

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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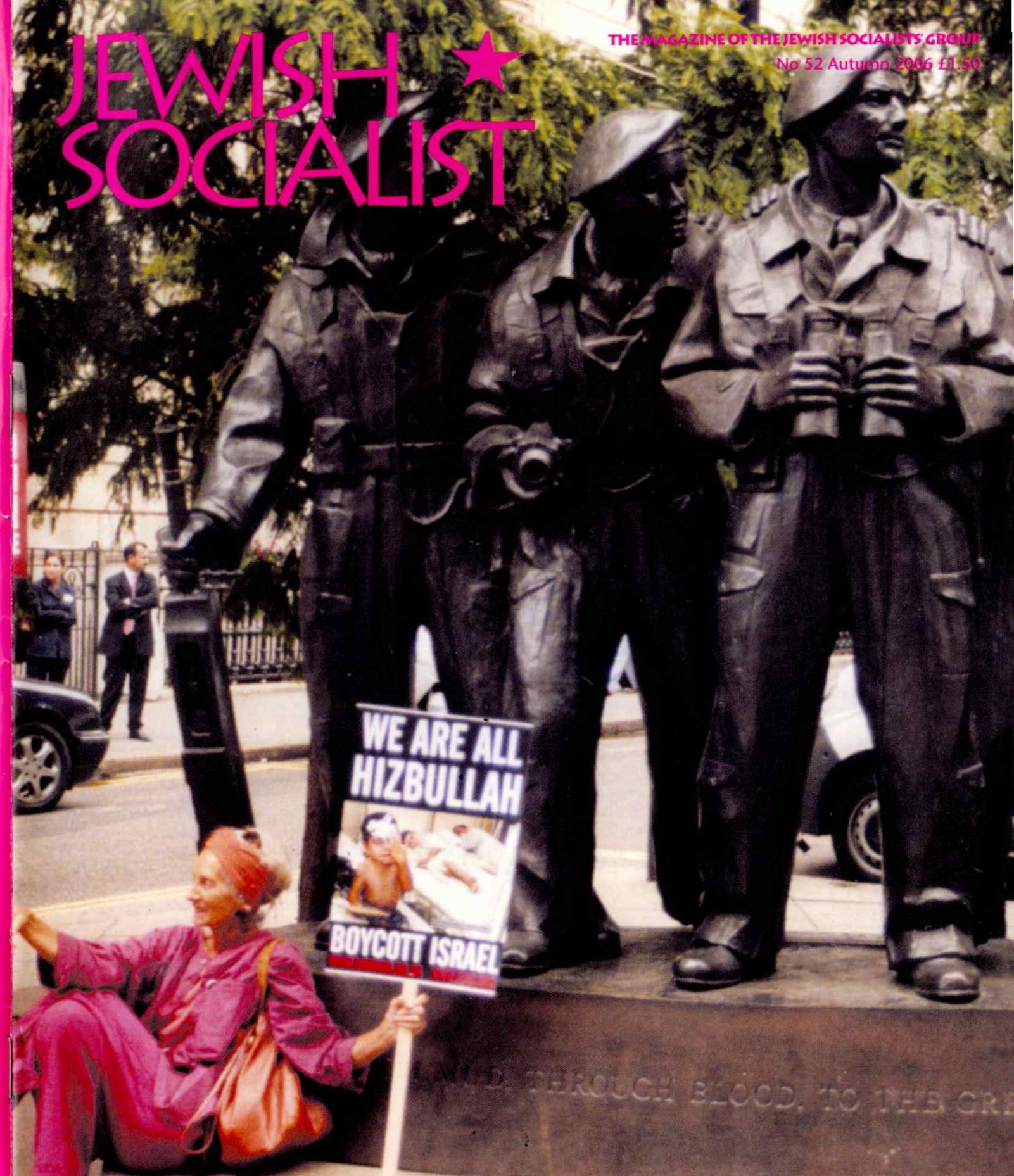
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For further information write to:
Membership Secretary
Jewish Socialists' Group,
BM3725, London WC1N 3XX
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JEWISH SOCIALIST ★

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

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MIXING IT

CAN POLITICS + RELIGION = FREEDOM?

Cable Street ■ Animal rights ■ jewdas ■ Suez ■ Hungary

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Cover photo: Lebanon demonstration, London 2006/Simon Lynn
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the new issue of Jewish Socialist and belated New Year greetings for 5767. The period between Rosh Hashona (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), which fell in late September/early October, is traditionally a period of deep reflection on the previous 12 months. You don't have to be religious to do this – although religion's menacing combination with politics and power has been a hot topic of debate on the Left and within wider society in this period.

In the age of the 'war on terror' – in which, ironically, the prosecuting states themselves use terror – the media associates religion and politics almost exclusively with Islam. We cast our net wider and also look a little closer to home. In the Jewish community, as Clifford Singer shows (page 14), a well-resourced organisation presenting itself as modern, enlightened and intellectually challenging, may be drawing its recruits into something quite the opposite. We present a parallel article by Delwar Hussain (page 8) on the forces that have shifted politics within Muslim communities – in London's East End and in Bangladesh – away from secular, socialist approaches and towards religious fundamentalism.

