

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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

Through this forum we aim to:

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

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The Jews should give back the Occupied Territories but I think we should hang on to New York

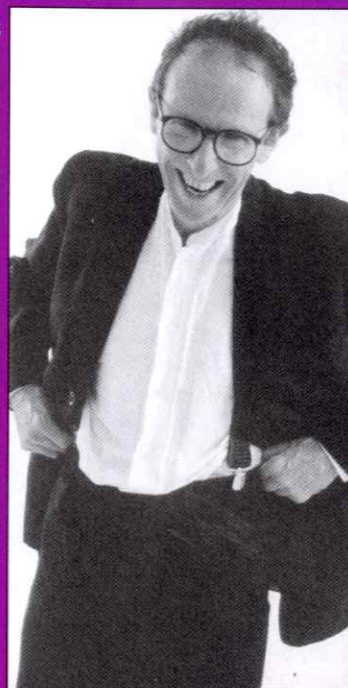
'This is Not a Subject for Comedy'

a comic monologue about
Israel, Palestine and the Jews
written and performed by
Ivor Dembina

His gags are plentiful and at times painfully funny. Dembina is that rarest of comedians, not afraid to tackle political subjects while remembering the most important element is to keep the audience laughing.' - International Herald Tribune

'A compelling piece boasts drama and broad laughs. While other acts prefer knee-jerk Blair-baiting, it is heartening to hear from a performer who has genuinely risked his life for his beliefs.' - Evening Standard

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8.30pm
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Enquiries 020 7633 9539
www.hampsteadcomedy.co.uk



Tuesdays 19, 26 July and 2, 9, 16,
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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:
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www.jewish-socialist.org

JEWISH SOCIALIST

50

FIFTY ALREADY!

Aliens Act ■ Russian revolution ■ Identity ■ South Africa ■ Secular celebration

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EDITORIAL

Happy birthday Jewish Socialist!

Jewish Socialist has turned 50! This is a moment, we are especially proud to share with those readers who have been with us since issue 1 back in 1985. For those who missed the first 49 issues, enjoy this one and we hope you will want to read more.

So what's changed since 1985? At that time Thatcherism was rampant in Britain, pushing forward an aggressive agenda of privatisation, individual advantage and increasing authoritarianism – with the support of many people. Today the majority of people in Britain reject that approach but, as the recent election showed, they could only show that by slashing the majority of Tony Blair, who had ended 18 years of Tory misrule only to advance the old Thatcherite agenda himself in the name of Labour.

Also, that year the Board of Deputies were having heated arguments with Ken Livingstone about antisemitism and the Jewish community. Curiously, then they were complaining that he was releasing information about antisemitic incidents they were trying to hush up. And they were complaining about his support for Jewish groups. They didn't like his policy of funding Jewish organisations without allowing the unelected deputies to vet them. Meanwhile, in the land of milk and American money, Israel was prosecuting Israelis for the 'crime' of meeting and talking peace with PLO members. Back home their 'security' boneheads were protecting Jewish meetings from the danger of hearing dissenting voices.

As for dissenting voices, there were plenty – but they had no effective outlet through which to express it. Many Jews were prominent in left groups but such groups had little impact on the politics of the Jewish community. Other Jewish dissenters felt so alienated from the community they grew up in that they were happy to leave it to the right wingers and assimilate into, well... something else.

But when the first issue of Jewish Socialist was published, we knew that we had provided a base for the rebels, the radicals, and those starting to question. It was also clear early on that we had many non-Jewish readers who welcomed sensible and thought-provoking comment on Jewish issues that they were engaged with. One of the watchwords of the 1980s was 'glasnost', and our magazine represented both a demand for and an expression of a long-awaited glasnost in Jewish life.

We have seen our role as opening up spaces for debate and for facing power with truth, in the left, in the anti-racist movement, in the Jewish community, locally and internationally. Spaces where orthodoxies, whether of a religious or political variety, can be questioned and criticised; where traditional Marxist views of nationalism can be put under the spotlight as much as religious imperatives such as circumcision.

And we have had an effect. Some ideas first penned tentatively in our magazine have moved into more mainstream spaces. For many years, on the left, the Israeli peace movement was considered almost irrelevant to the liberation of the Palestinians. We continued to give space to such activists and now their role is recognised as absolutely crucial.

The true test of whether a magazine is alive lies in its writers. If you see the same old faces each time, that is not a vibrant publication but a fossil. We are proud that every issue of Jewish Socialist, including this one, has welcomed new writers who have never written for the magazine before. And with each issue we have gained new subscriptions.

In this issue we celebrate our anniversary – our 50th issue – but the content of our jubilee issue reflects a wider span of anniversaries: 2005 is the 100th anniversary of two momentous events close to our hearts – the first stirrings of revolution in the Russian Empire (see page 13) and the decision of the British Parliament to control Jewish immigration to Britain (page 6). The consequences of both continue to reverberate today for a new generation of activists struggling for human liberation and for the new victims of old racism.

We look forward to the next 50 issues and we thank you for your continued support.

JSG defends anti-Zionism from antisemites

The annual conference of the Jewish Socialists' Group expressed its growing concern about the infiltration of antisemitic arguments into campaigns for Palestinian rights and agreed a new policy statement on antisemitism in progressive circles. Here is an extract from the statement:

'The JSG also has a long history of challenging the Jewish leadership's conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, which we see as, in part, a device to silence debate about or criticism of Zionism or Israel both within and beyond the Jewish community. Nevertheless, there are elements among progressive campaigners who, knowingly or not, draw on traditional antisemitic imagery to support the Palestinians' case. This may mean references to Jewish power in the media, Jewish manoeuvring behind the scenes to persuade governments to back Israel, Jewish wealth and so on. As well as being wrong in themselves, to allow these assumptions to become common currency will not only make it more difficult for us to work with others challenging racism and fascism, here, in Israel/Palestine or anywhere else in the world, it will also devalue the clear validity of the Palestinian demand for self-determination and an immediate end to the Occupation... We urge Palestinians, Israelis and supporters of a just peace to be on their guard against antisemites and agents provocateurs who will exploit any confusion between anti-Zionism and antisemitism to foster suspicion, fear and hostility between peoples and prevent us coming together for liberation.'

For the full resolution contact jsg@bardrose.dircon.co.uk

Old racism, new victims

Memories of Britain's first immigration law were combined with a call to campaign in support of today's refugees and asylum seekers at a public meeting held in June by the Jewish Socialists' Group in London's East End.

David Rosenberg described how an unholy alliance of Tory politicians, the press and the infant trade union movement campaigned for restrictions on Jews fleeing oppression in Czarist Russia.

Ken Leech – a veteran of

anti-racist struggles in the East End – described the impact of racist attacks at street level that followed on the heels of politicians' bellicose rhetoric against black immigrants in the 1950s and '60s.

Dave Landau, representing the No One Is Illegal campaign, stressed that it is important, while taking up individual cases and winning concessions in the here and now, to argue within the movement, for the goal of open borders.

WISEWORDS

A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein 1879 - 1955

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Medical Foundation – a human rights organisation set up in North London, under the leadership of Helen Bamber, to support survivors of torture and organised violence and help them rebuild their lives in dignity.

Last year 2,588 men, women and children from more than 80 countries were referred to the Medical Foundation. Most of these clients were refugees and asylum seekers. As well as supporting torture victims with medical treatment, counselling and therapy, the organisation also documents their experiences and

raises public awareness of torture.

The Medical Foundation now has treatment centres in London and Manchester and a medico-legal reporting service in Scotland. Medical Foundation teams have also worked in the Balkans and Sri Lanka and they currently run projects for community mental health workers in Mexico and Guatemala..
Website: www.torturecare.org.uk
Tel: 020 7697 7777



Freedom charter – 50 years

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Congress of the People held in an open space in Kliptown near Soweto in apartheid South Africa, where 3,000 delegates met to agree the Freedom Charter. Over many months against a background of heavy repression meetings were held in factories, townships and villages to draw up demands for the charter and elect delegates to the Congress.

At the time the African National Congress (ANC) was a black-only organisation but it was working very closely with the Congress of Indian Democrats, the Coloured Peoples Congress, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of Democrats which included many whites seeking to overthrow white privilege. These last two included a very significant number of Jewish communists and radicals. The poetic language of the final document is usually attributed to Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein, an architect and writer who played a leading role on the drafting committee.

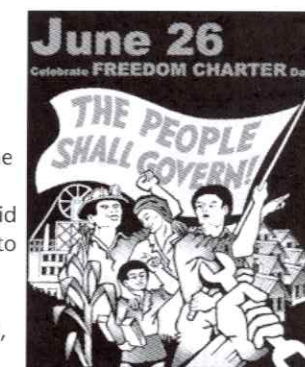
Towards the end of the meeting, armed police stormed the speakers' platform. They confiscated documents, told the participants they were committing treason and took their names and addresses. As they did this the participants sang freedom songs. In the following year 156 leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo were put on trial for treason.

The charter had ten demands:

The people shall govern
All national groups shall have equal rights
The people shall share in the country's wealth
The land shall be shared among those who work it
All shall be equal before the law
All shall enjoy human rights
There shall be work and security
The doors of learning and culture shall be opened
There shall be houses, security and comfort
There shall be peace and friendship

The full text of the Freedom Charter is at www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html

Interview with South African singer Vusi Mahlasela on page 28.



NOT SET IN STONE

**MADGE
DRESSER**
compares
England's
monuments to
those who
suffered from
and campaigned
against the
transatlantic
slave trade with
those who made
their fortunes
from it

Public statues are political creatures. The triumphalism of that much-televised fall of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad may now seem crassly premature, but it proves the point. Public statues and their deployment tell us what a particular group at a particular time thought was worth remembering reverencing or reviling. What, after all, better evokes the changing fortunes of Soviet communism than Lithuania's Stalin World – a commercial theme park where 65 once-public statues of Lenin, Stalin and their posse now languish behind an ironic faux-barbed-wire fence?

By the same token, to paraphrase historian Eric Foner, what has never been memorialized '...tells us as much about a society's sense of the past as what is'. It was with this in mind, that, some years ago, I began to wonder if public statues have been used to celebrate, commemorate or condemn the transatlantic slave trade in Britain. I also wondered how far the contribution of African slave labour to British development has even been acknowledged by way of statues or public memorials. Focusing specifically on England, I've found few instances of such commemoration, even in London. Does this paucity of public monuments reveal a deliberate act of collective amnesia?

The answer to this is, partially. Once middle-class, non-conformist values gained some degree of ascendancy in Britain in the 1830s, slavery was remembered. But it was remembered in a particular way, which marginalised some of the less palatable aspects of the nation's involvement in the slave-based economy.

I have been struck by the varied ways statuary helps both to shape and to obscure historical remembrance. Significantly, there are few, if any, government-funded memorials regarding slavery. To be fair, most public statues in England seem to be the products of private benefaction or so-called public subscription – though the 'public' involved would be drawn from a very restricted section of the population – but this is especially true of those associated with slavery. Obviously statues tended to reflect the prejudices and concerns of the most moneyed classes, so perhaps it should not surprise us that in England, as in the United States, the role of slavery is sanitised and the slaving activities of local worthies are discreetly ignored or glossed over.

In London we can group the public memorials and statues linked to slavery into three categories. The first includes those individuals who made a substantial amount of money from slave trading or slave holding. The second includes anti-slavery campaigners. The third encompasses those enslaved Africans whose labour and suffering contributed so much to British prosperity. So far as the first category goes, it has to be said that no one in Britain actively commemorated a slave-owner or slave trader specifically because of his or her links with slavery. Such people were celebrated because they were rich and powerful, and the extent to which their wealth was due to enslavement was an incidental or, depending on the era, embarrassing, by-product. This point stands in interesting contrast to the situation of public statuary in parts of the USA where monuments to Confederate heroes have long been raised partly because of their relationship to slavery and where, even today, pro-slavery arguments are resurfacing on the

extreme right and changing the terms of debate about public history there.

Which of the public statues and memorials in London pay homage to individuals involved in the British slave trade? No one seems to have undertaken the task of investigating this. And no wonder: establishing slavery links is a notoriously slippery business. It could, for instance, be argued that statues of such rulers as Charles II and William III qualify for inclusion in a list of slave-owners as both were involved in royal companies devoted to the slave trade. It's been claimed with some justice, too, that of the four statues on the front of Deptford's old town hall in New Cross Road, three are connected with Caribbean slavery: Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and Oliver Cromwell. Certainly all demonstrate the connection between conquest, colonisation and the slave trade.

Less obvious is the connection between slavery and the founder of the British Museum Sir Hans Sloane whose statue by Michael Rysbrack is in the British Museum forecourt and after whom Sloane Square is named. This erudite writer, collector and doctor was physician to the Governor of Jamaica for two years in the early 18th century and, more to the point, his marriage to Elizabeth Langley, the widow of a wealthy Jamaican slave plantation owner helped to consolidate his career.

To my mind, one should start by investigating which merchants whose statues occupy public space had extensive investments in slavery. In London's Guildhall, for example, there is a monument to William Beckford who was Lord Mayor of London in the 18th century and an immensely wealthy owner of slave plantations.

More research is needed to investigate the business activities of the wealthy City merchant Tory politician and philanthropist Sir John Cass. Statues in his honour are in the Guildhall and over the entrance of the Sir John Cass Institute in Jewry Street – but it seems very likely this alderman who made much of his fortune out of selling mounted guns, cannons and other military supplies also had investments in slavery. We know he was a colonel in the Orange Regiment in 1713 and a 'Col John Cass' is listed as serving between 1705 and 1708 on the management board of the Royal African Company, the company which possessed the English monopoly on the Atlantic slave trade.

Significantly, the largest category of slavery-related statues and memorials celebrate anti-slavery campaigners. Discounting statues to politicians such as George Canning who supported slave emancipation but whose support was not mentioned on his statue in Parliament Square, or church memorials such as the one to the slave-trader turned vicar, John Newton, at St Mary Woolnoth, one might at first sight conclude that those who opposed slavery have been adequately featured in the nation's capital. Yet these campaigners, when they are remembered at all, are commemorated in a way that ignores the agency of Africans. Such memorials also seem to foreclose any further thoughts about British involvement in slavery itself.

Is it significant that in 1838 it was an obscure if well respected (and probably Jewish) sculptor Samuel Joseph, who was chosen to carve the statue of William Wilberforce? Is it telling that the statue,

finished five years after the MP's death, when West Indian and unreformed Tories still had power in Parliament, seems almost apologetic in tone, portraying the once fiery and much-opposed activist in carpet slippers? As if age, illness and legislative success had rendered him less of a threat to established interests? The dedication on the memorial proclaims that his work purged England of 'the guilt of the slave trade', and clearly implied that Britain's exploitation of Africans was a finished chapter, leaving no legacy of economic disadvantage or political exclusion in its wake.

The only other statue in the Abbey commemorating those who opposed the slave trade (which ended in 1808) was Sir Richard Westmacott's monument to Charles Fox. Yet it is only the inclusion of the figure of a meekly kneeling slave, that reassuringly passive icon so effectively deployed by campaigners against the slave trade, which links the Whig leader to the antislavery cause. Westmacott, an immensely prolific sculptor of the early 19th century, tended to be identified with liberal heroic figures – in 1834 he sculpted a marble statue of that father of democratic theory, John Locke. The fact that Locke had himself been a prominent investor and advocate of the slave trade (he was a member of the Royal African Company), had by the early 1800s been erased from public memory. Westmacott himself had a similarly contradictory connection to both liberal ideals and slave-related interests: as the husband of a Jamaican doctor's daughter, he was also called upon to provide sculptures and memorials for merchants and other notables in the West Indies.

It was Frederick Thrupp, who, somewhat controversially, won the tender for the statue commemorating Wilberforce's successor in the anti-slavery campaign, Thomas Fowell Buxton. Though Wilberforce had successfully ended British involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, more than 800,000 people remained enslaved in British colonies. It was Buxton who drove through the Emancipation Act in 1833. By then Emancipation was celebrated as proof of British moral superiority by a newly empowered industrial middle-class anxious to flex its muscles against what it saw as a dissolute and parasitic landowning class.

As many opponents of emancipation were quick to point out at the time, the concern of the industrial middle classes for the plight of enslaved Africans sat oddly with their acceptance of severe conditions suffered by the industrial working classes in Britain itself during the so-called 'hungry 40s'. In truth, both sets of workers, in Britain and the Caribbean suffered during the economic upheaval of this period, though it was the newly emancipated slaves who had no access to the benefits of economic growth, which began to affect significant sections of the British working class by the 1850s.

By the mid-Victorian period, prosperity had transformed the crusading middle-classes into the complacent middle class. The tone of conservative self-congratulation is nowhere more evident than in the second memorial to Buxton and his allies in the emancipation campaign. Its contrast in both form and content to the earlier statue is telling. Financed privately by Buxton's son, Charles Buxton, who was also an MP, it was erected in 1866, the year after the ending of slavery in the USA, in Victoria Tower

Gardens near the Houses of Parliament. Dedicated to Thomas Buxton and all those who helped achieve the formal emancipation of British slaves in 1833, it was originally conceived as an imperial ode to temperance, a water fountain surmounted by stone symbols of British militancy from Caractacus and William the Conqueror to Queen Victoria. The statues of rulers were in the end omitted but their initial inclusion shows how conservative in concept this memorial was. No radical campaigning against injustice here, rather a confirmation of mid-Victorian values. Perhaps typically of mid-Victorian doublethink, this fountain was funded by a brewer in honour of a brewer, for both father and son were partners in Truman, Hanbury, Buxton & Co. Of course Quakers were very much identified with the temperance movement and the Buxtons were Quakers. But then the Quakers, so long identified with anti-slavery causes, had also been in the thick of the slave trade before 1760.

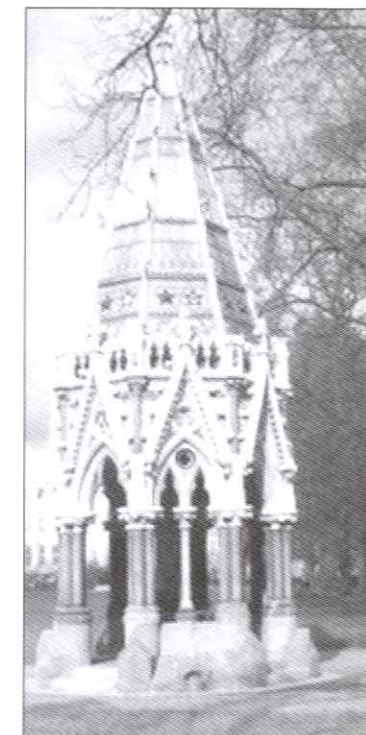
There is little in the imagery of the decoration, save one minuscule portrayal of a mistreated slave, to alert passers-by to the reality of slavery itself. And the monument languished in increasing disrepair until 1987 when it was rededicated by the Anti-Slavery Society.

The parliamentary efforts of Wilberforce and Buxton had been immensely energised by the extra-parliamentary campaign against slavery and the slave trade led by Thomas Clarkson. Yet this most important and progressively minded campaigner had no London memorial dedicated to him until 1989. Only then was a modest plaque, privately funded by a committee set up to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his birth, placed near Wilberforce's statue in the Abbey.

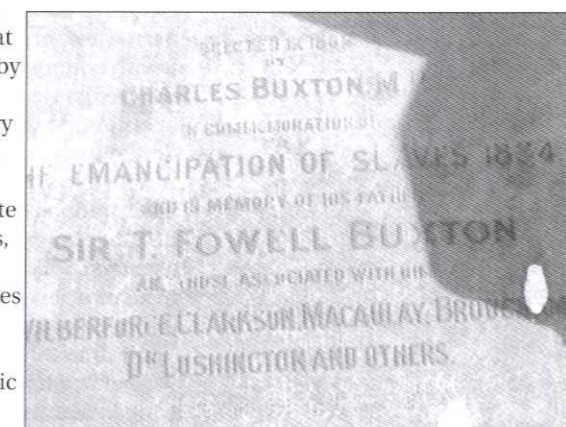
As for the enslaved Africans, with few exceptions they have either been ignored or reified as ornamental objects – as in the personifications of the continent of Africa on the Bank of England and at the Drapers Hall. A partial exception is the figure of a sailor of unmistakably African features on the base of Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square. It is perhaps significant that the sculptor who carved the African seaman was Irish rather than English and that he, John Edward Carew, was the least well known of all the sculptors involved in the monument, which was erected around 1849.

It seems all the other attempts in England to memorialise the suffering of Africans, to acknowledge their many attempts at resistance or to celebrate the contribution slave labour made to British prosperity have all been made within the last decade of the 20th century. In London, it was not until 2000 that a green plaque to Olaudah Equiano was erected at Riding House the site of his birth by Westminster Council.

