludes: 'Just wait till I tell mother. She'll give you hell.' And I bet she did, too.



HARROW EDUCATION

Maybe school league tables have a use. They can make dunces' caps for politicians. At a Refugee Week party in Harrow we heard the borough's schools had leapt from 13th to 6th place since an influx of overseas families' children. I asked the mayor and mayoress, clapping with the Somali dance troupe, what they thought of Home Secretary David Blunkett's insistence that asylum seekers' children should be segregated to stop them 'flooding' schools? 'Disgraceful!' they said. They're both former head teachers.

Blunkett says Asian parents must speak English at home if they want their youngsters to be integrated. My parents weren't allowed to speak Yiddish in school, but nobody told my bubeh what to speak in her own kitchen. This government's 'boldness' looks like the old baloney, telling those targeted by racists that it's their own fault.

A Spanish refugee's son who was educated at Harrow County (not that other Harrow school up the hill, as fellow Tories believed) couldn't resist a dig at Blunkett, during a fringe meeting in Blackpool: 'When I was growing up in my house my parents quite often did not speak English to me. But I seem now over a period of time to have become assimilated.' Did citizens of the late 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' ever dream its president would one day be ridiculed as a reactionary by Michael Portillo? A cruel fate, but a deserved one.

EAST END MYSTERY

Princelet Street in Spitalfields once had a Yiddish theatre and inspired a film, *The Golem* of

Princelet Street, and the book, Rodinsky's Room, but nothing so remarkable as the Observer article on 7th July: 'Described as the nation's answer to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, 19 Princelet Street in London's East End was refuge to hundreds of Jews fleeing persecution from the Nazis,' it said. The fine Georgian house, once home to Huguenot silk weavers, concealed a 'secret synagogue' built so Jews could worship safely from Blackshirt attack, and a hidden room where plans were made for the battle of Cable Street. Friends who attended Princelet Street shul for decades were amazed, confessing they knew none of this. But a trust with some famous names wants to raise three million quid to restore No 19 as a heritage centre.

Seeking some genuine history, I join a conducted East End walk one balmy summer evening. As we pause by No 19, our guide, whose grandmother once lived next door, has hardly begun his spiel, when a lady comes out and says we should have told her we were coming. Surely she's not going to put the kettle on for us all? No, she takes over, telling us how important the house is, did we know it was built by Huguenots? OK, some reporter (only the Observer's political editor!) got some things wrong, but there was a remarkable synagogue, and they want a centre to celebrate all the East End's immigrants. She hands out cards.

Weighing up cars and glimpsed interiors, and thinking of the wine bars passed earlier, I'm wondering, can the golem that held up the bulldozers halt the yuppification of Spitalfields? Could people like our grandparents live there again? Some writers imagine quiet

streets and houses disguising dimensional interfaces, through which one can step into bygone ages or parallel universes. Maybe 19 Princelet Street is becoming a portal between the 'race relations' and 'heritage' industries. I'm all for places that invite us into our past, but too much hype can turn away all but the most credulous punter.

HATE MAIL

Is the true-blue Daily Mail, which once supported Sir Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts, enlisting the green-ink grenadiers? Staff at the Community Fund which allocates lottery cash had to cope with irate, abusive and threatening mail and phone calls, after right wing newspapers denounced a grant to the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC), which helps asylum seekers. The Mail ran the story for a fortnight, providing addresses so readers could express their 'justified anger'.

The paper cheerfully acknowledged help from the Home Office. By coincidence, the stories implying something 'illegal' about the NCADC (which assists desperate refugees with legal help), came after a judge ruled the Home Secretary had acted illegally in ordering the seizure and deportation of an Afghan family, the Ahmadi, who are still not allowed back. Ministers were supposedly 'powerless to act' over the lottery grant, but it was suspended temporarily after the Culture Secretary intervened. Now we're reportedly going to have boxes to tick on our lottery tickets, choosing which category of causes we wish to support. How about providing a similar facility on our tax forms?