The recent war in Lebanon faced the Left with the conundrum of how to express its support for forces defending themselves and Lebanese civilians from bombardment from American arms through its local superpower, when those forces explicitly subscribe to religious-based ideologies that run counter to freedom and equality for all, call themselves the 'party of God' and draw inspiration and sustenance from the deeply reactionary and oppressive Iranian regime. Proclaiming 'We are all Hezbollah' – as significant sections of the Left and the anti-war movement were prepared to do – was a crass and puerile attempt to square this circle. We show how Jewish socialists and peace activists here and in Israel (page 18) intervened on these issues while Lebanon burned and Israel's Arab and Jewish citizens faced random strikes from katyusha rockets.

Jewish Socialist is always pleased to welcome new writers and open new controversies. With Anat Pick's article (page 11) we do both. The application of Holocaust analogies to contemporary Middle East politics is often regarded as stepping into dangerous territory, but she argues that such analogies can inform a different debate – on the way humans treat animals.

Anniversaries always bring opportunities for serious reflection. In this issue we recall 1936 and 1956: the first, a pivotal moment in the struggle against fascism in Britain (page 6), the second, traumatic days in Hungary and Suez (page 24), with grave implications for the decades that followed.

Britain's Jews have been marking their own significant anniversary this year – 350 years of continuous community life here after Cromwell acceded to petitioning and allowed Jews to re-enter the country. Those Jews who have succeeded materially, socially and politically are keen to portray the period since then as one long forward march. But, as Tony Kushner and Amanda Sebestyen, show (page 28), conflicts of minority identity and status have been and continue to be far from straightforward.

Along with these, there are many more articles here to inform you and make you think. We hope you enjoy this issue and that it will challenge, enlighten and inspire you.

News

Bridge role



Dissident Jews in Philadelphia found a novel way to spread their message during the Lebanon war that there was no consensus of American Jews behind Israel's war machine. They unfurled three large banners from bridges over main roads in the rush hour in an action co-ordinated with Jewish peace activists in New York and San Francisco.

A Philadelphia rabbinical student who recently returned from a month on the West Bank documenting human rights abuses against Palestinians said: 'Many American Jews don't support Israel's recent actions in Lebanon. We stand in solidarity with our Arab American neighbours whose voices are often ignored by the mainstream media and whose families are in danger. We oppose the two billion dollars a year in US foreign aid that goes directly to Israel's military, outfitting the violence we're seeing now in Lebanon.'

Philadelphia Jewish Solidarity phillysolidarity@gmail.com

Window on the world

'O the Windows of the Bookshop Must be Broken' is the title of an excellent collection of poems recently published by Jewish Socialists' Group member David Kessel. It brings together poems he has written between 1970-2006. David Kessel is a longstanding member of the East End Outsider Poets and a regular reader for Survivors' Poetry at the Poetry Café in London.

Available for £8 from Survivors Press, Studio 11, Bickerton House, Bickerton Road, London N19 5JT.

Website: www.survivorspoetry.com

Exhibitionists

The Jewish Museum in London is marking the 350th anniversary of the Jews' re-entry into Britain under Cromwell with a thought provoking photographic exhibition called Identities 2006, focusing on diversity in the Jewish community today. The exhibition also includes a documentary exploring the attachments of a range of individuals to Jewish life

within multicultural Britain. It includes interviews with two members of the Jewish Socialist editorial committee! The exhibition continues until 12th November at its Camden Town site, 129-131 Albert Street London NW1 7NB
www.jewishmuseum.org.uk
* Read Tony Kushner on marking 350 years on page 28

God is not great

Women Against Fundamentalism has called a meeting to discuss the twin threat to progressive movements posed by both the state's 'War on Terror' and by the collusion of the Left with fundamentalist religious leaders who are attempting to undermine rights and freedoms. Speakers include Pragna Patel from Southall Black Sisters, Nadjie Al-Ali of Act Together: Women's Action for Iraq, and Mai Ghoussoub, writer, artist and founder of Saqi Books.

The meeting, which will be chaired by Julia Bard of the Jewish Socialists' Group, takes place on Saturday October 21st, 2pm - 5pm, Upper Hall, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY. Entrance £5/£2.

Senseless in Gaza

Jews for justice for Palestinians took a full-page advert in The Times in July with signatures of 300 Jews in Britain condemning the Israeli army's bombardment of Gaza. In a further statement on Gaza at the beginning of September JFJFP said:

'The invasion of Lebanon has hidden the invasion of Gaza. The Israeli Army is reducing the buildings to rubble, the population to homelessness and penury. There is hardly any water or power, few supplies of food or clothing. Crossings – nominally EU controlled – are closed by Israel. Where fishing was restricted before, now it is banned altogether.'