Unsurprisingly, this last category of memorial, those to the Africans themselves, are noticeably less grand than those dedicated to white abolitionists or white slave-owners, indicating that those promoting such memorials had fewer resources than those usually involved in public commemoration. They are the true Cinderellas of British public monuments.



Victoria Tower Gardens



THE ALIENS ACT REVISITED

One hundred years ago, Britain's first immigration legislation came into force, aimed at closing the doors on Jews from eastern Europe. **DAVID ROSENBERG** traces the history

During the general election campaign, immigration once again became a political weapon as the parties scraped around for the populist vote. Former trade union leader, Sir Bill Morris, described the major parties' disputes over immigration policy as an unsavoury 'bidding war'. The Tories announce that they want health tests for immigrants, and instead of denouncing the crass association of immigrants with disease, Labour says, 'You're too late. That was already in our plans.' How depressing, too, that as you look further left, Respect's Great White Hope, George Galloway, standing in a traditional immigrant area, writes in the Morning Star: 'Every country must have control of its borders – no one serious is advocating the scrapping of immigration controls.'

This year we are conscious of anniversaries – 50 years since the Freedom Charter in South Africa, which heralded the struggle for racial equality in the land of Apartheid; 60 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, the camp where those considered unfit for equality were put to death in their millions. Perhaps we ought to remind our politicians, and the public they try to manipulate, of another anniversary: the 100th anniversary of the Aliens Act, Britain's first immigration law and the forerunner of every oppressive act against immigrants and asylum-seekers since. This law was designed specifically to keep East European Jews out of Britain. Everything that is wrong in principle about the concept of immigration control and the manner in which it is carried out was enshrined in that act.

Some find it ironic that Michael Howard, with his own Jewish immigrant ancestry so close, should choose to jump on this bandwagon. Time for a health warning for those who choose to understand Britain's politics in ethnic terms: don't forget, we have had 100 years of immigration controls presided over by non-Jewish prime ministers. But when Howard himself chooses to use this ancestry to justify quotas against today's immigrants and refugees, he invites this kind of narrow response, which will do no favours to the Jewish community.

So what was the Alien's Act and how did it come about? What does it tell us about the subsequent development of immigration policy?

The most fundamental aspect of British immigration law, already present in 1905, was that British immigration control was never designed as a general policy. It has never been meant to apply to all prospective settlers. It has always been directed against certain groups deemed 'undesirable'. In 1905 the undesirables were pauperised Jews arriving on 'immigrant ships', while richer Jews and other visitors remained free

from control. Immigrants were required to have £5 with them on landing.

In the 1960s the 'undesirables' were black immigrants from the Commonwealth who, only a decade earlier, had been desperately recruited to fill Britain's post-war labour shortages. In the 1980s the 'undesirables' were dependents of those admitted as immigrants, and were concentrated in the least desirable jobs. Today the 'undesirables' are the refugees and asylum seekers, the people whose home situation is so threatening and so unbearable that they uproot themselves from communities where they have lived for centuries to find new homes where they don't speak the language, knowing they will be marginalised. Most of these people move from one poor country to another. Around 20% of the world's refugees get to Europe and Britain currently takes in barely 2% of the world's refugees.

But while 'undesirables' are kept out, others are made welcome, or at least tolerated. Some 20-30 years before East European Jews arrived in significant numbers, similar numbers of Irish arrived in mainland Britain fleeing poverty and starvation. They met hostility and have continued to endure negative stereotypes, especially in the media but few would have questioned their right to come and be part of British society. The hostility directed against the Jews questioned their very right to be here.

Another large Irish migration occurred after the Second World War, shortly before black Commonwealth immigrants were recruited. In 1947 the Polish Resettlement Act brought hundreds of thousands of Poles, Lithuanians and Ukrainians to Britain's factories. They included large numbers who had served with Nazi forces. Meanwhile, only handfuls of Jewish refugees from Nazism could make Britain their home. The anti-immigrant laws and popular prejudices of the 1960s and '70s were directed predominantly against black people from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent and less so against white immigrants (though in the 1980s, long-settled Irish communities experienced racism and police harassment as hostilities between the British government and the IRA increased).

As Britain was passing the Aliens Act, its empire was still expanding to take in a quarter of the globe. In large numbers, Britons took advantage of the empire to build a very prosperous life for themselves in the colonies. Throughout the major period of British immigration control, these colonists and their children and grandchildren have been free to 'return'. The door which was closing on 'undesirables' has always been held wide open for them.

As the immigration debate gets louder, the voice that struggles to be heard is the voice of the immigrants themselves. Their motives are assumed for them, especially by the media, who denounce them as 'bogus', 'scroungers', 'liars', 'cheats' and 'fraudsters', threatening to 'flood', 'swamp' or 'stampede' a small overcrowded island.

The obnoxious term, 'swamping', entered the modern immigration debate in a BBC interview in 1978. The Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher said that British people 'feared that they might be swamped by people of a different culture'. Worried about votes leaking to the National Front, she was prepared to ape their kind of language, whatever the consequences on the street. Both major parties seem similarly unconcerned today about the consequences in their efforts to avoid losing votes to UKIP and the BNP, whose hard-line anti-immigration policies have won them local councillors recently. But the language of Thatcher's scare tactics had much earlier roots. In 1902 the Bishop of Stepney said Jews were 'swamping whole areas once populated by English people'.

The thrust for the first immigration controls – against the Jews – came from the usual suspects: Tory politicians and captains of the media. In 1894 Tory MPs made their first and unsuccessful attempt to bring in legislation against Jewish immigration. They tried and failed again a few years later but gradually the media helped raise a head of steam to boost their cause. The papers said Jews were overrunning the country, stealing English jobs and homes, and spreading disease. They proposed a solution too: 'The dirty, destitute, diseased, verminous and criminal foreigner who dumps himself on our soil and rates simultaneously, shall be forbidden to land,' said the Manchester Evening Chronicle.

In 1901 a Royal Commission on Immigration was set up, chaired by the Tory MP Major William Evans-Gordon. That same year a pressure group was formed, with significant working class support, called the British Brothers League. Evans-Gordon was also prominent in this group.

In the 1970s the National Front marched through London's East End to terrorise the Bengali community. In the 1930s Oswald Mosley's thugs marched and rallied to terrorise the Jews of the East End, but the first mass street level anti-immigrant campaigns in this area were those of the British Brothers League at the turn of the 20th century, which claimed the support of local politicians, clergy and newspaper owners. At the League's rallies speakers proclaimed: 'We will not have this country made the dumping ground for the scum of Europe. This is England not the dustbin of Russia and Austria.'

The so-called 'scum of Europe' were the Jews of the Russian Empire forced by increasingly repressive laws to live in an area called the Pale of Settlement. They were increasingly pauperised by being restricted from many employment sectors,

unable to move from town to town, and subject to pogroms – violent attacks by antisemitic mobs encouraged by the government and its police force. If they were arriving today they would no doubt be condemned as 'bogus asylum-seekers' and 'economic migrants'.

The year that the Aliens Act was passed was the same year that a new antisemitic force came into being in the Russian Empire – the Black Hundreds. On paper the Aliens Act made exemptions for those suffering religious or political persecution, but the figures speak for themselves. In the first year of the Act, 505 Jews won their asylum appeals. In 1908 the figure had fallen to 20 and by 1910, just 5. During the same period, 1,378 Jews, who had earlier been permitted to enter as immigrants, had been rounded up and deported to their country of origin. The Aliens Act created 'internal controls' through which the Home Secretary could order deportations. The thrust of New Labour's anti-asylum policy today is to strengthen internal controls and deport those who have begun a new, if precarious, life here.

Those railing against the 'alien' Jews claimed that Jews were changing the character of the country. They held to a myth that Britain was a homogenous monocultural society. And yet the inner cities were already far from this. The new Jewish ghetto in London's East End bordered already established Chinese, Maltese and Somali quarters.

It was left to the Jewish immigrants themselves to defend their rights to come and settle. They received little support from the wealthier, more long-established Jewish community. Many influential figures from this community joined the ranks of those opposing mass Jewish immigration, and welfare institutions such as the Board of Guardians were instrumental in assisting repatriation programmes. Britain's Chief Rabbi, Herman Adler, undertook a visit to Russia to tell Jews not to come to Britain.

Individual socialists such as William Morris and Eleanor Marx Aveling stood up to protest against the persecution of Jews in Russia and their right to seek safety here but the early socialist organisations were either lukewarm in their support or actively against Jewish immigration. This was also the case with the infant trade union movement. Feeling threatened by an influx of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, the TUC passed resolutions at three of its annual conferences in the 1890s calling for restriction. The famous dockers' leader, Ben Tillett, said of the Jewish immigrants: 'You are our brothers and we will do our duty by you but we wish you had not come.'

It has taken a long time for that narrow protectionist attitude towards immigrant workers to decline; hence the importance of Sir Bill Morris's comments, for trade unionists and for all those who want to take a stand against today's anti-alien.

THATCHER'S SCARE TACTICS HAD MUCH EARLIER ROOTS. IN 1902 THE BISHOP OF STEPNEY SAID JEWS WERE SWAMPING WHOLE AREAS ONCE POPULATED BY ENGLISH PEOPLE

THE MYTH OF WELCOME

Michael Howard used his family's Holocaust history to deflect criticism of Tory anti-immigrant policies. The left should make a more positive link between the past and the present, says TONY KUSHNER

In the 1950s, John F Kennedy proudly described America as 'a nation of immigrants'. In the same decade, attempting to justify the exclusion of Hungarian refugees, R A Butler, then Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated boldly that Britain was not an 'immigrant country'. The past, or myths of the past, have been particularly important in how the nation state has responded to those seeking entry from outside its borders. No liberal democracy wants to portray itself, on the one hand, as intolerant and mean-spirited, or, on the other, as a 'soft touch' and porous. In the British case, this circle has been squared by producing asylum and immigration policies which are, as a Labour White Paper of 1999 put it, 'Fairer, Faster and Firmer'.

If current asylum policies are increasingly firm, if not as fast as the right-wing tabloids and Labour leadership would like, the justification for 'fairer' has rested increasingly on instrumentalising the past. In its 1999 White Paper, for example, Labour paid tribute to 'Britain's longstanding tradition of giving shelter to those fleeing persecution' and recognised how 'refugees in turn have contributed much to our society and culture'. This is a rather comforting narrative of welcome and integration, part of what Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson labelled the 'myths we live by'. Indeed, Louise London, the foremost authority on immigration control procedures in the 20th century, has called this reference to past generosity a 'ritual invocation'. She has added, crucially, that we do not have adjectives so readily to hand to describe 'Britain's history of not taking in refugees' and, in their absence, suggests some of her own: 'shamefaced, hidden, denied, suppressed'.

Louise London was responding specifically to a contribution to an asylum debate in 2000, by Barbara Roche, then Labour Home Office minister. It is debatable whether reference to Roche's or other politicians' Jewish origins when they have dealt with such matters is relevant. The major interjection of Michael Howard into the area of asylum and immigration since he became leader of the Conservative Party in 2003 is not. Like Michael Portillo before him, Howard has moved from avoiding reference to his foreign/refugee/immigrant origins to placing them centre stage. Portillo, a student and fan of Benjamin Disraeli, realised, perhaps too late, that embracing little Englandism was always a rather crude option with his father's Spanish Republican origins. Portillo therefore decided to come out 'doubly', at least acknowledging if not embracing his past sexuality and, following Disraeli, taking pride in his family origins. Since 2003, Howard has tried to reinvent himself as more loveable, less the prince of darkness. Trying to overcome his past image of the Transylvanian vampire, Howard has, by reference to his father's family and their suffering in the Holocaust, attempted to convey a friendlier, cuddlier version of foreignness. His tactic appears to be moving from Ann Widdecombe's portrayal of Howard as 'something of the night' to the pathos of Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir, *Night*.

That Howard has come to terms publicly with his

refugee origins and has confronted the family losses inflicted by the Holocaust may seem, on the surface, commendable. His emotional references to his grandmother who died in a concentration camp are undoubtedly sincere. It would be naive, however, to suggest that Howard has not played on this background to (perversely) legitimise his hard-line intervention into the immigration and asylum debate.

There is an interesting discussion to be had on whether those of Jewish origin have an ethical imperative to be more sympathetic to those seeking asylum. Should Jews say that we, too, were victims of oppression and have benefited from being granted refuge and thus have a burden of responsibility to other vulnerable groups? Or is the logic of emancipation that Jews, or other minorities – ethnic, religious, and so on – have the right to be no different from those around them, for good or worse? Is it not dual standards to expect more compassion and humanity from those who have suffered or continue to suffer? What is not in question in the case of Howard, however, is that he is using his past to shield himself from any criticism of intolerance.

In January 2005 Howard took out a full page advert in the Sunday Telegraph entitled, 'I believe we must limit immigration'. Calling for, among other measures, an annual limit on immigration and quotas for asylum seekers, Howard was blunt: 'Some people say this is racist. It's not. It is common sense.' Indeed, like many politicians before him who have defended controls on the basis of defending 'good' race relations, Howard warned that 'Britain has reached a turning point. Our communities cannot absorb newcomers at today's pace. Immigration must be brought under control.'

The Labour Party's response to Howard's early use of immigration in the 2005 election campaign focused on what it saw as the impracticality of his proposals rather than their moral failings. In mainstream politics only the Liberal Democrats accused Howard of using the 'race card' in this extraordinary advert. This very possibility, however, was denied by Conservative, Howard Leigh, who, whilst congratulating Howard for 'hitting the spot', added that he was 'pleased that a Jewish person is dealing with it because we know he is doing it for the right reasons and can't be accused of being anti-immigration'. It would be nice to think that Jews are somehow immune from racism and xenophobia. Of course they are not. What is worrying, however, in relation to contemporary politics, is that there can be manipulation of this myth for unsavoury ends. Michael Howard is certainly playing it for all it is worth.

In his Sunday Telegraph advert, the Conservative leader states formulaically that 'Britain has always offered a home to genuine refugees and to families who want to work hard.' He adds a twist to this cliché by adding: 'I know – my family was one.' Here, Howard was repeating the dominant theme of his first speech as Conservative Party leader, given in Bournemouth in October 2004. Howard gave his followers 'ten words to remember': school discipline, more police, cleaner hospitals, lower taxes and,

following his failed predecessor in the last general election, William Hague, 'controlled immigration'.

Disraeli was regarded by his Conservative supporters during his life and afterwards as the 'alien patriot'. Howard in his Bournemouth speech attempted to emulate this formulation using the memory of the Second World War particularly to meld British and Holocaust history, in order to emphasise his patriotism: 'Everything I have and everything I am I owe to this country. I was born in July 1941, two weeks after Hitler invaded Russia. Those were very dark days. In the next four years millions of people were killed. Many lost their lives on the battlefield, at sea and in the air. Many lost their lives in cities blitzed from the air. And many lost their lives in the concentration camps set up by one of the cruellest tyrannies the world has ever known.'

Howard then brought the story of his family within the wider narrative of the conflict, wishing to cloud further the distinction between his insider and outsider status: 'My grandmother was one of those killed in the concentration camps. If it hadn't been for Winston Churchill, and if it hadn't been for Britain, I would have been one of them too. That's why when I say I owe everything I am to this country, I really do mean it. I owe my life to it. My father told me Britain was the best country in the world. I think it was. And I think it still is.'

In this speech and in his later advert, Howard was at obvious risk of advocating immigration and asylum policies that would have excluded his father, Bernat Hecht, who left Romania in 1939 and settled in south Wales. Howard and his Conservative allies have inevitably responded that their policies have been designed to let in 'deserving' and 'genuine' cases such as Hecht and to keep out the 'bogus' who drain Britain's scarce welfare and social resources. Genuine and deserving, however, were rarely the terms used to describe Jews escaping the Continent during the 1930s. And those from eastern Europe were seen as particularly undesirable, especially by the British government who feared that these 'unassimilated' Jews would bring problems with them, including antisemitism.

The British state apparatus was designed to keep out the 'wrong sort of refugee'. Continuing the racial and class prejudice of the turn of the century which culminated in the 1905 Aliens Act, it was Jews from countries such as Poland and Romania that were to be kept out at all costs – middle class Jews from Germany were seen as far less of a problem. Hecht could get in not because he was given refugee status but because his relatives in south Wales provided sponsorship for him. What in fact the Hecht family case illustrates is that every refugee is also, inevitably, an economic migrant. Millions of people in the 20th century and beyond have had to flee persecution. They have also had to make a living for themselves in their place of refuge in order to survive.

Howard's malevolent, if all too predictable, attempt to use the 'race card' by tapping into contemporary asylum seeker phobia reveals the importance of manipulating memory for political gains. The Holocaust has become the ethical story of the 20th century, often used, as the Chapman Brothers rather cruelly put it, as 'moral potty training for adults'. Refugees from Nazism, and their earlier co-religionists leaving Czarist oppression, are now widely perceived as 'classic' refugees from the past



Britannia, 'I can no longer offer shelter to fugitives. England is not a free country'. Cartoon 1906, *The Aliens Act at Work*

whose genuineness is beyond question.

The rhetoric of positioning 'genuine refugees' against 'bogus asylum seekers'/'economic migrants' has become standard for both major British political parties. Either directly or indirectly it makes reference to persecuted Jews in the first half of the 20th century and places them in the first category. There have been those, including Hugo Gryn, and many on the left-liberal side of British Jewry and beyond, who have wanted to use that Jewish refugee experience, of entry and exclusion, to argue for more humane and open policies towards today's asylum seekers. They (we, I) have pointed out that in the 1900s and '30s Jewish aliens were contrasted unfavourably to the earlier 'genuine' refugees, the Huguenots, and yet these Protestants themselves were often regarded with suspicion at the time. It is only hindsight that seems to be able to give the epitaph 'genuine' to refugees and that is often too late for those seeking asylum.

It would be naive, however, to believe that the battle over history and memory with regard to refugees has so far been won by the progressives. There are some who believe that heritage and memory work are always reactionary. The late Raphael Samuel believed otherwise. I do not think Samuel was wrong. Nevertheless, progressives have to recognise that there are profoundly conservative tendencies in the worlds of history and heritage. I have tried to illustrate through the case study of Howard how memory and history have been and continue to be exploited negatively in the critical areas of asylum and immigration policies. Those wanting to reverse the increasingly ugly and destructive moral panic that exists over refugees have to recognise that the past, and its utilisation, really matters. Addressing history and memory is thus not a luxury for those on the left; it is an essential part of the battle to restore dignity and humanity to the debate. We need to remember the past, as Howard has belatedly done, but to do so in a way that connects to the present and not in a manner that creates an insurmountable barrier to it. As Auschwitz survivor, Hugo Gryn, argued in his last speech, given to the Refugee Council: 'How you are with the one to whom you owe nothing, that is a grave test and not only as an index of our tragic past.'

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His most recent book is *We Europeans? Mass-Observation, 'Race' and British Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Ashgate, January 2005). It is the first study of ordinary people in Britain and their responses to and experiences of ethnic diversity.

Guilt trip

The memory of the Holocaust victims is being betrayed by the Israeli government turning it into an instrument of foreign policy, says **URI AVNERY**

It was an impressive ceremony: the UN Secretary-General, presidents, ministers, prime ministers and notables from 40 countries gathered in Jerusalem to inaugurate the new Holocaust museum of Yad Vashem - only a few months after the mighty of the earth had gathered to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz.

From the well-chosen - as usual - words from Joschka Fischer, the German Foreign Minister, to the tortured - as usual - face of Eli Wiesel, the Holocaust professional, it was an appropriate commemoration of the historic crime.

But it was also a great victory for Israeli diplomacy. The chiefs of our Foreign Office openly boasted of this political achievement. The foreign guests met with the Israeli leaders and thus lent their indirect but clear support to Ariel Sharon's policy.

Altogether, it underlined the ambiguity of the Holocaust commemoration at this time.

When one of the leading Nazis imprisoned in Nuremberg first learned the full dimensions of the Holocaust, he exclaimed: 'This will not be forgotten for a thousand years!' He was right. The Holocaust was indeed a unique crime in history.

It is difficult for foreigners to understand that for us in Israel the Shoah is not just a thing of the past. It is a part of the present. An example: at the time of the museum opening, I was flying back from Europe. In the airplane I got into conversation with an Israeli professor I had not known before, and he told me about the various stages of his life. I noticed that he passed quickly over several years of his childhood. When I asked him, he told me that he had been in Theresienstadt. He did not go into detail, so I did not ask what happened to his family.