'Having reoccupied Gaza, the IDF is blind to its own failures. They continue to destroy while claiming to be searching for Corporal Shalit, who remains a prisoner. There is no ceasefire here, immediate or sustainable, just state sanctioned violence and

murder. Over 220 people were killed in Gaza in August.

'Meanwhile, faced with a failure of 'unilateralism' the Israeli government chooses to ignore the obvious lesson. Rather than negotiate they prefer to prolong the crisis by instigating their own abductions of democratically elected legislators and ministers. In the words of Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, this is "politicide".

'Israel and its armed forces are wasting time and lives. Only negotiations can see Shalit and thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons released to their families. Only genuine freedom for Palestinians will stop Qassam rockets. Israel knows this, and so does the rest of the world. The situation will not be resolved while Israel and international actors behave as though they were deaf, dumb and blind.'

PO Box 46081, London W9 2ZF
jffp@jffp.org

Who let the dogs out?

The far right British National Party scored an unexpected success on the edges of east London in May's local elections. DAVE LANDAU analyses how this happened and what we can learn from it

The local authority election in May 2006 marked a significant gain for the BNP. They now have 48 seats compared with the 21 they had in 2004. Seventy-seven BNP candidates who failed to get elected, came second. Their average percentage of the vote in wards they contested was 19%. In the West Midlands their vote went up from 45,000 to 64,000 – their biggest increase in votes. In Yorkshire they got their highest vote: 88,000 compared with 82,000 in 2004. On the East London/Essex border they have become the second party in Barking & Dagenham with 12 seats and won a seat in two neighbouring boroughs, Havering and Redbridge, in both cases topping the poll in the wards where they stood. In the Hainault ward of Redbridge, they might have won two or three seats if they had stood for all the available seats. And three more in Epping Forest.

But they had setbacks, too, and did not make their national breakthrough. In the North West their vote dropped from over 28,000 to 23,000. They expected to gain more seats in the West Midlands certainly. But they could hardly believe their success in Barking & Dagenham.

Perfect timing

Certain events played into their hands. They capitalised on the 7/7 bombing, sustaining a campaign against Islam from then on. During the election period their principal slogan was 'Make 4 May a Referendum on Islam'. The publication of the Danish cartoons and the events that followed enhanced their campaign.

The BNP benefited too from a disgraceful media and politicians' campaign around 'foreign criminals' released in to the community – much more dangerous, we are led to believe, than the considerably larger number of British born and bred criminals released into the community.

The election coincided with a low point in British politics: the Labour Government's failure to meet people's expectations was typified by chaos and cuts in the Health Service, reports of an ever increasing pensionable age, and the cash for peerages scandal.

Then there was the extraordinary talking up of the BNP's chances by Barking's Labour MP, Margaret Hodge, suggesting that eight out of 10 white people in her constituency might vote BNP. This undoubtedly had an impact on the results there.

It was not just external factors, though. The BNP targeted wards they were seriously going to try and win, and worked terrifically hard. People often say to candidates, councillors and MPs: 'We only see you at election time.' Not so with the BNP. They were visible in all their target wards. In a period of disenchantment and neglect this spoke volumes to disaffected voters.

Divided campaigners

Local anti-BNP activity was marred by divisions in the anti-fascist movement between Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and the Together groups, closely allied to the anti-fascist anti-racist magazine Searchlight. The Jewish Socialists' Group has argued against this split and called for a movement that is 'United and Together!' But what lessons have they learned?

In Searchlight (June 2006) Nick Lowles argued that Labour seats are mainly at risk to the BNP because of their failure to deliver to the working class. This is amplified in a further article by Jon Cruddas MP and Nick Lowles where they write about 'working class disenfranchisement'. They say: 'New Labour has quite consciously removed class as an economic or political category; it has specifically calibrated a science of political organisations – indeed an ideology – to camp out in middle England with unarguable electoral successes.' They look at health, wage inequalities, and the failure to provide social housing for which racism provides scapegoats, and put forward a series of good demands on housing strategy, labour market reform, education, health and the use of brownfield land. However, behind these very good points, they start to make serious concessions, for example, when Nick Lowles writes about how the issue of Polish migrant workers dominated the election campaign.

He says: '...the issue of migrant workers is far more incendiary than that of asylum seekers. Asylum

seekers are seen by some as "scroungers" exploiting an over-tolerant society. Migrant workers, abused as they are now by some employers, are a threat to people's livelihoods. That's cash in the pocket and food for the family.'

If this is true, what follows? Either you follow what Voice of the Aliens said over 100 years ago when the same arguments were being made about Jewish immigration: recognise that the problem is capitalism not the workers and organise for equal rights at work and equal wages. Or you say, there are too many migrant workers, kick them out, stop them coming in. Lowles remains silent on this question.