From the concentration camp of Theresienstadt, most prisoners were sent on to the death camps. My aunt committed suicide there, her husband was sent from there to Auschwitz and was never heard of again. I remember this uncle laughing when my father decided to flee from Germany in 1933. 'What can happen to us here?' he asked, 'After all, Germany is a civilized country!'

The impact of the Holocaust is not restricted to the generation of the survivors. A young writer once told me that both her parents had spent time in the death camps. 'I did not know that,' she recounted, 'They never spoke about it. But when I was a child, I knew there was an awful secret in our family, a secret so terrible that it was forbidden to ask about it. That filled my whole childhood world with dread. Even now I still feel anxious and insecure.'

Almost every day we hear stories that are connected with the Shoah. One cannot escape it. One should not try to escape it, either. Forgetting the Holocaust is a kind of betrayal of the victims.

The question is: *how* to remember? *what* to remember?

After World War II, the Shoah became the center of Jewish consciousness. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the philosopher who was an observant orthodox Jew, told me once: 'The Jewish religion died 200 years ago. Now there is nothing that unifies the Jews around the world apart from the Holocaust.' That is natural, because every Jew knows that if they had

fallen into the hands of the Nazis, their life would probably have ended in a gas chamber. We, in Palestine at the time, were quite close to that when the German Afrika Corps under Erwin Rommel approached the gates of our country.

There was no need for a conclave of the Elders of Zion in order to turn the Holocaust into a central instrument in the struggle for the creation of Israel. It was self-evident. The Zionists had argued right from the beginning that in the modern world there can be no existence for the Jews without a state of their own. The Shoah lent this argument an irresistible force.

It caused the Jews in the State of Israel, which was created in war and had to fight for its life, to crave total security, and so we became a military power. It is impossible to understand both the good and the bad in Israel without taking into account the impact of the Shoah on our national and personal consciousness. It was none other than the late Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, who told this to his compatriots.

The centrality of the Holocaust in Jewish consciousness caused the Jews to insist on its absolute exclusiveness. We are shocked and furious when somebody tries to remind us that the Nazis exterminated other communities too, such as the Roma, the homosexuals and the mentally ill. We get very angry when somebody comes and compares 'our' Holocaust with other genocides: Armenians, Cambodians, Tutsis in Rwanda and others. Really! How can one compare?

The Holocaust was indeed unique in many respects. Nothing compares with the organized extermination of a whole people by industrial means, with the participation of all the organs of a modern state. It may be that Stalin murdered no fewer, and perhaps even more human beings than Hitler, but his victims were drawn from all the peoples and classes of the Soviet Union, and were not subjected to a process of industrialized extermination.

But the concept of the exclusiveness of the Holocaust can lead to despicable perversions. Many among us argue that no moral restraints apply to us, because 'after what they did to us' nobody can teach us what is or is not permitted. 'After the Shoah' we have the duty to do everything to save Jewish lives, even by ignoble means. We are allowed to use the memory of the Holocaust as an instrument of our foreign policy, since Israel is the 'state of the Holocaust survivors'. We are allowed to stifle all criticism of our behavior, since it is self-evident that all critics are antisemites. We are allowed to blow up every insignificant incident in order to prove that 'antisemitism is on the rise' in the world and raise the alarm.

I want to argue that now, 60 years after the end of the Holocaust, it is time to grow out of all this.

The time has come to turn the memory of the Holocaust from an exclusively Jewish property into a world-wide human possession.

The mourning, the anger and the shame must be turned into a universal message against all forms of genocide.

The struggle against antisemitism must become a part of the fight against all kinds of racism, whether directed against Muslims in Europe or Blacks in America, Kurds in Turkey or Palestinians in Israel, or foreign workers everywhere.

The Jews' long history as the victims of murderous persecution must not cause us to wrap ourselves in a cult of self-pity, but, on the contrary,

Unity is the goal

Dear friends

Following some of my updates, some friends send me messages reminding me of the worrying phenomena of growing antisemitism in today's world. It is worrying indeed, even beyond the erroneous identification made between anti-Israeli policies, or even anti-Zionism, and antisemitism. Imagine a crowd somewhere in a European football stadium, shouting antisemitic slogans, waving flags of hatred, and cursing a Jewish player, or an Israeli team. Imagine the waves of protest from Jewish circles over the world and official protest from Israel.

Well, in my country, in my town, last night, such scenes of hatred were seen big time: scenes which would not have put to shame the most radical assemblies of neo-Nazis and other racist groups. Except that the targeted group was not Jewish, but Arab. The fans of the Israeli football club Betar Jerusalem are known for their lively conduct during games and around them. Scenes of violence frequently occur when they have grievances against the score of their team every day of the year. Now imagine what happens when a league game against one of the two Arab clubs - Sakhnin and Nazareth - in the Israeli Premier League takes place.

Last week the national team had two important games here in Israel against two of its international rivals in Group 4 of the World Cup 2006 qualifying games: Ireland and France. Both teams were considered to have an advantage over the Israeli team, and the draws were considered a fair achievement for the Israeli team. The goal which brought the Israeli team the draw against Ireland was scored by the Arab Sakhnin player, Abbas Suan; against France, the other Israeli Arab player in the national team, Walid Badir, headed a late equaliser to grab a point just seven minutes from time and got Israel the coveted draw.

Last night, in Tel Aviv, in the same stadium where those two international games last week took place, at the scheduled league meeting between Betar Jerusalem and Suan's club, Sakhnin, Suan was supposed to be received by everyone as the star of the national team. The organisers, from the host Betar club, wasted no effort in trying to impose a sporting nature on the charged clash, with the announcer congratulating Israeli international Abbas Suan, 'in the name of the tens of thousands of Betar supporters', for his equaliser against Ireland just over a week before. 'Welcome him,' enthused the announcer, but the applause was drowned out by a huge chorus of boos from the Betar stands. Suan may be a national team star but in Jerusalem, he is just another Arab soccer player. The score this season

should encourage us to take the lead in the world-wide struggle against racism, prejudice and stereotypes that begin with incitement by vile demagogues and can end in genocide.

Such a people would truly be 'a light unto the nations.'

This article originally appeared on the Gush Shalom website: www.gush-shalom.org/

between the two clubs, both currently struggling at the bottom of the league, is in favour of the Arab team. It's bad enough for a Jewish club to beat the most patriotic team that represents the eternal capital of the state but for an Arab club to do so twice in a single season is just too much. At least 400 among the 5,000 Betar supporters were shouting: 'Let the town of Sakhnin be burnt down,' 'We hate all Arabs,' and worse. To the cameras of the various Israeli TV channels, Betar fans shouted: 'We'd rather lose 0-10 to Ireland than have an Arab score a goal in our name! He doesn't represent us!'

Some apologetics were sounded in talk shows this morning. We are asked to understand that football hooliganism is a familiar phenomenon. 'Four hundred,' said one Betar supporter on TV this morning, 'is less than 10%.' I am not sure such arguments would have satisfied Jewish protests against antisemitic riots elsewhere.

Yet just as we are asked to regard antisemitism as a unique form of racism, so we should pay attention to growing Israeli xenophobia and particularly to Arab-hatred amongst the Jewish population. It is a developing phenomenon, not to be underestimated. Violence grows among youth; people are stabbed to death during daily rows over a parking space or the behaviour of neighbours' dogs. Yesterday a teenager who came to Israel from France two years ago was hospitalised after being battered by her classmates, boys and girls, following a row over a mobile phone. She told the TV interviewer she was considering going back to France: 'There is prominent antisemitism growing there,' she said, 'but at least I wasn't battered like this.'

The sport portfolio in the Israeli government is placed in the hands of famous Minister of Education and Culture Limor Livnat, who has recently ordered the 'legacy of [assassinated Israeli Minister of Tourism] Rehav'am Zeevi,' who founded his radical nationalistic party on a platform of 'transfer' (in plain terms 'ethnic cleansing') of the Arab population of Israel, to be part of the official school curriculum. Stand-up comedians on stage and TV in Israel are still ridiculing her enthusiastic jump - to the point of harassment - all over Israeli sportsmen who gained medals for Israel in the recent Athens Olympic games. What, do you think she would have had to say about last night's riots against Arabs? You have guessed right. Nothing. She, like all her other fellow ministers, suddenly lost her voice. Small wonder: they must save it for crying their protest against the next antisemitic incident somewhere in the world.

For better days
Avraham Oz

Israel's national football team has Arab heroes but at club level it's a different story, writes **Avraham Oz**

Avraham Oz is a professor in the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of Haifa

Farewell to a peacemaker

Maxim Ghilan 1931-2005



Maxim Ghilan, who died in Tel Aviv on 2nd April, was a man who came from the fires and storms of 20th-century war, through hope and disillusion with the State of Israel to work tirelessly for a just peace in the Middle East. A former manual worker turned journalist, translator, poet and political analyst, he will be

remembered by Jewish Socialists as an amateur diplomat, in Paris, at ease chatting to old printers in a 10th Arrondissement café or introducing us to world leaders like Yasser Arafat.

Born in Lille, France, in 1931, Maxim was five years old when the family moved to Barcelona, for his father's work, just as the Spanish Civil War broke out, in which his father was to be killed by Franco's fascists. In 1944, he, his sister, mother and grandmother went to Palestine, where the teenage Maxim joined the anti-British underground Lehi – the 'Stern Gang' – before serving with the Haganah in the Independence war.

Some former underground fighters found difficulty emerging from ideological confusion and adjusting to statehood. Former Sternist Yitzhak Shamir, enlisted by Mossad, rose through its shadowy world of state terror eventually to become Foreign Minister then Prime Minister. Scheib-Eldad became a notorious racist fascist. Nathan Yelin Mor swung over to advocating Arab-Jewish unity, calling soon after the 1967 war for an Israel-Palestine federation with Jerusalem as its shared capital. Maxim Ghilan was arrested in 1953 in a crackdown on nationalist conspirators. Accused of possessing 'secret documents', he was held for 14 months at Atlit prison. Meeting Palestinian prisoners, he was shocked to witness their brutal treatment by the security police, and began to rethink his outlook.

In 1956 he was among 'usual suspects' briefly detained again, after the Kastner assassination. Rudolf Kastner had brought embarrassment to the government by losing a libel action over accusations that he collaborated with the Nazis in wartime Hungary. A police informer was sentenced for his killing.

In 1958, Maxim helped form Koach Yotzem, Initiative Force, calling for equality between Israel's citizens, and for Israel to take its place in the Middle East. He joined Uri Avneri, Shalom Cohen and Sabri Jiryis to launch the Israeli Committee for Algerian Freedom, and campaigned against military government in Israel's Arab areas.

In 1966, having become editor of an irreverently sensational magazine called *Bul*, Maxim was jailed again, along with his publisher, for defying the censors to expose how Israeli agents assisted the kidnap of Moroccan trade unionist Mehdi Ben Barka

in France. Ben Barka was tortured to death by Moroccan secret police. When the story was leaked abroad, the *Bul* case became an international scandal, and famous figures campaigned for the release of the journalists.

After working on Uri Avneri's magazine *Haolam Hazeh* (This World), Maxim came to London where he wrote *How Israel Lost Its Soul* (Penguin, 1969). But it was in Paris in 1971, with Hungarian-Jewish refugee Louis Marton, that he launched the journal *Israel and Palestine*, and began his vital work of establishing Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, and involving other Arabs and diaspora Jews. The journal became renowned for thoughtful articles and inside stories rarely found anywhere else, not just on the the Occupied Territories and the Middle East, but on, for instance, Ethiopian Jews. Maxim Ghilan's growing circle included the Egyptian Jewish communist Henri Curiel (assassinated in 1976) and several Palestinians, among them Said Hammami, assassinated in London in 1978. Working for peace was a dangerous profession.

Shortly before the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Maxim had invited Jewish dissidents from several countries, including members of the Jewish Socialists' Group, to a gathering in Paris at which, as bombs were falling on Beirut, the International Jewish Peace Union was launched. We were cheered to hear that Issam Sartawi and Matti Peled held a joint press conference, and three prominent diaspora Jewish figures – former French president Pierre Mendes France, Nahum Goldmann, and Philip Klutznik – signed an appeal against Israel's war. How much of a hand Maxim Ghilan had in this we don't know. Dr Goldman, former president of both the World Jewish Congress and World Zionist Congress, didn't attend our shabby little gatherings above the Israel and Palestine printshop. But he was not entrusting his concern about Israel and the Jewish future to wealthy and 'important' people. After his death we learned that Goldman had discreetly funded Maxim's work.

More followed: public meetings in Paris and UN NGO conferences in Geneva and Vienna. Maxim Ghilan convened and assisted Jewish and Israeli delegations and made sure we met leading Palestinians. In 1987 he was the only non-Palestinian invited to the Palestinian National Council in Algiers, from which began the historic process towards recognising the State of Israel as the price for Palestinian freedom and peace. That the promise has yet to be attained is no fault of Maxim Ghilan's.

After the 1993 Oslo agreement, Maxim Ghilan was permitted to return to Israel; threats of prosecution for his 'illegal contacts' were removed on the intervention of then Israeli Minister Shulamit Aloni. Last year he had the sad but proud duty of attending the funeral of a friend for whose return he had fought, Yasser Arafat. Maxim's own funeral at Kibbutz Einat on 8th April was attended by, among others, member of Knesset Azmi Bishara and novelist Amos Kenan.

Maxim Ghilan lived neither for riches nor fame, but he left a rich heritage of friends.

Charlie Pottins

THE FIRST BLOODY SUNDAY

On Sunday 9th January 1905, columns of working men and women with their children set off to the Winter Palace in St Petersburg to present a petition to His Imperial Majesty Czar Nicholas II asking for better conditions and political reforms. Like the weavers who had assembled for their rights in St Peters Fields, Manchester, almost a century before, they came as if they were going on a holiday procession, whole families wearing their cleanest clothes.

They started the morning kneeling in prayer, amid lightly drifting snow. Forming up to march in an orderly manner, they carried holy icons, national flags, and portraits of the Czar and Czarina, and sang not revolutionary songs but favourite hymns. They were led by a priest, Father George Gapon, whom they trusted would receive a hearing from those in power.

A year before, Gapon, a former prison chaplain, had persuaded Interior Minister Plehve to let him try to set up something which Moscow secret police chief Zubatov had introduced: a legal organisation where workers could meet socially, organise mutual aid funds, even seek improvements in conditions, while remaining loyal to the Czar and safe from revolutionary influences. This Assembly of St Petersburg Factory Workers excluded anyone who wasn't Russian and Christian. Numerous police agents ensured its assembly halls excluded troublemaking Jews, students and 'politics'. But, like the Zubatov unions before them, they could not exclude class struggle.

At the end of 1904, workers at St Petersburg's Putilov ironworks approached the management to negotiate over conditions and pay. On 2nd January, believing their representatives were being victimised, and finding that the bosses would not listen, the Putilov's entire 13,000 workforce swept out of the works, past the police who were trying to restrain them. With Gapon's help, workers drew up a list of demands, including an eight-hour day, increased minimum pay, better sanitary facilities and free medical aid. They wanted a recognised bargaining committee and no arbitrary dismissals. Groups of Putilov workers toured nearby shipyards and factories, persuading other workers to join them. By the end of the week, almost all St Petersburg's manufacturing, from steel and textiles to furniture and chocolates, had stopped. Father Gapon proposed that they should assemble at their halls and march to the Winter Palace with a petition.

They would ask the Czar to grant popular representation, release of political and religious prisoners, freedom to form unions and co-operatives, state education at primary level, and separation of church from state. They also called for an end to the unpopular war with Japan which had dragged Russia to ruin. 'Thy name will be engraved in our hearts and in those of posterity forever,' promised the petition, signed by 'George Gapon, priest, Ivan Vasimov, worker', and thousands who could barely write their names. Otherwise, 'we will die here in this square.... Let our lives be a sacrifice for suffering Russia.' This was the only wish the Czar would grant that day.

The authorities didn't rely on priests or prayers. As the working people marched peacefully, thousands of police and troops from elite guard regiments were in position and reinforcements arriving. Near the Narva Arch, the workers were ordered to halt; but they carried on, perhaps believing that their moral will would prevail. A cavalry squadron galloped in to disperse them but they regrouped. Rifleman fired eight volleys into the crowd before they fled, Father Gapon with them, leaving a dozen dead and more wounded. Across the capital, columns from the Vyborg and St Petersburg quarters converging on the Troitsky Bridge, had the same reception. Shocked and terrified, people ran for their lives, leaving comrades bleeding in the snow.

As people struggled home, some workers went to Palace Square where they were joined by students, supporters, and people who came to see what was happening. Troops were ordered to clear the area. People jeered that they should be fighting the Japanese or called on them to come over to the people. The Preobrazhensky Guards opened fire on the crowd and kept firing until everyone had either fallen or fled. People tried to help their wounded friends escape. The officers took their men to St Petersburg's main street, the Nevsky Prospect, concentrating their fire at the crossroads where the crowds were thickest. On Vasilevsky Island that afternoon some students threw up makeshift barricades and fought running battles with police. By evening, order was restored. The imperial capital was quiet except for the weeping of those who had lost dear ones. Officials estimated 96 dead and more than 330 wounded, one tenth of whom died later from their wounds. 'There is no God, and no Czar!' cried Father Gapon. A week of illusion was over. A century of wars and revolutions had begun.

The entire Russian Empire was shaken, all its peoples' discontents bursting forth. 'Comrades! On the streets of St Petersburg the first barricades have

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the first stirrings of revolution in the Czarist Russian Empire. **CHARLIE POTTINS** describes how it came about

Bundists honour their comrades who died in 1905



been built ... the great day has come! The revolution has come ... Arm yourselves!', urged Rafael Abramowitz, a leader of the Jewish Workers' Bund, who had left St Petersburg to report to a Central Committee meeting in Dvinsk.

On 10th January the Bund and its allies called a general strike. Workers were already out in St Petersburg and Moscow, and strikes rolled from Warsaw and Vilna (11th January), Riga and Kiev (12th January), Lodz, Minsk and other cities by the 13th, and, by the end of week as far as Batum and Tbilisi in the Caucasus, Samara and Kazan. Altogether, half a million workers went on strike – Russian and Pole, Jew and Lett, Georgian and Finn – and their unrest was shared by students and professionals.

In Riga, the Latvian capital, a meeting of Lettish, Jewish, Russian and Ukrainian Social Democrats resolved to campaign for a constituent assembly and political freedom. Some 15,000 people, some armed with pistols, marched on 13th January. Police and troops opened fire, killing at least 40 people and wounding 200. Crowds fleeing across the frozen River Dvina were drowned as the ice gave way.

In the latter part of the 19th century, capitalism, having spread unevenly around the whole world, entered a new stage. Great powers emerged. Small firms in national markets were overshadowed by giant combinations of industry and capital, commanding governments, their fleets and armies, to carve world markets and materials into empires. Bestriding continents with railways, telegraphs, soldiers and settlers, the United States and Russia reached the Pacific. US power crossed to 'liberate' Spain's Philippines colony, and eye China. Russian interests, keeping forces in Manchuria after the Boxer Rebellion, coveted neighbouring Korea, where they faced a new upstart rival: Japan.

The Russian Empire, though still feared in Europe, was backward. Its autocratic regime and army rested on the backs of poor peasants barely out of serfdom. Its institutions maintained outdated prejudices, notably the segregation and persecution of Russia's Jews. Russia's educated and business classes had little say in politics; its rapidly growing working class had no rights at all. Huge modern factories established by foreign capital stood surrounded by insanitary slums. Only the means of repression – secret police, prison exile, state-sponsored pogroms – foreshadowed later developments. That repression, and the advanced ideas, which spread among intellectuals and working people despite the efforts of police and priests, even secretly penetrating some army units and ships.

The brutal weight of repression was sometimes lightened by inefficiency, confusion and corruption. A police chief in Ekaterinoslav earned praise and promotion by uncovering and closing illicit printing presses each year, until it emerged that he

kept setting them up to make his name with raids. Nowadays we'd say he was meeting targets.

The Japanese government sent a note to the Imperial Russian government about timber concessions that a retired officer turned speculator, Bezobrazov, had obtained along Korea's Yalu river, claimed by Japan. Bezobrazov had friends in the Admiralty and court, and the Russian government took no notice of the Japanese, trusting that its forces in Manchuria and warships at Port Arthur would hold them away.

On 26th January 1904, Japanese torpedo boats attacked Russia's fleet at Port Arthur, sinking or crippling most of it before sailing home. 'Asiatic treachery!' screamed the conservative St Petersburg press, vowing that Russia would soon be avenged. A Moscow University professor, Prince Trubetskoi, said Russia was defending Europe against the 'yellow danger, the new hordes of Mongols'. But the Japanese army was German-trained, and its Navy equipped and trained by Britain. Seeing what havoc its new Whitehead torpedos had wreaked in Port Arthur, The Times said Japan's 'act of daring' would earn 'a place of honour in naval annals'. Who would foresee Pearl Harbour?