Lowles and Cruddas call for a 'once and for all regularisation of illegal migrants so as properly to quantify population growth'. It sounds radical at first, but it is in no sense saying 'No One is Illegal'. The phrase 'once and for all' sounds ominous. After this 'regularisation' presumably the Government must batten down the hatches. Will those who are 'regularised' have the same entitlements as everybody else or are they to be kicked out when they have served their economic purpose? The suggestion that migrant workers are a real threat and problem, implies the worst interpretation. [Since this article was written, Nick Lowles has written a good piece on these questions in the following edition of Searchlight (Labour's timidity is giving fuel to the racists, September 2006) which is unambiguously pro-migrant.]

Unite Against Fascism produced a paper 'The BNP and the 2006 local elections'. Surprisingly, for a campaign involving members of avowedly Marxist organisations in its national leadership, its analysis is less sharp on class questions than Searchlight. The main lesson that they draw is the importance of building an alliance and 'confronting racism head on': 'The broadest possible coalition against the BNP has to be constructed nationally and locally, centrally involving the trade unions, the Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, religious faiths, lesbian and gay groups and every other community threatened by the fascists.'

An almost exact quote from the Jewish Socialists' Group resolution passed at the National Assembly Against Racism, this is a step forward from their previous insistence on Black leadership. More specifically on Barking & Dagenham they say: 'Many commentators have rightly argued that more investment in social housing is needed. However this must be accompanied by a systematic campaign opposing and defeating the racist myth that grants have been given specifically to African communities... some politicians have said that allocation of housing needs to be changed with more of a priority given to families that have lived in the area longer....'

Both Barking & Dagenham Together and the UAF produced material challenging the 'Africans for Essex' myth, which the BNP endlessly played on. The problem with Barking & Dagenham Together is that the many of the people associated with them were Labour councillors who conceded much more on these questions when wearing their Labour Party hats. This proves how important it is that anti-fascist campaigns remain independent from the political parties especially when these parties are in power, locally or nationally. They can be in a united front, with the campaign forcing them into opposing racism, rather than the campaign appearing to be on the back foot, pandering to them.

According to the UAF: 'How the BNP won councillors here was a mirror image of how the BNP were defeated in Millwall; the Labour vote increased, but the greater mobilisation of the BNP vote reflected in the higher

turnout of 38%, meant the BNP gained council seats. The anti-fascist campaign was able to increase the Labour vote; however, it was not sufficiently big and broad enough to tap into the 68% of the electorate that did not vote. Crucially the communities targeted by the BNP – particularly the African communities and other ethnic minority communities – needed to be more engaged in the anti-fascist campaign.'

This argument is a bit bizarre. The self-organisation of communities targeted by fascism is not primarily about getting their votes out but about how their organisation can inform and reshape the politics of the working class movements as a whole. Both UAF and Barking & Dagenham Together worked on getting the Black and minority ethnic vote out but the UAF, surprisingly, given that this was one of their criticisms of Together, talked about getting the Labour vote out specifically. If the majority party had been Conservative, what would they say then? Both UAF and Together were tied too closely to Labour.

The critical argument for the centrality of communities under attack was made by the JSJG when the National Front had targeted areas with large Black communities. These days the BNP target predominantly white wards close to areas with significant ethnic minority communities. This makes it far more difficult in practice to involve these communities at a local level. Epping Forest District, for example, is almost entirely white in terms of its residents. The BNP spread fear about those coming from elsewhere to study at the local college. But UAF's real problem,

as a top-down national organisation, is how seriously it can take the word 'local'.

Can we beat them?

Lessons can be gained from the fight against fascism in the East End in the 1930s, where the British Union of Fascists were making gains in sections of the working class on an antisemitic basis. The Jewish working class played a crucial role pushing the anti-fascist agenda forward locally, and forging an alliance with the wider working class (see the article on page 6). The crucial factor was that the leadership of struggles against the employers and landlords – whether Communist Party, Bundist, left Labour or Independent Labour Party – were associated with the anti-fascist movement. This is the key to uniting the whole class, not a campaign too closely linked with MPs and councillors who reflect the system that is oppressing, or at least failing to deliver to the working class.

What is missing from the anti-fascist movement today is the issue of protecting those communities under threat from fascism, supporting their self-defence against the enemy and providing workers' defence of them: the old tradition of 'they shall not pass'. As the BNP and other racists gain confidence and feel they have a license to abuse and attack, this issue will be increasingly on the agenda.

We need a united front based on these principles, built from the grassroots upwards. This is the perspective we should fight for in both Unite and Together, while arguing that this is no time be disunited and untogether.

WISEWORDS



'Ever since I have been big enough to understand things I have rebelled. As a small child of three or four years old I would rebel at human injustice in the way I understood it at that age. And as long as I have been able to remember, up until now, the government and a lot of people have treated me as a second class citizen...from the time I arrived in Spain until after the time I left, for that period of my life I felt like a human being, like a man. People didn't look at me with hatred in their eyes because I was black, and I wasn't refused this or refused that because I was black. I was treated like all the rest of the people were treated, and when you have been in the world quite a long time and have been treated worse than people treat their dogs, it is quite a nice feeling to go some place and feel like a human being.'