Russian officers called the Japanese 'yellow monkeys'. They assumed Russia's huge army and gold reserve would prevail. A brief mood of patriotism swept through the middle class, dreaming of 'destiny in the east'. But Russia's army was scattered across a huge empire, larger forces holding rebellious Poland and the Baltic areas than could be moved to the Far East. Economically, while British and American finance bankrolled the Japanese, Russia was devastated by the war. Firms profiting from military contracts were outnumbered by those hit by disruption of Asian trade. Workers were laid off, textiles left standing in the Trans-Siberian Railway's sidings as it struggled to convey military supplies.

Though some Russian units fought bravely, they were badly led and poorly equipped, and morale fell. Foreign observers reported that the only time senior commanders led from the front was fleeing ahead of their men after the Battle of Mukden (March 1905).

With one fleet lying at the bottom of the Yellow Sea and other ships bottled up in the Black Sea by Turkish batteries and international treaty, Russia despatched a fleet from the Baltic to the Pacific war zone. Panicky over rumours of saboteurs and Japanese gunboats, the Russians sank a British trawler in the North Sea, engendering war talk and harassment from shadowing Royal Navy ships, before sailing around Africa. With scarcely a port willing to shelter them for coaling, they endured tropical sickness, hardship and mutiny. By the time they reached the Pacific, Port Arthur had fallen, on 20th December 1904, two weeks before Bloody Sunday. Heading for Vladivostok, the doomed fleet entered the Tsushima Strait and the jaws of the Japanese navy. It was destroyed on 14th May 1905 and its admiral was captured. Russia secretly accepted the good offices of US President Theodore Roosevelt to sue for peace.

Talk of Japanese agents in Europe was not entirely groundless. Colonel Akashi, former military attaché in St Petersburg, had travelled to Sweden to meet Finnish, Polish and Russian revolutionaries. Finnish radical Konni Zilliacus saw the war as an opportunity. He urged a united manifesto to the Czar, propaganda among the troops, and arms for

the revolution. He thought Japanese forces could free political prisoners from Siberia. Polish Socialist Party leader Jozef Pilsudski sought support in Japan to raise a Polish Legion.

More advanced than Russia in some respects, its western subject peoples smarted under social and national oppression. Poland's 11.3 million people, less than 8% of the Russian Empire's population, contributed 25% of its industrial output and 150 million roubles a year to the imperial treasury. But Poles were denied even local councils and were excluded from government jobs. The schools were forbidden to teach Catholicism or the Polish language. Some 60% of Polish army recruits could neither read nor write.

Wealthy Polish manufacturers and landlords tempered national resentment with appreciation of Russian order and markets, hoping to share in the spoils of empire. Dmowski's National Democrats (Endeks) opposed Pilsudski's adventurism, focusing their nationalism against Germans, or safer still, Poland's Jews, even though many Jews were serving at the front in Manchuria. Besides those sent to war, some 100,000 workers in Poland were laid off when Asian markets closed and those still working faced wage cuts.

Following Bloody Sunday, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the more marxist Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, and the Bund called strikes. School students went on strike, demanding teaching in their own language. During a three-day general strike in Lodz, barricades went up and the Governor was captured until troops rescued him. With their leader's nationalist, military outlook, and hopes on Japan, PPS armed squads ambushed troops and police on Warsaw streets. This led to nervous, trigger-happy soldiers shooting people indiscriminately but did not provide workers with means to take power or defend themselves. Warsaw was placed under siege on 17th January; 64 people were killed and 69 wounded by government troops.

At the Socialist International Congress in Amsterdam in 1904, the veteran Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov embraced Japanese socialist Sen Katayama, to rapturous applause from delegates. If the Czarist government defeated Japan, Plekhanov declared, the losers would be the Russian people and the subject nations. As internationalists the social democrats could neither go along with liberal patriotism nor tie their hopes to Japanese victory. As it turned out, Russia's defeat could be entrusted to the rulers who had taken the country to war in the first place. But if the workers' struggle hastened an end to the war, so much the better. In that sense, socialists were 'defeatists'.

What made strikes in Russia into revolution was not just their extent or the adoption of political demands, still less the violence and destruction (at which the forces of order always excelled), but the way workers progressed from immediate economic concerns to lead society, creating organs which took on functions normally reserved for government.

At Ivanovo-Voznesensk, a textile city north-east of Moscow, a government factory inspector advised discontented workers to form an assembly. In May they came out on strike demanding shorter hours, a higher minimum wage, paid maternity leave, factory nurseries, freedom to meet and the right to read newspapers during breaks. On 20th May they



A Bundist self-defence group in Odessa with three of their slain comrades, 1905

voted to set up a workers' militia to keep order and combat hooligans of the monarchist, antisemitic Black Hundreds.

The strike committee found itself called upon to regulate food prices in the shops and to decide if printers could produce official notices requested by the Governor. With Cossack reinforcements, the authorities tried to stop the workers from meeting. But the strike lasted until July, when employers agreed to pay rises, paid maternity leave and other demands. Meanwhile the workers' committee had adopted a new name: soviet, meaning 'council'.

In Lodz, after soldiers shot demonstrators, workers led by the Polish Socialists, Social Democrats and the Bund resisted government troops for three days in June 1905. Some 300 people were killed and 1,000 wounded. Trouble spread across Poland and the troops had to be reinforced from 250,000 to 300,000.

Odessa in the south, a boom city in the late 19th century, had been quiet at the start of 1905. Two Bolsheviks who tried to start a strike in the railway workshops after Bloody Sunday were handed over to police. But that spring political unrest and union activity grew among dockers and doctors, sailors and seamstresses.

Many had come to Odessa in prosperous times, among them Jewish workers who found employment in factories and the waterfront. Bundist militants escaping police crackdowns in Vilna came too. Bolsheviks were gaining influence among the railway workers, and there were Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries too. At the urging of the workers, and on the initiative of the Bund, the different factions in Odessa began meeting to discuss a common strategy. Odessa city council, which had tried to send money to Bloody Sunday victims, asked Dr Mikhail Bogomolets to report on workers' conditions and health in the Peresyp district. His detailed report called for new sewers, improvements in factory conditions, enforcement of public health laws, workers' participation in safety measures, trade union rights and democratic local government. Dr Bogomolets, a Bolshevik, did more than recommend reforms. He and his colleagues saw that workers from the Peresyp came to the meetings.

Politics breathed fresh life into union activity. On 6th May over 10,000 workers walked out of Peresyp's

An early Bundist group in Rovno, Ukraine, around 1905



engineering plants and shipyards, and strikes spread. Demands included canteen facilities, sickness benefits, free medical care, an end to bosses using offensive language and an end to the war.

On 15th June, after clashes between striking workers and the police and Black Hundreds, which left scores dead and many buildings blazing, the Czar placed Odessa under martial law. Into this port sailed the battleship Potemkin, seized by its crew after a row over maggot-ridden food. They brought ashore the body of a comrade killed by the officers.

Konstantin Feldman, a student, went down to the port.

'Where are you going?'

'To the free revolutionary ship,' I answered.

'And who may you be, a Social Democrat?'

'Yes.'

'And what proof do you have to show?'

'Social Democrats don't have passports to show, they let us go to rot in Siberia and prison without them.'

'Well get in with us.'

He stepped down into the cutter alongside the young sailor who had challenged him, a craggy-faced Ukrainian whom the men introduced as their commander, 25-year old Matyushenko. Two other agitators arrived on board the Potemkin, one of them a Bundist. The sailors gathered for a mass meeting. Feldman told them about the workers' struggles all over Russia, and said workers were dying with the slogan 'Death or Freedom!' It was taken up in thundering chorus. Then the Bundist spoke of brotherhood and equality, of the solidarity of the proletariat, of the Social Democrats marching at their head. 'And hand in hand with the proletariat of all lands, you sailors, their brothers, give a mighty cheer: Hurrah for socialism! Hurrah for freedom!' A mighty hurrah resounded.

But then the bell rang for dinner. 'The sailors invited us to join them. We were glad to accept their invitations, for we had eaten nothing all the morning. Surrounded by a dense crowd of sailors,

we went below. We were offered a little glass of vodka, then we were seated on long benches besides the sailors. The faces of all were excited. Our hearts too were throbbing joyfully. Can it be it's not a dream? Can the freedom of Russia be so near?'

'I longed to shake hands; I could have hugged them all in a burst of holiday feeling. And at that instant I felt someone squeezing my hand. I turned round. It was the Bundist. He too was feeling as I did. We stood in silence, looking into each others eyes, and one of us murmured, "Can it be...?" That simple phrase said it all.'

Onshore, as Odessa citizens gathered to cheer the Potemkin, the powers that be ordered a massacre, troops shooting people down mercilessly on the steps as depicted in Eisenstein's famous film. Over 1,000 were killed. At the urging of Bolsheviks and Bundists, the Potemkin sailors replied by shelling a theatre where the reactionaries were meeting. But one ship could not take on the whole Russian army and navy, though when the Black Sea fleet steamed up, the Potemkin, signalling to them, 'Join us', was able to sail through.

The reactionaries had not finished. In October, even as the Czar proclaimed limited freedoms and a limited parliament, the Duma, they launched a bloody antisemitic pogrom in Odessa lasting three days, and killing 800 people. Neither old people nor babies were spared. 'The Jews want freedom? We'll show them what freedom is!' said Neidhardt, Odessa's City Governor. Such 'spontaneous' pogroms, better organised and better armed than the revolution, spread across Russia, though not where the socialists were stronger, Moscow or St Petersburg, where a young fellow called Bronstein, better known as Trotsky, was chairing the Soviet.

To change the world you not only had to down tools, but take up arms, to know what you were up against. Russia had given the world a glimpse of things to come: the dream of solidarity on Potemkin and the nightmare of the Odessa steps massacre and pogroms.

THE INTERNATIONALE

The Internationale was popularised as the song of the Paris communards of 1871. It has since been translated and sung by workers' movements in many countries. The song urges the workers to rise up and destroy the society that violently oppresses them. 'So comrades, come rally, and the last fight let us face. The Internationale unites the human race'. Jewish workers in Eastern Europe sang it in Yiddish on May Day parades. Here is a Yiddish transliteration of the song.

Shteyt oyf ir ale ver vi shklafn
In hunger lebt ir un in noyt
Der gayst, er kokht, er ruft tsu vafn
In shlakht undz firn iz er greyt

Di velt fun gvald-tatn un laydn
Tseshtern veln mir un dan
Fun frayhey, glaykhey a gan-eyden
Bashafn vet der arbetsman

Refrain (x2)

Dos vet zayn shoyen der letster
Un antshedener shtrayt
Mit dem internatsyonal
Shteyt oyf ir arbetslayt

Neyn keyner vet undz nit bafrayen
Nit got aleyn un nit keyn held
Mit undzer eygenem kley-zayin
A retung brengen mir der velt

Arop dem yokh, genug shoyen gelitn
Genug fargosn blut un shveys
Tseblozt dos fayer, lomir shmidn
Kol-zman dos ayzn iz nokh heys

Refrain (x2)

Der arbetsman vet zayn mamshole
Farshpraytn oyf der gantse velt
Un parizitn di mapole
Bakumn veln fun zayn shverd

Di groyse shturem-teg, zey veln
Nor fun tiranen shreklekh zayn
Zey kenen ober nit farshteln
Far undz di hele zunen-shayn

Refrain (x2)

JUST SAY NO

On Thursday I learnt an important lesson: it is fine to become friends with those among us who are disabled by a belief in the Bible, but you should never become so friendly that you allow yourself to be dragged along to evangelical dinners. Last week, through an evangelist friend, I was subjected to such a fate.

Earlier that day a Jewish friend had offered to lend me his Star of David for the evening. I declined, not because I was worried about causing trouble, but because I knew it would make me even more of a prime target for the converters. As I walked into the hall my spirits rose briefly as I saw a stall giving out 'cranberry punch'. Realising that getting some alcohol down my neck would be vital to maintaining my sanity, I walked over thinking that I would make an early start. However, it took only a few sips for me to realise that it was in fact non-alcoholic punch. It dawned on me that this was to be a sober evening among the faithful and pious.

Well, the evening got under way. I was sat at a table with what I believe were eight Christians and one other atheist – in similar position to myself. We started talking in a very friendly manner about fairly inconsequential matters – the weather, the food and so on. I usually dread such conversations but tonight I was sure that talking bollocks was preferable to talking about Christ. Christ, however, increasingly came to be slipped into the conversation. As I looked at the order of events, I realised that this strange gathering was scheduled to go on until 11pm. This was going to be a long evening.

After the main course some copies of a Bible chapter were given out. I still, in fact, have mine and am determined to make use of it – if I ever run out of toilet paper. At this point an important looking evangelical preacher entered the stage to read a quotation by Jesus. He then extrapolated on what he read out, explaining that people such as myself are walking in darkness, that we face God's judgement and will spend eternity in the fiery depths of hell. I made a mental note to bring along some marshmallows when I pass into the spiritual realm, as there will be ample opportunity to give them a good toast.

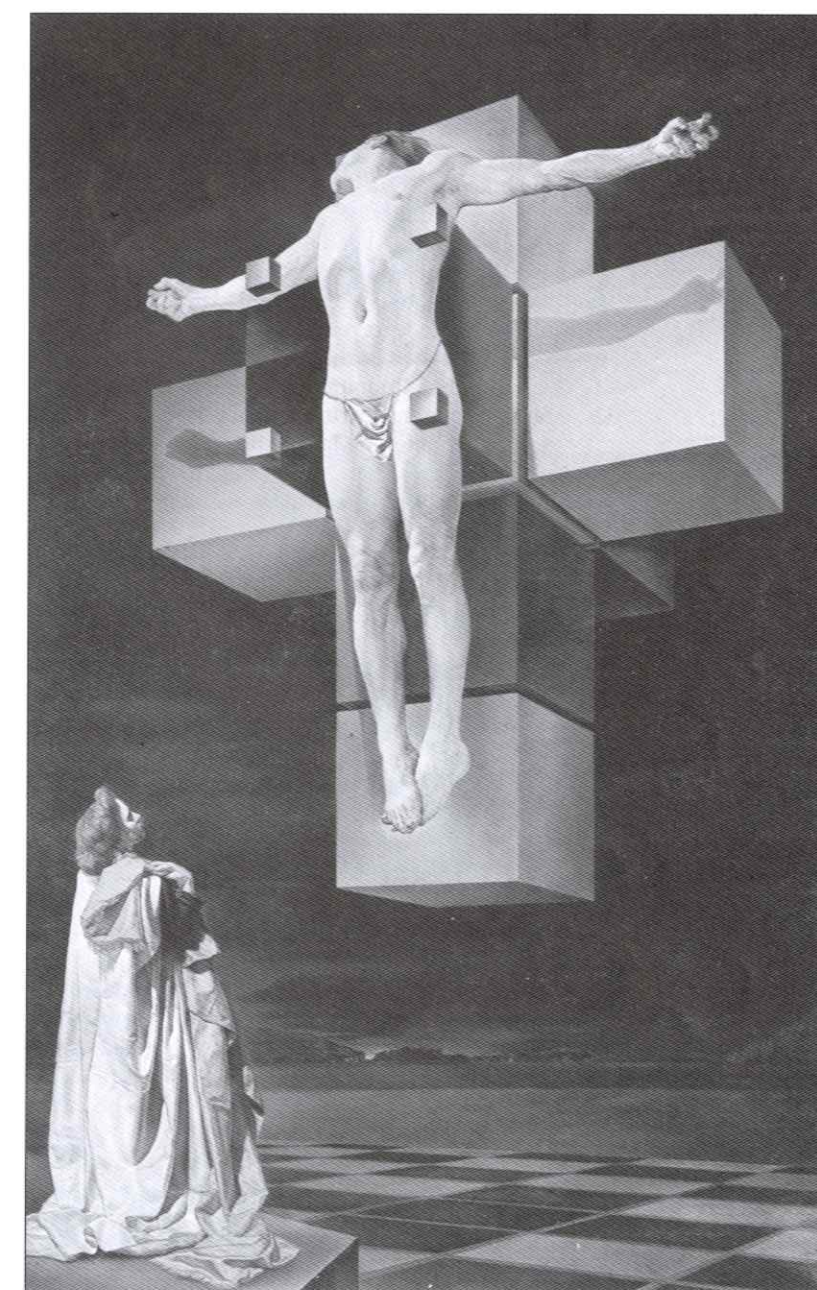
When, at the end of the speech, my evangelical chums turned to me to ask what I thought of the speech, I did not, of course, tell them about this particular mental note. In fact I did not give a particularly honest answer (for example, 'He talked bollocks and he should probably be in some kind of psychiatric ward'). I was in an uncharacteristically inoffensive mood (due perhaps to the lack of alcohol) and therefore was very complimentary about the rubbish I had just heard. On the upside, I avoided getting into an argument. On the downside, my pretence at being interested means that I am still thought of as a possible convert.

Well, dessert came, and while evangelical Christians may be irritating crackpots, they can definitely make good food. The dessert did in fact contain marshmallows – perhaps a kind of

subliminal message to make us atheists think about the fires of hell.

The final major event of the evening was a speech by a medical student telling us about his conversion to Christianity while at the university. It was a frightening and horrific example of how a normal – if slightly odd looking – student could end up as a religious fanatic. At 11pm, three and a half hours after the evening had started, I finally managed to get away, still in one piece and, most importantly, not converted. Luckily I got to the college bar in time to get some drink down me and see my friends. Finally, away from the hordes of Bible-bashers, I realised that as much as the evening had bored me, it did give me a useful insight into the lunacy that runs through the mind of the average evangelical Christian.

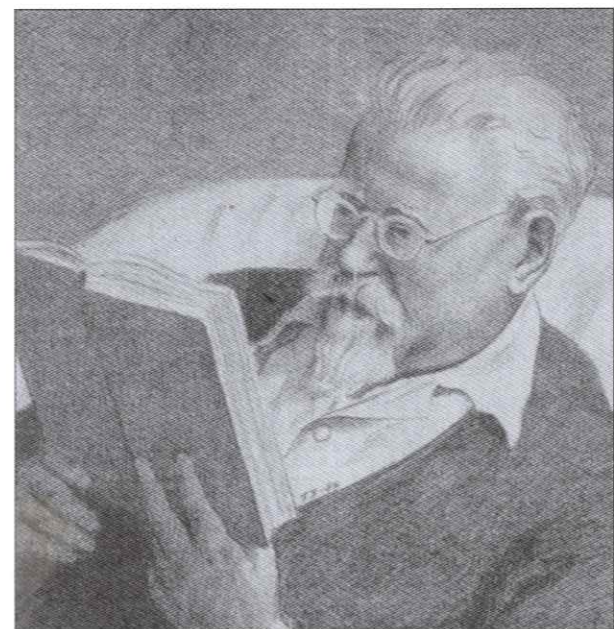
Undergraduate REUBEN CARTER finds himself caught up in an attempt to convert him to Christianity



ANARCHISTS IN

When the artist Fermin Rocker died at the age of 96, he left behind enduring memories of East End Anarchists, writes **MARGARET VALLANCE**

Below: Rudolf, 1946
Right top: Newspaper sellers, 1960
Right bottom: Address: 1965



Fermin Rocker was born in Stepney, in the East End of London, on 22 December 1907. His parents had met in the anarchist movement. His mother, Milly Witcop, had fled from poverty, his father from political persecution. Milly was from a family of Yiddish-speaking orthodox Jews who lived in Zlatapol, a small town in the Ukraine. Her father was a tailor who had also learned a little Russian, having served in the Czarist army. Her mother was deeply religious and despite her own poverty, devoted herself to relieving the poverty of her fellow Jews. Milly came to London alone in 1894. She worked in the tailoring sweatshops of the East End, living on a pittance so that she could save up for the fare to bring her parents and sisters to London. Her experience of economic exploitation challenged the strongly held religious faith in which she has been brought up, and led her to an interest in radicalism. She began to attend the meetings of the Jewish Anarchists in the Sugar Loaf pub in Hanbury Street. When her parents and sisters were eventually able to join her in London her parents were grieved to find that she had abandoned the old faith, but were reconciled with Milly when her son Fermin was born.

His father, Rudolf Rocker, later to become a famous anarchist writer and public speaker, trained as a bookbinder in Mainz, and was already involved in the anarchist movement when he arrived in London in 1895. After leaving Germany he had lived in Paris for a few years during which time he fathered a son, Rudolph, born in 1893. The child was sent to join his father in 1899.