Morgan Crawford, African-American volunteer for liberty in the International Brigade, a fighter against Franco's forces in Spain. On the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, Jewish Socialist salutes all who volunteered in the fight against fascism in Spain.

EAST END

On the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, **DAVID ROSENBERG** describes how the antifascist struggle won the hearts and minds of the people of London's East End, Jewish and non-Jewish, and explores its political legacy today

Sir Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts were physically prevented from marching through the heart of the Jewish East End on 4th October 1936 by the massed ranks of East Enders and their supporters. It has gone down in history as the day pre-War fascism was defeated in Britain.

Mosley can't fault the British state. Police fought for hours to find a way through Gardiners corner, where the City of London met the East End. When they found it solidly blocked, they tried their luck at the 'Jewish end' of Cable Street, closer to the River Thames. In Cable Street though, anti-fascists had overturned lorries as they erected improvised barricades. They were chalked with 'no pasaran', 'they shall not pass', the popular slogan of the Spanish Civil War. Bottles, hot water – anything that came to hand – rained down on the police trying to break through the barricades. Marbles were thrown under the feet of police horses to disrupt their charges. Feigning a retreat at one point, some police were lured by the anti-fascists and subjected to 'people's arrests'.

The police, though, made more than 80 arrests and their beatings resulted in many bandaged heads. But, by mid-afternoon, Police Commissioner Sir Phillip Game had to disappoint Mosley and advise him to head off in the opposite direction. Suffering humiliation in a movement they saw as invincible, many of Mosley's supporters drifted away in the weeks and months that followed 4th October. Their charismatic leader turned out to have feet of clay.

It didn't stop Mosley trying to revive his movement's fortunes, continuing to spread his poisonous ideology and winning some new adherents, but the heart and soul was ripped from his organisation at the Battle of Cable Street.

Cable Street, which led from the docks, was a narrow street running about a mile and a half, full of little sheds and tenements. It marked a border of the 'Jewish East End'. One end was Jewish, the other was populated by families of Catholic Irish dockworkers. The relationship between these communities over several decades was typified by suspicion and hostility but peppered with inspiring acts of solidarity – supporting each other's families during prolonged strikes. Communist Party branch meetings were one of the few arenas where Jewish tailors and Irish dockers breached the territorial divide to meet in common purpose. But these separate communities were completely united on 4th October and, if not close friends, they became firm allies.

Without doubt Mosley was humiliated at Cable Street, but so too were the dominant political forces in Anglo Jewry. The Jewish masses responded to the call of the Jewish People's Council, the Communist Party, the Independent Labour Party the trade unions, and the Workers Circle, against the express wishes of the Board of Deputies and against the advice of the Jewish Chronicle. Then, as now, the Chronicle represented the conservative forces in the community.

The Friday before the demonstration The Jewish Chronicle advised its readers to stay inside and pull down the shutters, a call echoed by local rabbis. The attitude of the Board and the Chronicle exemplified

the complete failure of the Jewish West End to recognise the reality endured in the Jewish East End, and the levels of anger bubbling to the surface.

Today the Board of Deputies rises loudly in righteous indignation at any incident that could possibly be construed as anti-Jewish. Yet, when antisemitic incidents were first being reported in greater numbers in the early 1930s, the Board tried to deny or trivialise these incidents.

When they could no longer ignore them, they argued that such attitudes couldn't be intrinsic to Great Britain but must have been imported from Nazi Germany. Faced with a growing clamour to act, they advised Jews to 'stay away' from the antisemites. At the height of the antisemitic agitation in the summer of 1936, a 'special correspondent' of the Jewish Chronicle was despatched to the East End. In a series of articles he captured the mood in the area and broke ranks with the softly, softly approach. He wrote:

'If the Black shirts are allowed to continue their villainous campaign of lies and incitement, racial riots must not be regarded as an improbable result. This is not scaremongering.'

Moved by his reports, the Jewish Chronicle editorial line briefly shifted in a more radical direction, arguing that the East End Jews would like 'to stay away from the chalking of offensive remarks on the pavement and walls of houses, the placards stuck on doors and people who go into shops and intimidate Jewish shopkeepers. Jewish pedestrians set upon by gangs of thugs would be only too glad to stay away.'

But, perhaps under direct pressure from the Board of Deputies, they returned to type and warned the community not to become 'troublemakers' by physically confronting the fascists.

The Jewish establishment's understanding and assessment of British antisemitism developed very little during the 1930s. It attributed negativity towards Jews to ignorance of Judaism. Their action was limited to organising community orators to educate the public about Judaism.

A grassroots body, the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Antisemitism (JPC), closely linked to the Workers Circle movement, the Communist Party and the National Council for Civil Liberties, outflanked the Board of Deputies. As well as mobilising a 100,000-strong petition calling on the Home Secretary to outlaw Mosley's march, the Jewish People's Council called on people to physically prevent the Blackshirt march if it went ahead. Fenner Brockway of the Independent Labour Party addressed a large meeting in Hackney Town Hall a few days before 4th October calling for a mass demonstration.

The JPC also organised a strong street orator campaign, the difference being that their speakers recognised the instrumental role that antisemitism played in fascism as a political movement. This meant that they were able to explain to non-Jews, who were ripe for recruitment to Mosley's movement, how fascism was a threat to their lives and their aspirations too.

BATTLEGROUND

The Communist Party benefited more than the Board of Deputies from the turmoil in the East End in the 1930s. Its national membership doubled between 1935-37 and many new recruits joined its East London branches. A Jewish communist, Phil Piratin, secretary of the Party's Stepney branch was elected as a councillor in 1937 and later in 1945 as MP for Mile End, Stepney. He won the votes of Jews and non-Jews in the East End. His and his party's popularity and victory illuminated the deeper struggle that defeated fascism in the East End.

Cable Street was a pivotal moment but the anti-fascists couldn't have succeeded without consistent work on the social and economic problems to which Mosley's movement offered its antisemitic solutions. Although the Communist Party nationally was split on how much attention to give to Mosley's movement and how much to international developments, especially the civil war raging in Spain, its East End branches forced the hand of the party nationally in prioritising local work by its activists there.

The Party provided particularly strong and persistent campaigners for the tenants' movement. And it promoted a real alternative. Jewish communist activist Solly Kaye later elected as a very popular local councillor, recalls: 'You had massive unemployment, immense poverty ... terrible slums. The fascists had their strongholds in places ... on the edge of Stepney where the large Jewish population lived ... they could involve people on the basis of envy, fear ... they said: "The Jews, they've got your houses, the Jews, they've got your jobs." Even though we were all living in bloody poverty with bugs crawling all over us in the night....

'The Communist Party, together with some very courageous Church people, organised the Stepney Tenants Defence League, and all the tenants living in bad houses were being involved in a fight to get the repairs done and the rents reduced ... some people were being evicted from a block of flats called Paragon Mansions, Phil Piratin heard about it. He went there and got the rest of the tenants to organise barricades to stop the bailiffs coming in.'

During the evictions at Paragon Mansions, the Communist Party became aware that the father of one of the families was in Mosley's BUF. There was a row over whether the party should help the family. Piratin argued, successfully, that it was a class issue, that the family deserved protection, and that there was a bigger battle against the scapegoating tactics the fascists used. Later the father joined the Communist Party and commented that his eyes had been opened as to who was the real enemy.

The tenants' struggles often took place in blocks with Jewish and non-Jewish residents and sometimes with Jewish landlords. Another Jewish communist, Max Levitas, who lived in Brady Mansions, convened a 21-week rent strike in 1939. 'We were fighting the Jewish landlords the same way as we'd fight any landlord that increases rents ... these are the enemies of the people and must be fought,' he said.

The party won active fighters for socialism and against fascism from all communities in the East

End. In the Jewish community, the rabbis had played a traditional role supporting Jewish employers in industrial disputes and counselling the community to live moral lives and keep their distance from political agitators. The Communist Party made a direct approach to the most progressive and secular layers, especially in the trade unions, and they appealed to grassroots organisations. They won them on a principled basis by articulating and fighting for their interests.

Today the East End is different. Not many Jews remain. Less than a handful of synagogues, the Brick Lane shop-front of Ch Katz who only ever sold string, and the bagel shops, are pale remnants of an area that, in Mosley's heyday, contained more than half the Jews of London.

The first Bengali families who arrived in the early 1970s now walk their grandchildren around the East End relatively free from racist harassment. On Bethnal Green Road, where the Mosleyites favourite watering hole – The Bladebone – once stood, there is now a Thai restaurant bringing the cultural flavours of yet another immigrant group to the East End's mosaic.

But a few miles east, in Barking & Dagenham the ghost of Mosley appears. At last May's council elections the British National Party – true heirs to Mosley's British Union of Fascists – won seats in every ward they contested. Despite consistent campaigning in the area by anti-fascists to undermine the BNP's ideas, all the anti-fascists could offer as an alternative at the ballot box was 'vote for one of the mainstream parties' – parties with hardly a fig-leaf to separate them in their political perspectives. Not surprisingly it didn't work. People whose life experience has barely improved and even declined under decades of a 'socialist' local authority were hardly likely to vote enthusiastically for Labour as a solution when Blair was cuddling up to mainstream Tory policies. (See Who Let the Dogs Out? on page 4.)

Ironically, back in the East End itself, several Labour councillors lost their seats ostensibly to a more radical force – the Respect Coalition – but local commentators suggest that the actual candidates who succeeded for Respect represent a narrow force within the local Bengali community connected to reactionary political forces in Bangladesh, whilst Respect candidates within a longer and deeper socialist pedigree failed to get elected.