Rudolf senior soon made contact with the Jewish Anarchists, and began attending their weekly meetings at the Sugar Loaf, and it was here that he met Milly.

Fermin's early childhood in the East End, with his father, his half-brother Rudolph, and his mother, is vividly portrayed, and illustrated, in his autobiographical account, *The East End Years* (Freedom Press, 1988). Rudolf Rocker was by all accounts a charismatic figure, a

born orator, self taught and widely read. (Fermin's portrait of him hangs in the Whitechapel Library). Friends who visited the book-lined flat at 33 Dunstan Houses included many famous anarchist intellectuals, among them Peter Kropotkin, Gustav Landauer, Louise Michel and Errico Malatesta.

Fermin's talent for drawing manifested itself early. As a small boy he accompanied his father on visits to the dockyards, and began to draw the ships and workers. He was encouraged by his brother Rudolph, himself a gifted draughtsman, who later gave him advice on technique and perspective and initiated him into the art of watercolour painting.

Fermin progressed to sketching the buildings of the neighbourhood and to drawing portraits, above all of his family and friends. One such drawing portrays his father speaking at a public meeting, listened to attentively by his Jewish father-in-law, 'Zaide', seated behind him on the platform.

When the First World War broke out Fermin found himself developing divided loyalties. His parents and friends, with the exception of Kropotkin, were all against the War, believing it to be wrong for the oppressed masses to be fighting each other, instead of the capitalists. Fermin followed the newspaper accounts of the course of events and became sickened by the jingoism and blatant anti-German propaganda in the English press. He began to sympathize with the Germans.

Despite Rudolf's known record of anti-militarism and opposition to Prusso-German expansionism, he was interned as an 'enemy alien', spending three years in Alexandra Palace, where he was elected spokesman by his fellow detainees, and achieved much to improve conditions. When Milly was arrested as well, Fermin was cared for by his aunt Polly. In 1918 the Rockers were finally released and allowed to leave England. They travelled to Holland where in Amsterdam they were united with their old friend, the Dutch anarchist, Domela Nieuwenhuis. On the last day of 1918 they arrived in Berlin where the short-lived German revolution was in full swing.

Fermin attended a Realschule in Berlin and then the Berlin School of Arts and Crafts, followed by a four-year apprenticeship with a lithographer. The ten years he spent in Berlin were the least happy of his life. He found the rigid class structure and the arrogance of the Prussian police oppressive. With the onset of the Depression he sought work in England and in Germany, but in vain. In 1929 he accompanied his father on a lecture tour to America and decided to try his luck there. He found work, first for the Graphic Survey and later for the Max Fleischer studios in New York, which published, among other things, the cartoon series, *Popeye the Sailor*. He worked for nine years in the

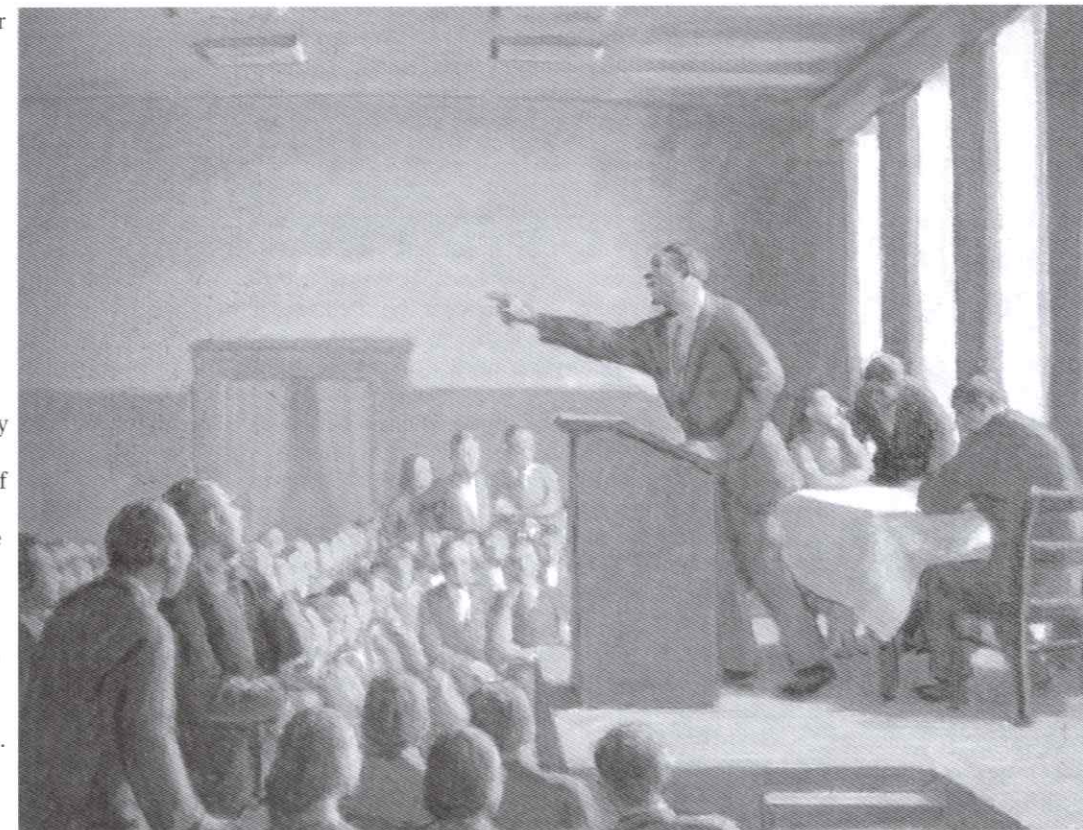
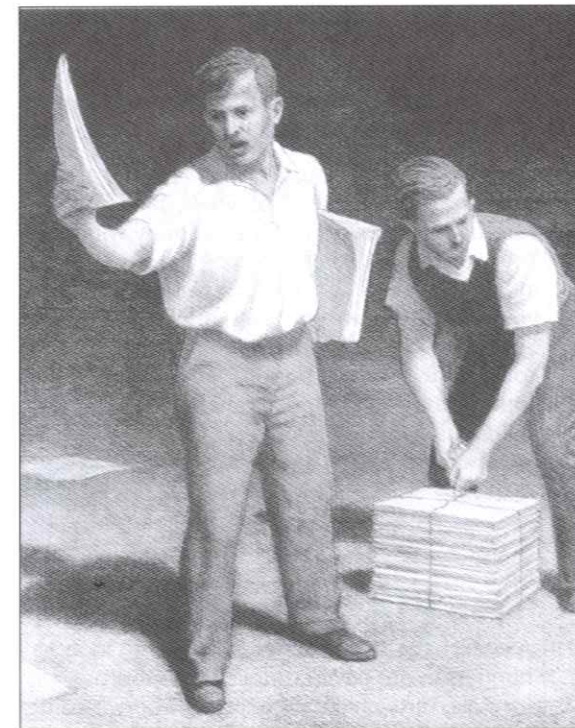
THE BACKGROUND

animation studio doing backdrops for the figures. From 1939 onwards he concentrated on print-making, first with the copper-plate media, etching, drypoint and lithography.

By 1938 Fermin worked as an independent artist and illustrator of children's books. His prints were exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, the Chicago Art Institute and one etching was awarded the prize of the Philadelphia Print Club. Some of his finest paintings are of the view from his flat in New York, over the Hudson River, of streets scenes and urban life, and of his family. His first independent exhibition was in 1944.

In 1933, when the Nazis came to power, Rudolf and Milly had escaped from Berlin and sought refuge in America, Rudolf carrying with him the manuscript of his latest book, *Nationalism and Culture*. Fermin sympathized with his father's anarchist ideals, but continued to emphasize the fact that it was in a capitalist country such as the United States that his parents not only found sanctuary but were permitted the freedom to live as they wished and to continue to expound their radical views. They joined Fermin in New York, but in 1937 moved to a community of like-minded radicals in the Mohican Colony, about 50 miles away. Fermin spent the war years in New York. In 1952 he married Ruth, who worked for a publisher. Their only son, Philip, was born in 1957.

In 1972 Fermin and Ruth returned to London, where they spent the rest of their lives. From their flat in Tufnell Park Fermin painted urban scenes, increasingly from memory, as his legs began to fail him, some timeless political scenes, such as the refugee paintings, and his beloved musical themes. Cared for by his son, Philip, following Ruth's death, the last years of his life were amongst his happiest. His paintings were regularly exhibited at Stephen Bartley's gallery off the King's Road. His first retrospective exhibition was at the Michael Chambers gallery in Long Lane, opening on 18 October 2004. Fermin died peacefully on the previous evening.



IN MEMORY OF JUDE

You could still marvel at the blackbird singing
above the dusk college square, with sombre bells
ringing beneath the May sycamores.
At bookshops bleeding with mankind and the firmament.
Fancy youths with death in their hearts
pass up and down the seductive streets
and behind thick walls make words deadly
with expectation and fear, drunk with themselves.
Only in the cold churches do they struggle
to win some divine life.
The desperate vagrant is more solid.
He remembers, as yourself, the rich flinty earth,
cuckoo calling and smell of wheat in rain up on a down.
Your death is carved in stone in library windows.
Your tears angry, soulful music
in a pub by the bus-station. Beneath a bus
your sweetheart wrestles with uncertainty
Spanner in hand, her poems in her pocket.
You are the busman, bright-eyed and eager to know
your mother's dark land. Your children's
children may enter this city
with nothing but strong boots, good bread and hope
to destroy and create a strange people's history.

THE VIXEN

A vixen long through the killing night
hungers in our covert, duplicitous suburbs
for stale, dirty chips, a wounded rat.
In her earthy womb an iron litter
pulsing for moonlight across a June field.
Bitter eyes, rusty her saliva,
she eats her menses and placenta.
Sing for her a Romany lament in an alleyway
beneath the wintry Plough's seven stars.
Oh starved outcast citizen you are alive
beyond all perception of illuded impatient people.

POETRY AND POVERTY

Poetry as witness
All poetry is a poetry of hunger for the particular rather than
the general.
The purpose of poetry is to create hope in desperate
circumstances.
The poetry of the common people has been driven underground
since 1660.
Poetry and otherness; the otherness of the common people.
When we cease to share, our language becomes a cipher, the
language of the dispatch box and the popular press.
Towards a new lyricism we need to rediscover a deciduous
language, the language of Winstanley and Emily Brontë.

Cockney poetry is underground poetry expressed in Rock
music; downbeat, dissonant, demotic; eg The Clash, The Free.
Celebration of the ordinary.
Nature of the City.
Metaphysics of poverty.
There can be no cockney power without cockney poetry.

From the collection
Outsider Poems by John
Zammit, David Kessel and
David Amery. This is
available for £4 (including
p&p) from 15a Heneage
Street, London E1 5LJ.
Please make cheques
payable to David Amery.

WHITECHAPEL LIBRARY, ALDGATE EAST

BY BERNARD KOPS

How often I went in for warmth and a doze
The newspaper room whilst my world outside froze.
And I took out my sardine sandwich feast.
Whitechapel Library, Aldgate East.
And the tramps and the madman and the
chattering crone.
The smell of their farts could turn you to stone
But anywhere, anywhere was better than home.

The joy to escape from family and war.
But how can you have dreams?
you'll end up on the floor.
Be like your brothers, what else is life for?

You're lost and you're drifting, settle down, get a job.
Meet a nice Jewish girl, work hard, earn a few bob.
Get married, have kids; a nice home on the never
and save for the future and days of rough weather.

Come back down to earth, there is nothing more.
I listened and nodded, like I knew the score
and early next morning I crept out the door.

Outside it was pouring.
I was leaving forever.

I was finally, irrevocably done with this scene,
The trap of my world in Stepney Green.
With nowhere to go and nothing to dream.

A loner in love with words, but so lost
I wandered the streets, not counting the cost.

I emerged out of childhood with nowhere to hide.

When a door called my name
and pulled me inside

And being so hungry I fell on the feast.
Whitechapel Library, Aldgate East.

And my brain explodes when I suddenly find
an orchard within for the heart and the mind.
The past was a mirage I'd left far behind.

And I am a locust and I'm at a feast.
Whitechapel Library, Aldgate East.

And Rosenberg also came to get out of the cold
To write poems of fire, but he never grew old.
And here I met Chekhov, Tolstoy, Meyerhold.
I entered their worlds, their dark visions of gold.

The reference library, where my thoughts were
to rage.
I ate book after book, page after page.
I scoffed poetry for breakfast and novels for tea.
And plays for my supper. No more poverty.
Welcome young poet, in here you are free
To follow your star to where you should be.

That door of the library was the door into me.

And Lorca and Shelley said 'Come to the feast.'
Whitechapel Library, Aldgate East.

From Grandchildren and Other Poems by published by
Hearing Eye, Box 1, 99 Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RX.
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East End books

People with an interest in the political history of the
East End can once again have access to three
excellent publications, which have been reprinted by
Fiveleaves Press in Nottingham.

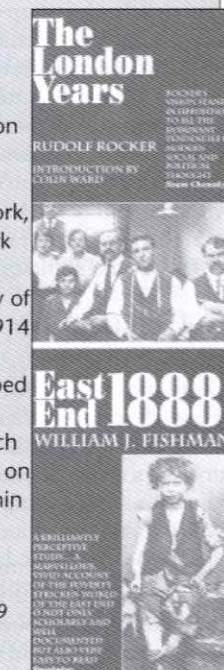
The London Years (£14.99) was the
autobiography of Rudolf Rocker. Born a German
Catholic and exiled for his political activity, Rocker
became the undisputed leader of the mainly Yiddish-
speaking anarchists who formed the strongest radical
movement in the East End in the years before the
First World War. Rocker became the editor of Arbeter
Fraynt – The Workers Friend – a Yiddish anarchist
newspaper, and spoke regularly at street meetings
and in the network of socialist and anarchist clubs
that grew in the East End.

1888 was a year of struggle in the East End as
workers in the burgeoning tailoring industries fought
for an 8-hour day. The historian, Bill Fishman, who
himself grew up in a poor tailoring East End family,
chronicles the social, political and economic realities

of life in the slums and the
changes that were on the horizon
in a book titled East End 1888
(£14.99) and now reprinted.

Bill Fishman's other major work,
available again, is a seminal work
called East End Jewish Radicals
(£14.99). A true people's history of
the period from the 1880s to 1914
this book tells the story of the
political organising that developed
amongst the immigrant poor to
challenge the conditions in which
they lived their lives and to take on
their oppressors even those within
their own community.

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East End History

East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914

WILLIAM J. FISHMAN

from
Five Leaves

VALUE ADDED JEWS

Julia: I enjoyed reading the book and was intrigued by the structure, based on three people in your family. Why did you choose those three?

Jonathan: They did seem to me to be three remarkable stories but I think they also illuminate some of the core issues of identity. You can't have a discussion about Jewishness without saying ok well where does faith sit in all of that? In my mother's story there was this paradox. It was not until writing it down I really spelt it out, but the idea of being religiously observant but without faith was in my home, every day, growing up. And with Mick Mindel, the dilemma of what comes first, the universal pull of humankind or the needs of our own people – the tension of the two rubbing against each other creates a huge part of being Jewish. And lastly the whole business about Israel and loyalties: are you British or are you Jewish? And if you're connected to Israel, then how deep should that attachment be? It's ironic that Nat's the oldest character in the book and yet in some ways his issues are the most modern of the three.

Julia: I also felt that all of them broke stereotypes of Jews, of Jewish families and the received wisdom about Jews, both within and outside the community. From your mother's point of view, the loving warm bosom of the Jewish family was not a reality. I think Nat is recognisable for British Jews who have seen their grandparents being so proud of their naturalisation papers but I don't think most outsiders see that aspect of being Jewish. Mick, is more of a stereotype in some ways but that portrayal of him living with the conflict isn't entirely predictable.

Jonathan: One of my aims was to confound some of the stereotypes. The one big one was: would it be possible to write a powerful and emotionally rich memoir of Jews in the 20th century which isn't centrally about the Holocaust? I think that's so important in terms of Jews' sense of themselves – to not feel as if the Holocaust is the sum total of Jewish belonging. All three are in the shadow of the Holocaust in one way or another, yet they're not Holocaust survivor stories.

Mick's story is a stereotype for anyone who knows the Jewish community well, but for a whole lot of non-Jewish people who think that Jews equals Alan Sugar and Robert Maxwell, it will be a surprise to realise that Jews were once in desperate poverty and on the front line of the war for social justice and equality.

And the third thing that you rightly picked up on is the idea that we do have a stereotype of the warm Jewish family – especially the orthodox Jewish family. I think a lot of secular Jews think, well we all have our modern dysfunctions but those families in Stamford Hill have got real family values. I don't think that because of my mother's upbringing. My mother had a very damaged family upbringing in a family that from the outside you'd assume would be exactly as you said, the warm bosom of the Jewish family.

So it was meant to defy stereotypes but not as some sort of marginal, perverse story of Jews who stand outside the Jewish community.

Julia: One of the things that I felt you dealt with implicitly in the book but not explicitly was to do with power inside the Jewish community and how the boundaries of the Jewish community are policed. You mentioned Jewish schools as a resource for minorities to sustain themselves. My view of them is that that's how the policing of the boundaries works. If you look at who controls Jewish schools, you might see them a little bit differently than as just a consumer.

Jonathan: The context of that point was about understanding faith groups really as ethnicities. I was thinking of the militant secularists who run a mile from faith schools because they think they're clerical, rather than places that maintain ethnic cultural

identities. That is how I understand the school that my oldest son Jacob goes to. I don't see it as a 'faith' indoctrinating factory. There are other Jewish schools that are much bigger on indoctrination than this one. That's the small point. The large point about policing the borders I think is right. I'm now answering your question very literally – when I talk about conversion and say that the rules need to be changed, we have to wrest power over the Jewish community from the unelected rabbinate who make up our rules. This is just weird, almost an anachronism, where we have redefined ourselves as a national cultural grouping, yet we observe rules on the status issues as if we were just a religious sect. That is a paradox that has gone on too long. It causes pain for people directly. I think we as a people have to say collectively: we're not a religion only any more, therefore it's completely bonkers that the rules we all have to live by in terms of status – funerals, marriages etc – are devised only by the religious leadership. That's the people we were pre-Emancipation, when religious identity mapped directly on to our other identity because that was the only option.

Julia: That's right about rule-making but when you look at dissident views within the Jewish community, the ease with which people are accused of antisemitism, for example it's used quite routinely to push people beyond debate and beyond the community.

Jonathan: On that we would totally agree. You've been on the receiving end of it; I've been on the receiving end of it. If you meant the power to slap that label, I think we have to be street fighters, to fight back and either argue very forcefully and prove that we're not antisemitic – the person hurling the accusation might not be persuaded but people in between might – or we should throw it back at them. I think there's a strong case to say: who are the real anti-Zionists? The people on the right who insist on holding on to the settlements and therefore jeopardising the existence of the state of Israel? To my mind they're the real anti-Zionists because there won't be a state of Israel left. Follow my politics, which is pretty well a full withdrawal more or less to the 1967 borders, that will preserve Israel.

But the one thing I would say to fellow progressives is that one way of making it harder for our opponents is to make it clear that we are in this fight from within; that our concern is because we care about the Jewish people. It's like the business about the four sons in the Pesach story. The difference between the wise son and the wicked son boils down to a pronoun. The wise son says: what does all this mean to *us*? And the wicked son says: what does all this mean to *you*? The Haggadah is branding as wicked someone who has simply asked a question but has done it from the outside. We brand the very same question as wise if it's emotionally from within.

Julia: You have said that Israel might be the solution to the problems of rule-keeping.

Jonathan: When I say the Jewish people needs a whole new set of rules to go by, I cannot imagine who would have the mechanism to do that and to enjoy broad – not complete – consensus across the Jewish world other than Israel. If it had the seal of the government of Israel you could avoid the kind of situations you're in now where rabbinates around the world have their different standards and you have the kind of ludicrous, obscurantist, rigid, doctrinaire position of the London Beth Din which seems to revel in its status as the most intransigent authority, saying: 'Our standard is the gold standard.'

Julia: You just touched on something that really bothered me in your book that was to do with loyalty and disloyalty. Loyalty has never been a concept that I think should really motivate people at all. There's a point in the book where you're teasing out the issue

Guardian journalist Jonathan Freedland's book, *Jacob's Gift*, has been greeted with acclaim. The stories it tells of his mother, Sara, and his great uncles Mick and Nat, resonate with modern day dilemmas about Jewish identity and purpose. **JULIA BARD** spoke to him about his book and the issues it explores

of universalism and internationalism and particularism, and whether being Jewish is a culture or a religion or an ethnicity. The conclusion that you come to is that you need to be able to sign up to a common set of values, like tikkun olam (repairing the world). But I think Jews are much more like the majority society which you wouldn't expect or ask to sign up to anything.

Jonathan: I was being very specific about conversion. There, universality is vital, because it's very diminishing and painful for a person to be accepted in one place and not in another. We've got to get to the point where if you're Jewish you're Jewish. That's why I'm in disagreement slightly with Reform and Liberal, because it's not enough to say: 'Well we accept you as being Jewish,' because part of being Jewish is that you're just part of this people. I want to develop a turnstile through which you go, and once you've gone, you can be everything: you can be an atheist, just like it is if you're born Jewish. If you read in the paper that Philip Roth was an atheist, you wouldn't say: oh that's funny I thought he was Jewish.

But on the bigger question, is it too much to ask for an animating spirit that would motivate all the Jews? I mean something so loose that it's almost a cultural ethos that everyone interprets in a different way. For my great uncle Mick it would have been communist politics and for my grandfather it would have been ultra-orthodox Judaism. They're worlds apart but they both would have felt there was something common about that; they would have both felt that these were somehow Jewish. Because they were interpretations of this loose idea of somehow making the world better.

I think groups of people do have to believe that they have some animating spirit otherwise, funnily enough, they get into 'ethnic for ethnic's sake', blood identities. Why are we Jewish? Not because there's a purpose but simply because we are, and because my mother was and my grandmother was. The book gets into this thing about bothness. It's not preaching any kind of Norman Tebbit-style monochromatic loyalty but it does welcome notions of loyalty. Why do I think a progressive person would be interested in that? Because there's something very individualistic about your idea that it's just about what's wrong and what's right; in the end it's just you and your conscience. But if you're into collective action and solidarity, then you do have to have some fellow feeling with the people in your own society.

To me patriotism doesn't seem an inherently right-wing idea. On the contrary it seems quite a progressive idea because it means you have something in common with the people around you. Pure Thatcherism, says there's no such thing as society; it's just me. I want a kind of left wing patriotism which says we're all in this together. That's why I think that patriotism needs to be embraced by the left. I just think we've got to make sure that the question is: loyal to what? That's why I think you need a kind of ethos, or purpose, which is progressive. Otherwise some pretty ugly idea about us all being similar, having the same blood, will fill the vacuum.

Julia: But there are people within the community who would argue that they're much more Jewish than you or I, who say things that we think are iniquitous. I don't see how you can even want to make common purpose with them. You can say, 'I'm Jewish, I'm just as Jewish as you but I think what you're doing is iniquitous and fascistic.'

Jonathan: I think right and wrong has probably got to be the higher standard. The reason why I have the whole Mick story is because it's indivisible. But what I don't want to do is say: all my moral conscience stuff is in my universal side and all my ethnic,

solidarity, emotional, bagels – is the Jewish thing. My head is secular and universal and my heart remembers my grandma and lokshen pudding. There's bits of both in both and part of my Jewish identity will pull me towards some moral projects and part of my conscience will pull me to connecting with other people.

The bothness was Jewish and British with Nat; with Mick it was particular and universal. Neither have a monopoly on either the moral or the emotional. Solidarity's very important but not so important that you end up going along with things you can't agree with.

Julia: You describe in the book, how identity shifts in time and depends on who you're talking to.

Jonathan: I'm making a plea for Jews to be more involved in the rest of their society; the truth is they're more British than they think they are. But also, conversely, to accept their Jewishness and to be less cringing about it. One of the ironies is that many of the Board of Deputies types who denounced the Jewish Socialists' Group in the early '80s, were much less 'out' about being Jewish than you were; more cringing and more self-conscious.

The other thing is the universal stuff. For so many of the Mick generation, who did put their trust in the communist project, the heartbreak they endured made them retreat from anything like that and say: you know what? The world doesn't want to know about us and they don't care. The disappointment, not just of the Nazi-Soviet pact but also post-War, there's a very specific Jewish dimension, where Jews thought: they're going to protect us, and they did the opposite. I think that is a big factor in the anti-left backlash now in the Jewish community. I'm really pleased that Mick didn't follow the script and leave the party in '56 or '68, even though as an individual taking a moral choice he probably should have done, because one of the pointers from his story is to say that we can't abandon these obligations for universal justice.

In the book I describe the kind of people who turn up the radio when it's about Israel, and turn it down when it's about the tsunami. There are a lot of people who are very narrowly Jewish and we have to become both more British and more universal.

Julia: If Jacob became very orthodox, how would you feel about that?

Jonathan: If he adopted anything which made him distant from us as his family, if he was to adopt a lifestyle that made it difficult for him to be with us – you hear all these stories about kosher food – then I think I'd be as upset about that as any parent. But if it was something which was just different from us – if he was very orthodox but didn't have to live somewhere else or eat entirely different food from us – I don't think I'd have a problem with that. My grandfather was a Gerer Hassid, and so he'd be coming back to that in a way, and I would have to live with that, and I hope I would find it in me to accept it. Where it would be difficult is if he was to do something which took him very far away from us – joining some cult or emigrating to Australia or if he was to become holed up in a yeshiva in Gateshead.

Julia: And if he decided to turn his back on his Jewish identity?

Jonathan: I can't lie about that, it would be very hard. It means so much to me it's something that I feel emotionally bound up with – it would be this breaking the chain thing that I talk about at the beginning of the book. But I can't pretend that it wouldn't also feel like some kind of failure, because I would feel that I haven't made it seem positive and attractive enough to him.

Jacob's Gift: A Journey into the Heart of Belonging by Jonathan Freedland (Hamish Hamilton, 2005) £16.99

NO GODS...

JEREMY GREEN, one of Red Herring's moving forces set the context for the Red Herring Club and East London Alternative Cheder's first Coming of Age Celebration

When we were planning this event, the others explained to me that this was the slot where the 'elders of the community' spoke. I'm not quite sure when I turned into an elder – I don't feel old enough and it sounds a bit sort of, Mormon. I prefer to think of this as the equivalent of the rabbi's sermon – the long bit where he (or just occasionally she) gets all erudite and quotes from the Torah in Hebrew, and the congregation can have a chat or a doze. So, in true rabbinical style, let's consider the question: 'Why are we here?'

The most obvious reason is to celebrate these four boys' coming of age. We are all very proud of our first graduating class, and hope they will be the first of many. They can already do many things much better than we adults. At least as far as I am concerned, foremost among them is the ability to keep time when playing music.

But why are we here? Why aren't we in a synagogue, celebrating their entrance as an adult into a conventional Jewish community? And what is this 'coming of age' thing?

Well, to start with, we think of ourselves as



secular Jews – with equal emphasis on both words. We identify with Jewish culture but we are not religious. I don't only mean that we are not frum – not observant. We don't believe, as orthodox Jews believe, that the Torah was written by God and dictated to Moses.

Nor do we believe, as Reform Jews appear to believe, that when the supersititious outer layers are stripped away there's an underlying core of superior ethics and morality. The truth is that those scriptures were written, edited and re-edited, and bolted together over hundreds of years – and during that long period what counted as morality and ethics changed a lot.

Over succeeding centuries really very clever Jewish intellectuals have expended massive amounts of energy denying this, and trying to pretend that the scriptures contain a consistent narrative and a consistent ethical code.

But they don't. The Ancient Israelites were not monotheists (only monolatrists). They practiced animal sacrifices, their society was based on hereditary castes and clan loyalties, and they had a

Jewish music. Leslie Barson, his guide, mentor and friend, suggested he focus on klezmer. He was not hugely engaged with this idea until he joined the Rockin' Rollmops. After a few rehearsals, he 'got it'. Playing their first gig, he discovered everyone could be a star (sic) and then took on his project with glee.

We persuaded a friend's serious dude of a son, a big professional clubbin' muso from the Midlands, to come down to London and help him choose his tracks to mix and create his own compilation CD. Will had never done this before and Peter Gomberg spent two days with him on his project. Our house rocked – or rolled – to klezmer very loudly for hours and hours. Now this was heaven – or was it nirvana?

Will has always rated Comic Relief. He truly admires the way it works and, inspired by his mate Louis producing his cookbook for Amnesty, decided to dedicate his CD to Comic Relief. The rest was easy. He was enthusiastic about the band rehearsals, loved working on the ideas for the event with the other guys and the ever patient and wonderful Ian Saville (a seriously good guy in Will's books) and he took the whole event very seriously – to the extent that he couldn't sleep from a wonderful mix of anxiety and excitement. His pride was such that he took over the invitations, chose family members, family friends and even, astonishingly, invited his own friends from home.

Will was extremely proud of the event, raised £280 for Comic Relief, his large mop of curls – aka his 'fro' – has been renamed his 'Jew fro', together with Louis, is nervously considering running the youngest group of Red Herrings and he wants the Rockin' Rollmops to go benefit busking.

Result.

To barmitzvah or not to barmitzvah? That was the question secular socialist families like **KAREN MERKEL'S** were asking themselves. Here is how Will came round to the idea

'I'm not having a barmitzvah. I'm not having anything to do with a barmitzvah.'

'No one asked you to.'

'Well I'm not having one.'

'It would be really good if we could do something to acknowledge your "coming of age" and celebrate your Jewishness at the same time.'

'Sounds like a barmitzvah to me.'

I know when to stop. I particularly didn't want him to reject his Jewishness when he's been on such a positive journey so far, especially through the Red Herring Club. I did wonder what any of it meant to him though. Only one way to find out – take a deep breath and go straight to source.

'It's ok mum. We do good stuff – you know, building the Sukkah, going away to Jordans, (an annual trip to Jordan's Youth Hostel the Red Herring Club make each year), and there's my mates. I like the cooking with Leslie and hearing all the stories, the football, you know and my mates.'

'What's it all about? What's it for?'

'Oh god, you know, all that Jewish Socialist stuff' 'Yes...?'

'Well, you know, everyone being together, not being racist, into peace, looking after each other. It's all right, it's cool and I do understand it. Just don't need to talk about it, ok?'

I began to breathe.

Will agreed to take part in a coming of age event providing it wasn't too big, all four boys were in it and able to decide what it was going to be and that it wasn't going to be a barmitzvah. If those conditions were satisfied, he was happy to join in. Will's chosen project for the coming of age event was

NO TOASTMASTERS

very proscriptive sexual morality with lots of 'don'ts', all designed to prevent practices which did not lead to reproduction. Not much of this is compatible with contemporary ethics and morality, and it takes a lot of intellectual acrobatics to pretend that it is.

Many Jews think the same way that we do. We've lost count of the number of people we have spoken to who admit that they don't believe in God but have joined a synagogue as a form of communal identification – mainly because their cultural identity as Jews is important to them, and because they don't believe that they have any other option. So why have we been able to maintain the courage of our lack of convictions?

Partly because we've been lucky. For the last five years we've been part of a group of people – the Red Herring Club – which has been dedicated to celebrating Jewish culture in a secular way. For most of those five years we have been organising our activities jointly with another group – the East London Alternative Cheder – so much so that in

pretty much everything but name we form a single secular Jewish community.

We've celebrated festivals together in a way that felt right to us, allowing us to enjoy the traditions and the customs, and even some of the rituals,

without having to take on (or pretend to take on) the theological and moral baggage that go with them.

Fifty years ago our choice, and our way of being Jewish, wouldn't have looked so eccentric. Then there was a network of secular Jewish organisations – schools, friendly societies, summer camps and youth groups, housing associations, newspapers and magazines,

publishing houses – all based on the idea that there was a kind of Jewish identity not based on religious knowledge and practice. In other countries, even now, especially in the US, much of this survives, on a smaller scale. This is probably a good time to mention the Congress of Secular Jewish

Organisations, which has recently accepted the Red

continued on next page



DAVID ROSENBERG, one of the founders of the Red Herring Club, and a member of the National Committee of the Jewish Socialists' Group sent a message to the first coming of age event

I am very sorry I cannot be with you tonight at what is clearly a milestone in the life of the Red Herring Club. November is obviously a significant month for Red Herring as, not only tonight's event but also Red Herring itself was launched in November, back in 1997. And the event it was launched at says a great deal about the idea of secular Jewish continuity that it represents.

It was launched as part of a whole day event, organised by the Jewish Socialists' Group, to celebrate 100 years of Jewish socialism – more specifically 100 years of the Bund. This was a revolutionary movement that began its life in Vilna, flourished particularly in inter-war Poland but was largely destroyed by the Nazis, leaving remnants of the organisation across the globe, who continue to meet, publish journals and contribute ideas.

The Bund paid a lot of attention to children. It had a children's organisation – SKIF – which in the city of Lodz alone had 750 members before the war. The highlight of their year was their annual camp which they called The Socialist Republic of the Children. From SKIF the children graduated to the Youth organisation, Tsukunft.

Tsukunft is a very special Yiddish word which is particularly relevant for tonight. It means future. Outside of this building the rabbis and the leaders of the mainstream Jewish community worry about

the Jewish future. They think it can only be assured if children strictly follow the rules of the Jewish religion, become unthinking patriots for Israel, keep their distance from non-Jews, and then get their children in turn to do exactly the same. It is a narrow, ghettoised view of Jewish life. And it will increasingly resemble a bagel – as people realise just how empty the middle is.

Ask the adults in this room, what kept them attached to Jewish life? It wasn't this. And we could probably all name friends who have abandoned these attachments altogether. What Red Herring has done, though, is offer something so much richer. It has enabled children to experience and reflect on a much broader Jewish culture and history without saying: 'You must do this; you must think this.' And it has given them a pride and confidence in their culture, which they can carry with them in all their interactions with the wider world. Herrings do not fear other fish but can swim together.

The children who go to Red Herring and, especially today, the children celebrating a collective secular barmitzvah, will make their own future. And if it reflects some of the values that they have gained through Red Herring then it will be a happy, fulfilling and meaningful future.

Mazeltov, and a glorious tsukunft from all the Jewish Socialists' Group.

Herring Club as its British, and first ever non-American, affiliate.

But since that network isn't there any more, why have we bothered? Why try to preserve what doesn't seem to be capable of preserving itself? Well, the short answer is because it feels right to us. We feel like Jews, and we don't believe in God, so we've chosen this kind of identification. But feelings aren't always right – maybe this is just a silly sentimental attachment that we should grow out of. Isn't it time we just threw in the towel?

I don't think so. This year, my family made our near-annual pilgrimage to the Womad festival, which is a glorious celebration of human cultural diversity. In a single day we listened to bands from Colombia, Ghana, Italy, Spain, and all over the place. Our favourites are the hybrids, like the Flamenco-influenced rock band. But there can only be hybrids like that if there are things to cross-breed; and our little part of the big picture, our contribution to the recipe, is secular Jewish culture. If we expect other people to look after their traditions so that they have something to bring to the party, then surely we secular Jews have not just a right, but a duty too, to keep our own culture well-watered and looked after.

And why are we celebrating like this, with this

sort of ceremony? Isn't a coming of age ceremony, even without the 'B' word, inherently a religious activity? Maybe, but let's not forget that many of the scriptures, the customs, the prayers, and the festivals of religious Jews are actually borrowed from other cultures and contexts – and then given a new meaning that fits them into a specifically Jewish story.

Pesach and Sukkot existed as non-religious agricultural festivals long before they were fitted into the story of the Exodus. The story of Purim was imported from the Babylonian festival of Zagmuku, with the characters' names based on the Babylonian gods. The barmitzvah ceremony didn't really exist before the Middle Ages, where it developed under the same influences that led Christians to invent the confirmation ceremony.

So why shouldn't secular Jews mark the coming of age of their children with a ceremony too? After all, once you accept that the Torah wasn't written by God, you can really start to appreciate it – as a compendium of literature, love poetry, comparative ethics and Bronze Age political propaganda. So we assert the right to pick and choose from the storehouse of Jewish tradition without apology. To light candles, to read from the Torah, and to have barmitzvah ceremonies.

learn to sew. A nightdress with wobbly seams and a drawstring neck (that saved making a collar!) adorned my body as I went to bed that Sunday night. I think both my mother and I were relieved that that experiment was over.

What seems ironic now is that I come from a very assimilated family, yet the traditional role of eldest Jewish daughter was still expected of me. At home we didn't even talk about being Jews and were definitely very disconnected from any Jewish community. Without these connections I did not receive the questions some of my friends say they were asked by other synagogue members, such as: 'Have you met a nice young man?' Yet still I was raised with a strong assumption that my number one priority was to be a wife and mother, and provide my mother with grandchildren.

I approached the age of 30, still unmarried and childless. Was it too late, I wondered? A sense of panic ensued about whether I should now have children. I spent a few years awake off and on in the night fantasising about having a baby: about pregnancy, breast feeding, changing nappies, walking my baby proudly in the park. I told nobody of these dreams. They often seemed fairly disconnected from me. And there was one other drawback, I didn't have a man!

As my 30s headed towards 40, I was provided with a wonderful opportunity, a group for women thinking about our decision to have children, or not. I jumped at the opportunity, having become increasingly aware that I was keeping some of my life on hold in case I became a mother. I wanted to decide, so that if I chose to I could move towards

motherhood with thoughtful awareness. Well, as much as you can be aware until you are actually a mother, as my friends who are parents reliably inform me. In the group we all took turns to tell about the messages we received as young women about becoming mothers. We considered our feelings and thoughts, focusing first on the decision to become a mother, and then on not. I was interested to notice that whilst most of the non-Jewish women in this group had been raised with the expectation that they would be mothers, I seemed to have received the strongest message that my mother needed to be a grandmother, and that it really wasn't acceptable to choose not to be a mother. Whatever else I chose, mothering should come first and was a duty I should fulfil, for others.

And then I met my man. As we got to know one another I told David that I probably wouldn't want children. He was shocked and asked: 'How can you know that?' I simply said that I don't believe that all women have to have children.

David and I later married. I give myself credit for being honest about my thoughts on having children early in the relationship. Neither of us had family close by, so a decision to have children would have meant a different kind of network. My being a Jew and he a non-Jew led to many interesting and, at times, heated discussions about schooling, religion and circumcision (we agreed on that one), as well as who might stay at home and who would work if we did have children.

As I considered my own decision, I enjoyed hearing other women talking about mothering. What initially surprised me when I brought up the subject was how many mothers said that if they had had a chance to really make a choice they may well have chosen not to have children. This included Jewish mothers. They emphasised that they adore their children and wouldn't be without them now. They talked about how little information they got as young women about parenting; how profoundly it changed their lives; how hard it can be to get support and how, at times, they have felt they were not doing a good job.

Several years into our marriage, a friend encouraged me to assist David to think as well about whether he wanted to be a parent. She emphasised that women often make this decision alone, which leaves out the man. I also noticed that when others wanted to know if we were going to have children they would ask me, rather than David. So I made a point of asking him and listening as he considered being a dad. I loved his jokes: 'Can you take them back to the supermarket if you change your mind?' or 'If your Mum says you should have six, then we'd better start now.'

Walking on a beach in my home country of Australia, we told each other why we thought we'd make a great mum or dad, and what we saw as one another's challenges. Then I asked where we were up to. 'Fifty fifty,' David stated. I said 60 for no, 40 for yes. We progressed with these discussions over the years and finally agreed that, although David was not completely decided against parenting, I wanted to focus more on my career and so a decision would make sense. We decided not to have

children. I found that I could then become more focused in my life and be closer to friends with children and support them in their parenting.

Whilst interested in my decision not to have children, I often sense unease amongst my Jewish women friends about my being childless by choice. Some say: 'Will you have regrets?' Yes – I already do. I miss the attention, the praise and the acceptance, which mothers receive within the Jewish community, of which I am now a part. I also won't experience the particular kind of closeness that mothering brings. And I don't know who will look after me when I am old. I will have to figure something other than having children to rely on.

Apart from these concerned responses, I also receive appreciation for the courage it has taken for me to decide not to have children.

Let me go back a few years for a minute here. I was talking with a group of both Jewish and non-Jewish women at a conference some years back. We spoke about our decisions to have or not have children. I heard myself recount my mother's dream that I have six children. She had wanted six, but had only been able to have three of us and frequently expressed a feeling that the family was incomplete. I paused – 'Oh!' I proclaimed, 'perhaps it was one child for every million.' The non-Jewish women looked bemused. I explained, 'One for each million Jews who died in the Holocaust.' This was an important realisation for me, taking away the responsibility I sometimes feel for not have lived out my mother's dream.

At this point you might be inclined to think: 'So, that's why she didn't want children.' I can't deny that this may be an aspect of my decision. I don't and never have thought we can replace any of the six million who were killed. Such painful emotions aren't a good basis for a decision to have children, at least not for me. I do feel sad that my mother, in Australia, aged 13 at the end of the war, was perhaps so impacted by hearing about the Holocaust that she felt the number six so significant. I can't ask her as she died in 1998. This realisation did teach me that perhaps strong messages get conveyed from one generation of Jewish women to another about mothering.