The newly elected MP George Galloway is no Phil Piratin emerging from within the heart of the community and its struggles. He is a media wannabe who is unlikely to have an enduring presence in the East End. Many genuine socialists campaigned for Respect candidates. Perhaps their efforts might have been put to better use campaigning against Mosley's heirs a few miles up the road.



Mosley marching on 4th October 1936

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE COMMUNITY?

DELWAR HUSSAIN analyses the shift from secular leftism to Islamism within East London's Bangladeshi diaspora, and looks at the role of the British state

The connection between events in Bangladesh and the large Bangladeshi community in east London is intimate but not static. The influence of economic, political and generational change on the transformation of personal and public identities is profound. In particular, there has been a significant movement in recent years from alignment with secular politics as a vehicle of representation and empowerment towards Islamic-based organisation. An important element in this is that the British state has helped create and support this process through its funding policies and its application of a 'multicultural' model of relating to and supporting community organisations in the area.

To understand the context of this change, it is necessary to understand the trend of events in the Bangladeshi homeland itself. In 2001, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came to power in coalition with the vehemently Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami, which at the time of Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971 had fought to maintain the country as a province of Pakistan. 'East Pakistan' (the forerunner of Bangladesh) shared a Muslim identity with 'West' Pakistan – today the state of Pakistan proper – but most Bengalis wanted a secular society, rooted in Bengali culture rather than in Islam.

Almost immediately after Jamaat's arrival in government, attacks against religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh began to be reported. A British peer and parliamentary human-rights representative, Eric (Lord) Avebury, said that 'Bangladesh is an increasingly dangerous place for women, minority faiths and ethnic groups, opposition parties and secular organisations'. He argued that at the root of these problems lies the 'cancer of a maverick branch of Islamism' that aims to 'transform the country into a Taliban-style dictatorship'.

Five years on, Bangladesh approaches an election scheduled for January 2007 with its politics bitterly divided between the Awami League (AWL) and the BNP (see Liz Philipson, 'Bangladesh's fraying democracy' (26 June 2006)). The Jamaat openly advocates 'Islamic revolution' and calls for the establishment of a worldwide Islamic khalifah (caliphate). This is the culmination of a process that began soon after independence with the assassination of Bangladesh's architect Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the seizure of power by the army.

Bangladesh's new rulers sought legitimacy for their nationalistic vision by turning to religious parties. They removed secularism and socialism from the constitution, and declared Islam the state religion. This issue lies at the heart of the country's present predicament: the attempt to revive religion as an instrument to redefine the national identity.

The war of liberation appeared to have resolved the problem, but the faultline persists. Jeremy Seabrook argues that it goes to the heart of the

people's identity, '(setting) Bengali culture, language and tradition against the growth of a form of Islam not rooted in Bengal'. Seabrook makes the important point that for centuries, the distinction between these two realities was not experienced as a problem or a division at all.

The diaspora and the city

These issues – Islamic and Bengali identity, religion and culture, political struggle and political power – are very much alive in London's Bangladeshi diaspora, centred in the Tower Hamlets area. At their forefront are organisations such as the East London Mosque (author of conspicuous and effective Islamist initiatives) and the Shadinata Trust (a secular body that seeks to increase awareness of Bengali culture and history among British Bangladeshis).

The battle is an unequal one: the secular effort is faltering against the vibrancy and energy of the Islamists. One of the trust's primary objectives is to bring collaborators in the liberation war, some of whom live in Britain, to justice. For many young people in deprived Tower Hamlets, this is ancient history with no relevance to their lives: they regard Bangladeshi politics as distant and corrupt, and day-to-day issues of drugs, gangs and unemployment as far more relevant.

The Islamists, by contrast, are sophisticated and up-to-date in their focus and appeal. The East London Mosque (and its affiliate, the London Muslim Centre [LMC]) shares the ideology of the Jamaat-e-Islami. The mosque is no fringe organisation; it was at the centre of the campaign that helped elect the local Respect Party candidate and vocal critic of Britain's New Labour government, George Galloway, in the 2005 general election.

An article on the website of the Islamic Forum Europe (IFE), an organisation associated with the mosque, urged voters to vote for Galloway; although it said he was 'unlikely to establish khalifah in East London', and he has 'passionately (campaign) for Muslim political prisoners far more than some of our Muslim community elders who are still living in the days of the subservient maharajas in British India.'

The London Muslim Centre hosted an event in honour of the new MP, where he expressed his gratitude to the young volunteers who 'gave their blood' for him. The IFE's president, Muslehuddin Faradhi, said: 'We made sure that people (were) able to cast their votes without fear and intimidation and make an informed judgment. The way we attempted to educate people was significant. We believe the impact of this will be felt for years to come.'

A Bangladeshi Jamaat MP, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, has regularly appeared at the mosque and raised funds for his party there. These visits are

controversial: older Bangladeshis accuse him of involvement in the massacres of Bengalis during the liberation war. But the Jamaat has made strenuous (and successful) efforts to distance itself from its extremist and anti-Bengali past, and young, third-generation, British-born Bengalis have demonstrated in support of Sayedee's presence.