Over recent years I have built strong relationships with my friends' children. I love playing with them, and hearing about their lives. I have assisted in choices about schools, shouted with excitement as a teenager wins her first canoeing competition and spent nights up late with a friend as her daughter goes clubbing. I guess this is how I am a part of the next generation.

I believe that it makes good sense for Jewish women to be supported to make a choice about whether to have a baby, or not. I think our community is secure, and that our continuity does not depend on each Jewish woman having babies. I don't want any of us to be treated as less than complete, whatever our decision about mothering.

My mother used to say to me sometimes: 'There is nothing more wonderful than having children.' At my most relaxed I would respond: 'Perhaps there are other things and experiences as wonderful to treasure and be a part of.'

I THINK OUR COMMUNITY IS SECURE, AND THAT OUR CONTINUITY DOES NOT DEPEND ON EACH JEWISH WOMAN HAVING BABIES.

REGRETS, I'VE HAD A FEW

The pressures on Jewish women to have children can be overwhelming but it must remain a free choice, says VICKY GROSSER

When I was in my 20s (in the 1980s) I was drawn to a book on a friend's bookshelf: *Why Children?* How novel, I thought, to really consider whether you want children or not. I borrowed it with a sense of trepidation and excitement.

Over the coming weeks I read personal accounts in this book by women who had 'fallen' pregnant, had several children with ease, chosen not to have a baby, struggled to conceive, or took the opportunity to hugely celebrate motherhood. I was particularly struck by one woman's account of morning sickness – she claimed she knew every rubbish bin on the way to work because she had been sick in every one.

In the process of reading this book I realised that having children is a big deal: a responsibility, an opportunity for much joy, and at times immensely daunting given the expectation of the mothering role.

As the eldest daughter in my family it seemed to be assumed – and certainly vocalised on many an occasion by my mother – that I would have children. In fact she told me how many I would have. Six.

I look back now, as I approach my 47th birthday, with some amusement but, if I'm honest, also some anger about how I was trained for the role of perfect Jewish wife and mother. A Good Housekeeping Book appeared on my 12th birthday. Lists of ingredients were purchased at the supermarket and my siblings enjoyed the sticky, sweet puddings I made. The sewing machine was wheeled out by my mother one weekend so I could

SINGING FOR

DAVID ROSENBERG talks to Vusi Mahlasela, the voice of the new South Africa

A persistent and enduring image from South Africa in the 1980s was the mass funeral procession: immense crowds sporting the yellow and green of the ANC, defiantly singing the banned anthem 'Nkosi Sikele iAfrika', as they carried more young martyrs to their graves. Not for nothing did the exiled trumpeter Hugh Masekela describe the overthrow of the apartheid regime as 'a revolution in four-part harmony'.

Among the newer generation of poets and musicians utilising their talents to inspire and mobilise change was a young troubadour born in 1965 and raised in Mamelodi township east of Pretoria. Vusi Mahlasela released his first album *When You Come Back* in 1992. Its title song celebrates the exiles' return to a nation on the brink of dramatic change. In 1994, as a majority ANC government took office, he brought out *Wisdom of Forgiveness*, which he promoted as 'music to fight crimes and injustices in the era of hope'.

Mahlasela has recorded the struggles of the past with an honesty, sensitivity and depth that is spiritually uplifting. Today he is regarded as the voice of the new South Africa. Singing in several of its mother tongues, he has won awards for popularising multilingualism. Described by the Nobel prize-winning South African writer Nadine

Gordimer as 'a national treasure', his music is now reaching new audiences in the US and throughout Britain, where he has been touring as support to the long established Zulu a cappella group Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

'I started singing at a very early age,' he says. 'My grandmother had a shibeen [pub]. It was illegal then, in the time of apartheid, and she was harassed by the police. A lot of characters and musicians came. I saw these men singing a cappella and fell in love with song.'

Like many of his generation Mahlasela was brought up by his maternal grandmother. He never knew his father, and his mother died when he was young. He built his first guitar from food containers and fishing lines when he was not yet a teenager. As a child, though, he was blissfully unaware of the oppression and strife scarring the country beyond his immediate caring and supportive environment.

'When I grew up everything was normal. I went to school and I wanted to be a priest or a doctor. I didn't know there was anything wrong about my country, until the Soweto uprising of 1976. The country was in flames. I started to ask what is really happening and my political awareness started to grow.'

Mahlasela joined the radical poetry group Ancestors of Africa, and was welcomed into the ANC as a young cultural activist. At the age of 16, his activism landed him in solitary confinement in a police cell, an experience chronicled on his first album. The police regularly rounded up youth leaders before the annual commemoration of the Soweto uprising. On one occasion, though, his grandmother rescued him from the state's clutches. 'When the police arrived, she said: "Vusi is here but he's staying." She told them she had a whole barrel of boiling water and the first policeman to come in gets it. They went.'

Immersing himself in a world in which culture and politics were mutually invigorating, he joined the Congress of South African Writers and became an admirer of the Chilean folk singer and victim of the Pinochet coup, Victor Jara. Mahlasela read Jara's manifesto, and was inspired by the way he united the cultural and political spheres to mobilise and give courage to a mass movement. He finds it hard to imagine a successful liberation struggle that is not rooted in culture.

'We fought in many different ways: through music, theatre, dance and, for some, the armed struggle. Culture was a big part of it. It was our weapon. No government could tell the people what culture they had to live by. Music was at the height of the struggle. The police harassed us; they confiscated some of my poetry, but that gave me more reason to fight them.'

Despite the bitterness and anger generated through the struggle against apartheid, Mahlasela's songs reflect a determination not to be imprisoned by the past, but to find instead a positive language

PARADISE

to express the human values that he believes represent the only hope for South Africa's future. 'My music glorifies the spirit of collective good, the spirit of ubuntu: humanness. My songs are about love, forgiveness, about reconciliation, teaching us that as people we need to honour each other.'

This catalogue of themes does not do justice, though, to the beauty of Mahlasela's music. His voice demonstrates a range that can express the deepest emotions with power and sensitivity. Drawing on African traditional, jazz and Western influences, his guitar playing encompasses many styles with aplomb. In combination, they convey a sound and sentiment that is captivating, nourishing, exhilarating and uplifting.

He resents the label 'world music', considering it disparaging and degrading. He consciously promotes the 'folk-traditional' genre. 'Folk music carries the weight of the history of the people and is typical of their tradition. This label "world music" doesn't say this. We need that respect. We have to be proud of our own music and all the instruments of the people.'

His musical talents were nurtured and enhanced in a period when protest music was a powerful genre. The culture of post-apartheid South Africa is clearly different, yet Mahlasela recognises that the issues that gave birth to protest music still echo in South Africa's young democracy.

While he has no doubts that South Africa's national leaders are truly committed to addressing the terrible legacy of apartheid, he is less sanguine about local politicians who include 'those who are just there for gain: they lobby for some tenders so they can make money. If they are doing injustices to the people who have put them there, we have to go and pinch them through our art and music: in the way we did before.'

He dedicated his stirring 1997 album *Silang Mabele* 'to all those who believe in making this country a liveable place: a place of peace in which people will enhance each other to build a paradise free from fears, poverty and hatred'. But paradise is a long way off. The post-apartheid realities have compelled him to focus his political energies at a local level. In Mamelodi, where Mahlasela continues to live, unemployment is running at 40 per cent; older people, struggling to maintain rent payments, frequently have their water and electricity cut off. He is as committed to the battle to lift his township out of poverty as he was to lifting the nation out of apartheid. On stage he jokingly describes a township as 'a ship that is going to town but never gets there', but he relishes living in a place that manifests such a strong community spirit. He helped set up an anti-rape centre, supports the charity Epilepsy South Africa (he suffers from the

condition himself), and has performed for the Pretoria-based NGO Positive Art, raising funds for children living with HIV/Aids.

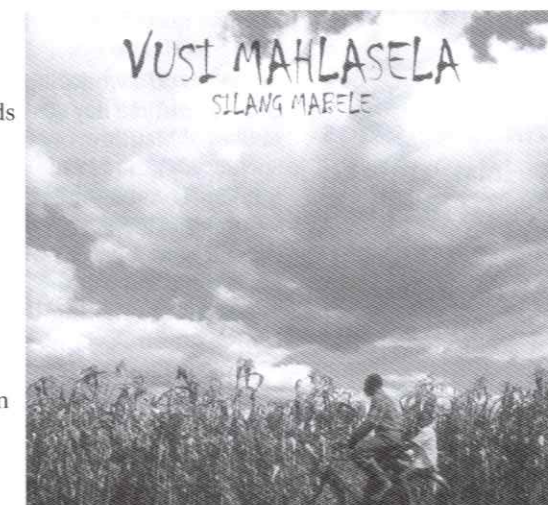
One of his proudest achievements was the creation of the Vusi Mahlasela Music Foundation, which supports local cultural workers and runs outreach programmes in local schools. The foundation recently began an initiative with refugee musicians aimed at combating xenophobia, as well as supporting the artists themselves. 'I launched the foundation in 2000. It was a really long-held dream of mine. The foundation supports artists musically and business-wise with contracts. It encourages them to pick up folk-traditional instruments, which wouldn't get played on the white radio stations in the time of apartheid, and fuse them with Western instruments.'

His determination for working musicians to return to their African musical roots reflects his far deeper concerns about South Africa's youth. In a country ravaged by Aids, and a continent ravaged by poverty, children under 15 now form the largest sector of South Africa's population. Despite having far greater opportunities than their parents, Mahlasela knows that the struggles they face against poverty and Aids, and for dignity and security, will be long and hard.

Exposed, as they are, by globalisation to the best and the worst of Western cultural values, he despairs of young South Africans being trapped in a plastic culture that glorifies fashion, money, sex and drugs but offers no lasting human values. 'The youth need some kind of cultural revolution. We look to them to be the leaders of tomorrow, but they are ignorant about where they come from and are running away from themselves. They have great opportunities, but they forget that people worked for this, people died for this.'

He wants his fellow South Africans, and especially the youth, to embrace their future collectively with confidence, awareness and belief. 'If you accommodate fear it will come and abide in you. So you have to think positively, and thinking is like a constant prayer. I am someone who is really optimistic. I have more hopes than fears. Our democracy is winning.'

Vusi Mahlasela's latest CD is *The Collection* (BMG, 2004).



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IF YOU ACCOMMODATE FEAR IT WILL COME AND ABIDE IN YOU.
I HAVE MORE HOPES THAN FEARS. OUR DEMOCRACY IS WINNING

I'M STANDING

The children of Holocaust survivors would be better to seek global justice than to turn their experience into fear and hatred, argues **SUE LUKES**

Invited to do a workshop on the 'Second Generation' in a day school on 'The Uses and Abuses of Memory', organised by the Jewish Socialists' Group, I found myself putting off thinking about it until the day before. I was there by a simple accident of birth. I certainly had no clinical experience. And even that accident of birth had left me towards the bottom end of the 'hierarchy of suffering' that often runs through conversations I overhear among my parents' generation: my father arrived alone and all his family were murdered, but he spent no time in camps.

My workshop title was 'The second generation: dealing with traumatic memories'. One of the problems of the second generation, of course, is that we actually do not have those memories, traumatic or otherwise. We are characterised, often, by an absence of people with stories to tell. But I do not believe that we are so easily pigeonholed otherwise. Helen Epstein, who was one of the first writers to find the second generation, made a brave statement that we are as diverse as our murdered family members: old, young, good, bad, straight, gay, observant, secular and so on. Our connection is simply that some of the most important things in our lives happened before we were born. But that can be true of many others.

Eva Hoffman, whose recent book – *After Such Knowledge* – asks whether it is not time to stop the mourning, 'let it gently go'. She also talks of the second generation as an imagined community, characterised by 'a common system of symbols and meanings deriving from the Holocaust past of their parents... placeless loss... dimensionless melancholia... resentment of one's parents for having monopolized all the existential grandeur of authentic suffering... stuck in a metaphysics of nullity and absence.'

My journey started with political engagement through working with refugees, to a personal involvement with second-generation activities and a recent move into observance via the North London Progressive Jewish Community. From my father I had learned that being Jewish could lead to trouble so great that he could not talk about it. I am concerned that, now, children talk about the Holocaust and are taught it in school, the story is decontextualised, the suffering medicalised and the presentation of the events as the 'ultimate evil' encourages outrage, shunning and a refusal to question or think, rather than action or enquiry. Hoffman, too, is suspicious of sentimentality, of the way that survivors have been transformed from 'lepers into Brahmins', of how the horrific may become fashionable. In discussion, the problems of the fashions in outrage and attitudes were explored further, with the recent phenomenon of idealisation of victims even giving us false memory

'victims' like Benjamin Wilkomerski, although my experience is that this is not such a new or rare thing. Suppression of painful memories is also common, although not the total removal of them posited by some 'therapists'.

It is, however, an open question for me as to whether the second generation or the first is so exceptional in some respects. In practical terms what they need is what anyone needs: respect, a decent health service, a community which supports them. But discussion in the group questioned this: with the NLPJC rabbi posing a clear challenge to the Jewish world to think more about the ways in which we, as Jews, should respond to, understand and use our proximity to the Holocaust. Others pointed up the need to think more about those who rescued, a theme I would love to explore further.

To the workshop I offered Walter Benjamin, who died as so many of our recent neighbours (like Patrick Okello, Rajwinder Singh Mutti, Ertal Hussein, Tema Kombe, Mohammed bin Duhri, Liang He, Kenny Peter, Sergey Barnuyck, Tung Wang, John Kanau Manana in the last year): a refugee in police custody. Benjamin gives history the role of rescuing the victims who 'have a retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.'

Hoffman points out that suffering was also caused by the losses of 'landscape, language and culture', to which I would add that pain was and is also caused by the experience of being a refugee in Britain then as now. I worked for many years with the Chilean community, from arrival, through settlement to return and then to the continuing struggle for justice. This exemplifies, in the lives of the people involved, a saying of Martin Luther King, with which I became over familiar, since we used it in the first e-campaign, in a letter sent from my home computer that eventually generated 75,000 signatories to letters and petitions sent to the then Home Secretary to demand that the ex-dictator of Chile face extradition and the courts. As I dealt with thousands of e-mails a day, on a dial-up - connection to a rather old PC, every one quoted back to me: 'Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice.'

Which brings me to the ways in which we can deal with traumatic events, or, as Corneille, the R&B singer, winner of the MTV best French Music Act 2004 said, 'You have to unconditionally love life to move on from that'. He is a survivor of the Rwandan genocide. But it also speaks to me of Israel/Palestine, because the Israeli state appears now to have become an embodiment of the fear and hatred that can be responses to trauma, but should not be. The use of the Holocaust to justify violations of human rights there makes it very difficult for us all to move on.

AMERICA'S SHOW TRIAL

AMERICA

New Labour is a clean machine. On the bridge over Victoria Station in Manchester there used to be a white-washed slogan daubed well before the age of spray paint: SAVE THE ROSENBERGS. The Labour council obliterated it some time in the 1990s. I want to restore it because this slogan politicised me by my eighth birthday on the cruelty, corruption and anti-communism of the USA political and judicial system. Those were what the playwright Lillian Hellman was later to describe as 'scoundrel times' – the era of McCarthy, the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC), when the question, 'Are you or have you ever been a Communist?' pervaded the 'land of the free'. As Arthur Miller wrote in *The Crucible*, his play about the 17th century Salem witch trials, an analogue to the scoundrel times in which he lived: 'The whole country's talkin' witchcraft.'

On 19th June 1953 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed, supposedly for giving the secrets of the atom bomb to the USSR during the Second World War. My parents said this was a frame-up of the innocent that ranked with both the judicial murder (execution) nearly three decades earlier of anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for allegedly killing a police officer and the racist convictions and imprisonment in the 1930s of the nine Scottsboro boys for alleged rape. The Rosenbergs' innocence became the *idée fixe* of my – like many other people's – political life.

My parents weren't Communists; their response to McCarthyism was because the inquisitorial 'Are you or have you ever been...' was effectively directed at Jews as Jews, as well as at Communists. Less than 10 years after the war against Nazism, antisemitism was running amok in the centre of imperialism, exposing the lie that the war was being fought to prevent Jewish annihilation. The Rosenberg case is a classic example of antisemitism as much as anti-communism.

Subsequently any denial of the innocence of the Rosenbergs became for me almost a denial of Marxism and the revolution. The frame-up and execution were the building blocks of my communist commitment and view of history. The ripples of the case extended well beyond the USA – there were major demonstrations in several European countries against their execution. Now Robert Meeropol in this latest book raises some fundamental questions. One of the two sons of Ethel and Julius, Robert was six at the time of the execution. The hysteria around the trial was such that most of the Rosenberg family rejected the children. Fortunately they were adopted by Anne and Abel Meeropol – Abel wrote the haunting anti-lynching song for Billie Holiday, *Strange Fruit* ('Southern trees bear strange fruit/Blood on the leaves and blood at the root/Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze/Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees')

An *Execution In The Family* intertwines Robert's questioning of his identity as the son of Ethel and Julius with his own political activism and a reappraisal of the trial of his biological parents. It is

a testimony to his own character and that of the Meeropols that he survived emotionally strong enough to face up to all this. Most major Jewish organisations joined in the condemnation of the Rosenbergs as communists. The Jewish Board of Guardians went further by taking out a court action accusing the Meeropols of abuse – not physical abuse but political abuse! As a result armed police effectively snatched the children, brought them before a judge who then institutionalised them until another court order secured their release.

In fact Robert grew up not just as a child of four parents but also of the 1960s and became a student activist. As a 'red diaper' baby he straddled the old and the new left. As an organiser for the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) he effectively subscribed to the 'million groovy kids theory' of revolution – somewhat removed from the Stalinism of his biological and adopted parents, all of whom at various times were members of the Communist Party. Much of the book recounts his experiences as a proponent of direct action. In middle age his major political activity has become the financing and running of the unique Rosenberg Fund for Children to help children whose parents have been politically victimised for progressive political activity.

Central to this autobiography is the whole question of the innocence or guilt of the Rosenbergs – and, crucially, what these terms mean politically. Robert and his brother Michael spent many years subsequent to his student activism initiating and building the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case (NCRRC). As a matter of both faith and logic he accepted the absolute innocence of Julius and Ethel. And indeed the couple's experience of the judicial system was so unfair, so based on fabricated evidence, so corrupt as to amount to a frame-up. Robert gives numerous examples of this.

David Greenglass, Ethel's brother, who sent her to the electric chair by turning state's evidence, worked on the Manhattan atom bomb project at Los Alamos and was allegedly the source of information on the bomb's 'secret'. However Greenglass was a low-level engineer without access to or knowledge of the weapon's intricacies. Indeed there was no single 'secret' to the bomb – which was a complex device. Yet Greenglass was supposed to have given Julius a drawing of the bomb on the back of a jello packet! Another so-called accomplice, the seedy Harry Gold, was later to confess about the trial: 'I lied so often it's a wonder steam didn't come out of my ears.'

One contradiction of USA civil society is that a Freedom of Information Act exists alongside the hidden world of the spooks of the FBI and CIA. Over 200,000 documents relating to the case have been released under the Act. These show that Greenglass and Gold were groomed by the FBI to concoct some sort of meeting where Gold was supposedly acting as a courier using the somewhat transparent code, 'I come from Julius'.

Along with the lack of any evidence that the Rosenbergs even knew about the manufacture of

STEVE COHEN remembers the Rosenbergs and examines Robert Meeropol's appraisal of his parents' trial and judicial murder, *An Execution in the Family*

An Execution In The Family – Robert Meeropol (St Martins Press, 2003)

the bomb, it is also clear that Judge Kaufman had decided before commencement that a guilty verdict would result in execution. He had also decided to ensure a conviction by holding highly irregular and secret discussions with the prosecutor – Cohn, who was to become McCarthy's chief prosecutor in the HUAC Hollywood hearings. In passing sentence, Kaufman accused the Rosenbergs of being responsible for the Korean war, and the trial took place against the virulent anti-communism of that war of USA aggression in its bloodiest period.

Even the Supreme Court was 'nobbled'. At the last moment one of its members, William G Douglas granted a stay of execution. However this was effectively overruled by a highly irregular cabal (and then by the Court as a whole) consisting of the USA Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, Chief Justice Fred Vinson and Justice Robert Jackson – with Kaufman being kept informed by phone of their shenanigans. Finally, the Rosenbergs were never convicted of spying as such, only of conspiracy, a charge typically used by the state, any state (including Britain) when it wants to exact the maximum penalty in the absence of any real proof of an offence.

The Rosenbergs were framed and they should not have been found guilty as charged. No problem – apparently. However Robert Meeropol raises the brave and important question: just because the evidence and procedures were fundamentally tainted did this mean the Rosenbergs were innocent? Even if not guilty as charged, were Ethel and Julius still blameless of the accusation of spying? If they were not innocent, then what were they guilty of? What do these terms mean? Robert Meeropol raises these questions not least because of other sources of evidence that have come to light (or been deliberately brought into the light by government spooks) since the execution of his biological parents.

There are two such sources. One is alleged tape recordings by former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev claiming he remembered Stalin once saying that the Rosenbergs had offered significant help to the Soviet bomb development. The second and more crucial source is the so-called Venona transcripts released in 1995 by the FBI and the National Security Agency (NSA). These are purported to be decrypted KGB electronic transmissions sent from the Soviet consulate in New York to Moscow in 1944 and 1945, which allegedly showed the Rosenbergs' guilt but which were too 'sensitive' to be produced at their trial. This 'evidence' has led some investigators to denounce the Rosenbergs now as spies. These include previous supporters of their cause such as Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton in their book *The Rosenberg File* (the first edition written prior to the Venona releases).

When I first read the Radosh and Milton book I went into intellectual denial. Now Robert Meeropol has put his parents' role into their proper personal and political perspective. He correctly dismisses the Khrushchev tapes as being of dubious pedigree with a voice expert refusing to confirm who made the recordings. The Venona transcripts, even if accepted as being true and untampered with, on close examination reveal two remarkable pieces of information. Firstly they would appear to exonerate

Ethel as being any sort of agent. Secondly, inasmuch as the transcripts might relate to Julius (his name does not appear, only 'Liberal', the bizarre pseudonym for a Communist) they claim he was 'in ignorance' of the 'problem' – the bomb project.

Several conclusions can be drawn from all this. Firstly, the Rosenbergs did not give the Soviets the 'secrets' of the bomb since they never possessed them. Anyhow the Soviets didn't need Ethel or Julius for this. Klaus Fuchs, a leading scientist, had already been convicted in the UK for supplying the details of atomic fusion – Fuchs received 14 years and lived to tell the tale. Secondly, insofar as there is evidence in the Venona papers that Julius was passing on information to the KGB, this was military-industrial rather than atomic espionage. Robert Meeropol is prepared to believe this may well have been the case. Thirdly, and crucially, the question arises – so what? The Rosenbergs were convicted of supplying information during the war period – a war when the Soviet Union and the USA were supposedly allies in fighting Nazism. Many people might regard this supply of information as a positive contribution – hardly treachery. Anyhow as a communist the whole construct of 'treachery' to a bourgeois state is at any time highly problematic. Within this context we reject, or should reject, notions of innocence or guilt. Robert Meeropol reports discussing this issue with Tsekei Murati, one of the leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth Council. Tsekei simply said 'nobody ever asks us to say Nelson is not guilty'.

Then there is the role of the USA Communist Party in the Rosenberg case. The CPUSA was a thoroughly Stalinised outfit. Following the Soviet line was its knee-jerk position. The Party has gained much historic credit for apparently organising the international campaign in defence of the Rosenbergs. However the truth is very different. At the inception of the case the CPUSA distanced itself – apparently out of fear of being associated with disloyalty to the USA! Subsequently they saw which way the wind was blowing and jumped on the bandwagon of the growing defence campaign. My interpretation of this is that they were looking for martyrs and were willing to see the Rosenbergs sacrificed to the cause. This could explain one of the final mysteries of the Rosenberg case. If Julius had been involved in some sort of industrial espionage, why didn't he just confess to this as a way of showing himself innocent of the more major charge and thus save his and Ethel's life. Did he remain silent out of misplaced loyalty or even at the direct request or demand of the CP?

Today we are again living in scoundrel times. Substitute 'terrorists' for 'Communists' and we are back in the age of McCarthy. And there is a direct line between the ages. The popularisation of the lies and deceit engineered to convict Julius and Ethel paved the way for the corruption of Watergate and Irangate and for the waging of war against Iraq on a pretext – weapons of mass destruction – that is as bogus as the claim that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg sold the bomb and started the Korean war. Each big lie is just a softening up process for the next big lie. So even if we can't, as that slogan exhorted us over 50 years ago, 'Save the Rosenbergs', we should still remember them and their judicial murder.

It is a measure of the cultural and political crisis within Israeli society that its most famous singer struggles to get her songs past the radio censors and has refused to perform in the country for the last three years.

Chava Alberstein is a household name in Israel, with 50 albums to her name. When commentators dub her 'the Joan Baez of Israel' this is not just a reference to a voice of beauty and depth, often accompanied solely by her guitar, but to an engagement with protest and a heartfelt call to the listeners to examine their consciences.

Since the 1980s Alberstein's songs have occupied this territory more frequently, most famously with her rewrite of the traditional Passover song *Had Gadya* – an allegory of Jewish fate told through the story of animals, each the victim of more powerful forces. In her version she states (translated from Hebrew): 'Once I was a sheep and a peaceful goat. Today I am a tiger and a predatory wolf. Once I was a dove. Today I don't know who I am ... how long will the circle of horror continue?' In the country which claims to have more free speech than its regional neighbours, her song was banned from the airwaves by the Israeli Broadcasting Authority. But the citizens were ready for it even if the government were not, and it sold massively, both in Israel and abroad.

Her new album, *End of the Holiday*, is perhaps even bolder, as it shines a light on the fraying edges of Israeli society epitomised in the immigrant neighbourhoods of south Tel Aviv. Her voice is sombre and powerful as she relays the human stories that

There is a saying in the Talmud: 'flobodim chayit bar hatmo flibidim' – blessed be the homemaker and the joy that is she. We read in the Book of Samuel how Bleari, the Wibsitte, still prepared a shabbat meal despite being banished to the desert. We reflect on the story of Bleari and her daughter Dreari during the month of wisteria in a ritual called D'sp'rate H'sewives where the Jewish mother and homemaker thanks God that she still has the respect of her husband and throws the crockery into the garden. As I read these stories I am reminded of the uniqueness of our experience as Jewish women and feel the spiritual ties that link me through the ages back to the great matriarchs Sarah, Rachel, Ruth, and the countless women in the Bible who we honour. There is a story in the midrash where Rabbi Haberdash...

Bored? Of course you are and you've only read 12 lines. Well over half of the 300 pages of this disappointing book is filled with this drivel. The editors of this collection of essays called *Jewish Motherhood* invited contributions from relatives and friends but soon found many were sent spontaneously. Their criteria for inclusion seems to lie with whether their first name is 'Rabbi' rather than if they can write. Karen Solomon's bland, fatuous 'blessings' had me scrawling obscenities Joe Orton-like into the margins. Rabbi Marcia Plumb plumbed the depths of silliness with her blessings for nappy changing and breastfeeding: 'Blessed are you who creates milk ducts that flow and nipples to suck and breasts to provide what is needed.'

I won't repeat what my margin notes tell Marcia she needs.

So we wade through pages of orthodox women contorting themselves to excuse the cruelty and ignorance of the Bible peasants as well as their elders that exclude and suppress them. There is a

illustrate the plight of immigrant workers (Vera from Bucharest), racism (Shadow), environmental degradation (Dying Creek), and, on several tracks, the loss of hope that threatens to overcome people's resilience and yearning for change. There are echoes of a melancholy Leonard Cohen melody (Famous Blue Raincoat) in the chorus of the title track. It sets the tone for the album which has few uplifting moments, but manages to convey deep warmth and purpose.

Alberstein is renowned not only for her work in Hebrew but also for her work in her mother tongue – Yiddish – which she spoke as a child in Poland, and after emigrating to Israel aged 4. Her Yiddish songs, from her earliest recordings to her fabulous collaboration with the Klezmatics on *The Well*, convey the full range of emotions, from desperation to ecstasy, but in her current album the emotions expressing hope and excitement are barely heard. Yet her compassion for ordinary people and their struggles to overcome their circumstances shines through.

Che Guevara said that 'the true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love'. I don't suppose Alberstein sees herself as a revolutionary but her mixture of protest and heartfelt humanity is certainly inspiring. And, as she asked the audience in London recently after her first number, 'Why must love for people stop at the border?'

Ben Nafasi



REBEL MUSIC

CD: *End of the Holiday*, Chava Alberstein, Rounder Records

GET A LIFE

FOR GENERATIONS: JEWISH MOTHERHOOD.
Edited by Ronne Randall and Mandy Ross.

Five Leaves Publications.
Price £9.99

poignancy as they grudgingly acknowledge the lives they live. Some claim small victories like Sally Berkovic who was concerned that the male teacher in her daughters' school constantly reinforced the idea that her daughters will never be allowed to participate on equal terms as the men. She approached him after classes. 'He listened sympathetically and scribbled a few notes down on a yellow Post-It note.'

Sally will be 'waiting to see if the message on the Post-It note makes its way into the script'. Even prisoners have a right to arrange the furniture in their cell. Conformity is all and I find these people quite simply inhuman. Listen, in contrast, to Auschwitz survivor Kitty Hart whose eldest son married a German non-Jew: 'To me it wasn't an issue ... I can't understand parents who cut off the children who don't marry into the faith.'

But at least there is a confidence about them, unlike the secular or Liberal/Reform-raised women who, on giving birth, fall about in confusion and insecurity that some form of Jewish identity has to be thrust upon the child as if it were a polio or TB jab. Their partners, many of whom are either secular Jews or not Jewish are left dumbfounded as a circumcision ceremony is arranged, Jewish nursery/school places are sought and family meals are replaced with mumbling rituals. Are any of them more Jewish as a result of all this frenzied activity? Thank God for their children. Ronne Randall's son is passionate about Celtic folklore, fencing, football and hip-hop. He doesn't believe in religious rituals and would not have his son circumcised but he will always identify himself as a cultural Jew. Some, like lesbian mother Lisa Saffron, I warm to. She enrolled her daughter into a Jewish nursery and tried to become part of the Orthodox community in north London. She bravely

ON THE SHELF

RAF SALKIE
reviews books
that challenge
received
wisdoms

tells another mother that she is a lesbian and the mother is horrified.

'I knew then that I could never belong to that narrow segment of the Jewish community... By accepting myself as I was I showed self-acceptance and acceptance of diversity... I gave her (daughter) a framework for understanding prejudice and oppression and people's shared humanity...'

The latter half of the book redeems itself slightly. Masha Gessen's 'Mutation' is a beautifully written piece that examines the failed relationship she had with her late mother and the bitter irony of living with her genetic legacy. Shirly Eran, an Israeli mother, grapples with Israeli society's perception of 'sanctified motherhood' in a land of 'endless bloodshed'. She tries to teach tolerance and coexistence as she anticipates her children entering national service. I enjoyed Anne Sebba's short story (was it fiction?) of a difficult lunch with her Palestinian friend and Berta Freistadt's honest reflection of her 'childless state'. Michele Hanson gave

I think a lot about difficult moral choices these days, so if you want a comfortable read, look away now. Here's an interesting statistic about the city of Hamburg. For four years until April 1945, public auctions of stolen Jewish property from all over Europe were held in the city every working day. Ships and trains loaded with luxury items poured in, and thousands of citizens obtained fur coats, jewellery, antique furniture and other things which had previously been beyond their reach. When there were temporary lulls in supply, the locals complained noisily. A minority refused to profit from genocide but huge numbers of people were only too happy to enjoy themselves and turn a blind eye.

These and many other disturbing facts come from *Surviving Hitler: Corruption and Compromise in the Third Reich* (Simon & Schuster), by Adam Lebor and Roger Boyes. The authors ask why so many Germans adapted easily to the Nazi regime, and argue that the terror apparatus was only one factor. Basically, the Nazis used consumer goods, mass tourism and patriotic propaganda to seduce many ordinary Germans, including socialists who should have known better.

The important questions for me are about the pre-Nazi democracy in which most of these people acquired (or rather, failed to acquire) their moral standards. This society was not very different from our own (in which, lest you've forgotten, scaremongering about asylum seekers led 800,000 people to vote for the BNP last year – and it would have been more if UKIP

hadn't attracted much of the anti-immigrant vote). How come so many Germans slipped easily from capitalist democracy to accepting fascism? How come so many British voters can't see evil in front of their faces?

Part of the answer is that it's easy to scare people into dividing humans into friends and enemies. Sadly, religion is rather good at this. Richard Dawkins is an outspoken critic of religious dogmatism, and his very readable collection of essays, *A Devil's Chaplain* (Phoenix), pulls no punches. Writing in outrage shortly after 9/11, Dawkins concedes that religious hate is not the primary cause for wars, murders and terrorist attacks, but insists that religion is 'the most inflammatory enemy-labelling device in history', the classic way of dividing the world into 'us' and 'them'. What's more, he says, calling a ludicrous piece of bigotry a 'religious belief' is a way of protecting it from rational argument, so that facile prejudices about the origins of life, the mistreatment of women, or homosexuality have to be treated with 'respect' for fear of 'offending' people's deeply-held convictions.

The monotheistic religions didn't invent intolerance, of course, but we sure do it well. As a Jew it's our own extremists who worry me most, and they are described in shocking detail by the late Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky in a new edition of *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (Pluto). The authors write that in Czarist Russia until the 1880s, riots in which groups of orthodox Jews attacked each other or persecuted

an intelligent introduction to the book and I always enjoy her writing.

Read Julia Bard. Sanctified be her name. When my partner and I agonised over whether to circumcise our son her words were the ones that stayed with me: 'Each family is different and not everyone shares my analysis and way of identifying with the Jewish community... My responsibility should have been to make an informed choice on behalf of my babies not to cave into propaganda.'

Unfortunately I gave up on many chapters. My eyes learned that italics meant more religious nothings, so I skipped them. What's the point? These people don't learn anything from life. Fundamentally, though, there's nothing in these writings that convinces me that our experiences, histories, family lives, dreams, fears and anxieties, albeit different, make us unique. I think of Lisa Saffron's phrase 'shared humanity'. I wouldn't want it any other way.

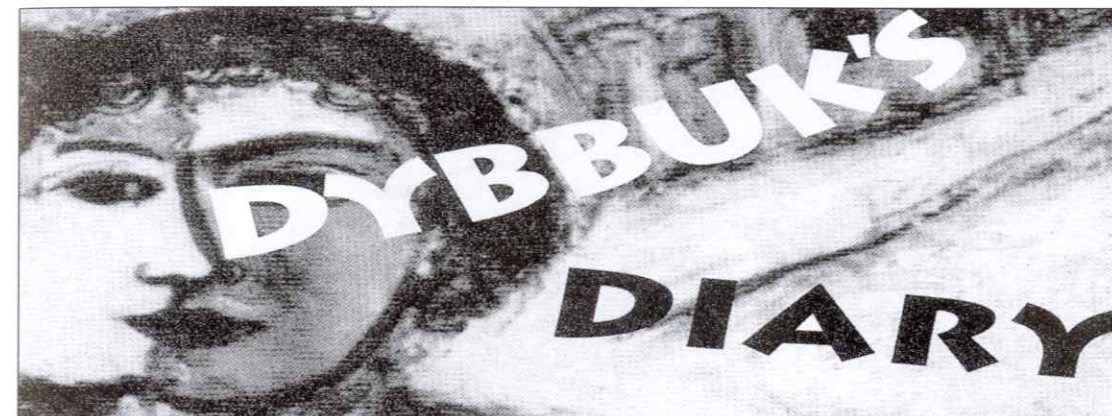
Ruth Lukom

secular Jews probably outnumbered pogroms by non-Jews. The book draws a direct line from groups of Hassidim smashing each other's synagogues in the Pale of Settlement to Yigal Amir, who believed that he had a divine right to assassinate Yitzchak Rabin. The Jewish extremists who now curse Ariel Sharon for insisting that they withdraw from Gaza are part of this tradition of intolerance.

And so to a pair of books which left me very uneasy: *The Myths of Zionism* by John Rose (Pluto), and *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*, a book of essays edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair (Counterpunch). Both books criticise Zionism as reactionary and destructive, and say that it is the wrong response to antisemitism. Their arguments are powerful, but I can't see a strategy emerging from them. I hold to the belief that as long as Jews are frightened (and see the world as 'us versus them'), they will cling to simple solutions. We need to attack the causes of Jewish fears, rather than attacking Jews for being frightened.

So we need to figure out why people like us are seduced by fascism, to confront the causes of antisemitism, support everyone who is working for justice in the Middle East, and condemn our own extremists and fanatics who are taking Israel down the road towards destruction. We'll need immense moral courage and massive energy. It sounds impossible – but if we don't succeed, we'll be remembered as no different from 'ordinary Germans'.

Well, I warned you that moral choices weren't a lot of fun.



NO EXIT

Such is the world, some poor people even try their luck in Israel. Migrant workers, cheaper than Jews, and less of a 'problem' than Palestinians (who are being excluded), are tending crops, cleaning floors, humping cement, and looking after old people. When they claim rights, even wages owed, they can be sacked and conveniently deported. The workers' hotline, Kav La'Oved, helps them, but one case amazed campaigners and lawyers. 'A' was arrested at Ben Gurion airport as he was about to leave the country.

He had a valid ticket for his flight back home to Moldova in the Czech Republic in two hours' time, but police took him to Ma'asiyahu prison. 'A' entered Israel two years ago as an 'illegal'. Caught by police late last year, he escaped when left unattended while they arrested someone else. But hearing his son was ill and needed to have an operation, 'A' decided to return home. He bought his ticket, obtained a laissez-passer from the embassy, and went to the airport on December 2. Police followed and arrested him.

'I cannot ignore the grave conduct of the immigration police,' said Attorney Sharon Bavli-Larry, of the Justice Ministry. 'The impression is that someone in the police tried to settle accounts with the detainee, or even to take revenge for his escaping from them a month ago.' Since 'A' was in jail, at the taxpayers' expense, and his ticket was no longer valid, the state would have to pay for another. 'The fact that the police have a quota of arrests to meet does not justify arresting someone who is leaving the country.'

In days of old, we took our revenge on police persecutors by

satirising their stupidity. Now we are a free people with 'our own' state, and can have our bullying cops like other nations! Meanwhile, with Britain's privatised immigration police pursuing government targets, it might happen at Heathrow.

STOP THAT TREE!

Tu B'Shvat is the Jewish New Year for Trees. As a kid I had to play the part of a palm tree in a garden pageant. My cousin threatened to fetch his dog as drama critic. I ceased being proud of trees planted in my name by the Jewish National Fund when I learned they might hide remains of an Arab village. Making the desert fruitful? Seeing what Israel's bulldozers have been doing to Palestinian fruit trees and olive groves, we could re-use old 'before' and 'after' pictures, in reverse. Some officers have a nice sideline selling old trees to Israel's new yuppie estates.

At Tu B'Shvat Rabbis for Human Rights went planting trees with Palestinian villagers. At Jayyous, where the Separation Wall separates villagers from their lands, taken for a new settlement, they faced a heavy police presence.

'I warn you, this is private property belonging to the settlers, and the planting of olive trees here is a violation of the law,' said the officer. 'We shall photograph every single person planting trees.' Though kept apart by police and troops, Israelis and Palestinians planted hundreds of saplings. Avoiding clashes on camera, the authorities waited a few days before bringing bulldozers to uproot them.

Olive trees aren't the only goodwill symbol in trouble. At Haifa University, Arab students

wanted a seasonal Christmas tree in the student cafeteria, where there had been a Chanukah menorah. The university banished the tree to a faraway spot where few people would see it. A court ruled that students could not tell the university where to site a 'religious symbol'.

On American websites, Israel's friends denounce 'intolerant Arabs' for wanting to ban the Christmas tree. Don't confuse them with facts, they know their opinions. In the words of the song, 'I talk to the trees, that's why they put me away, but here in Israel, the trees have been arrested.'

LA LORE

Just when what Ken Livingstone told a reporter outside a party seemed about to fade from memory, the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre has intervened, linking Ken's name with everything from swastikas in Hampshire to street crime in north London. It says Livingstone not only insulted a Jewish reporter but called Ariel Sharon a war criminal. There are real Holocaust deniers and Nazis in California, but the Wiesenthal Centre looks far and wide for enemies. Last year it wanted a Jewish boycott of the Athens Olympics, and accused Norway of stopping Jews from commemorating Kristallnacht. As Oslo's Jewish community tried to tell the Centre, the police had actually prevented Norwegian right-wingers with Israeli flags gatecrashing the Kristallnacht march (which is better than what the police did in Oldham in Lancashire).

But well-funded American outfits don't have to listen to us little people in Europe. Or we'd ask what the Simon Wiesenthal Centre got for helping Arnie Schwarzenegger.