It is striking that a party with the Jamaat's record can attract young people in Britain, when for the most part, they have little interest in the politics of their parents' or grandparents' country. In south Asia, the party has drawn support from those both promoted and dislocated by modernisation – middle-class people (teachers, lawyers, and engineers among them) repelled by western ideas and attracted to the ideological rigour of fundamentalism.

Indeed, societies in transition often generate fundamentalism. In London, the absence of a Bangladeshi middle-class has meant that support for the Jamaat was negligible, but it has discovered another constituency: the British-educated Bengali working class, those at the bottom of Britain's social pyramid, heirs to endemic poverty and exclusion. The path of social advancement may be closed to them elsewhere, but the doorway to rightwing, fundamentalist theology is broad and always open.

The state and the 'community'

The transnational, diasporic links represented by Jamaat-e-Islami represent just one aspect of the 'Islamising' of the Bangladeshi community in east London. There are further processes at work: political, religious, and 'multicultural'.

The social policies of successive British governments have played a part in the long-term trend away from secularism and towards Islamism. The British state has since the early 1990s deferred to a generic idea of the 'Muslim community'. This has increasingly enabled mosques to enter into partnership with local authorities to deliver social-welfare programmes. The East London Mosque, for example, provides educational facilities (religious and non-religious), a youth centre, a gym, a meeting-space and a library. The mosque and the LMC have also positioned themselves in resistance to the culture of gangs and drugs in the area.

These organisations share with others based on Islamic principles a facility in targeting youth 'at risk' and helping to curb anti-social behaviour. John Eade writes: 'The success of these projects in reaching out to disaffected youngsters ensures that these faith-organisations are engaged in mainstream service delivery channels and remain open and accountable, a requirement for public funding'.

Michael Keith, the former leader of Tower Hamlets Council, observes that faith has become legitimised as a way of providing welfare facilities, such that explicitly faith-based youth associations in the borough that have become increasingly significant; to end the funding of such organisations,



he says, would result in the disappearance of crucial social safety-nets of the kind once provided (but no longer) by the state.

Moreover, an effect of structural economic change in Britain (especially the unemployment of many former textile workers in London as a result of the effective outsourcing of their jobs to...Bangladesh) has been that local authorities themselves have funded faith-based initiatives that answer the livelihood needs of second – and third – generation Bengalis.

This funding has its origins in two significant events in the early 1990s – the Salman Rushdie affair (1989) and the Gulf war to eject Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait (1991) – that were crucial in the formation of the 'British Muslim identity'. In their aftermath, Britain's political establishment realised that British Muslims could not be ignored, believed that gestures towards fighting poverty and social exclusion would undercut support for specifically 'Muslim' causes, and at the same time sought (for economic and ideological reasons) to cut government funding to voluntary organisations. The result of these combined processes was the rapid emergence of faith-based alternatives in the social arena, whose agents urged individuals into using their 'Muslim' identity to access particular services and to gain traction over social and political concerns.

While in earlier periods British Bengalis were known by their national origin, today they are seen as part of a homogeneous 'Muslim community'. This is the irony of multiculturalism: policies aimed to create diversity in British society opened spaces for fundamentalist intolerance and homogeneity. Islamists have been the main beneficiary of these developments. The media may portray them as 'backward' and 'medieval' people who reject British values, but their demands on the British state have been and are legitimated within a government-created framework.

However, state funding is only one aspect of the rise of Islamism. As long ago as 1992, reports suggested that Asian Muslims were deserting bars and clubs and entering mosques and religious classes. The phenomenon seems in retrospect supportive of an argument based on the idea of young people being 'in-between two cultures' (alienated both from the cultural 'traditions' of their parents and 'modern' western culture).

THE SOCIAL POLICIES OF SUCCESSIVE BRITISH GOVERNMENTS HAVE PLAYED A PART IN THE LONG-TERM TREND AWAY FROM SECULARISM AND TOWARDS ISLAMISM. THE BRITISH STATE HAS SINCE THE EARLY 1990S DEFERRED TO A GENERIC IDEA OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY.

This led them, the idea runs, to an embrace of an Islam that allows individuals to transcend this separation by linking them into the global 'culture-free' identity of the umma. The increasing self-identification of Britain's 1.6 million Muslims by faith rather than by ethnicity would seem to support this line of thinking (the summary is, a simplification, needless to say, since cultures are not static, but complex and multiple with porous borders).

A more persuasive argument relates to issues of discrimination and exclusion. Bengalis are among the poorest in Britain, and among those most exposed to racial discrimination. This is not new; but the response of the maturing third generation of indigenous British Bangladeshis is.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Bangladeshis in London used secular, socialist ideology to combat injustice – a system of thinking that could then still lay plausible claim to the future. There also remained at that time the option of return which sustains many migrants, who promise themselves they will go 'home' when they have made enough money.

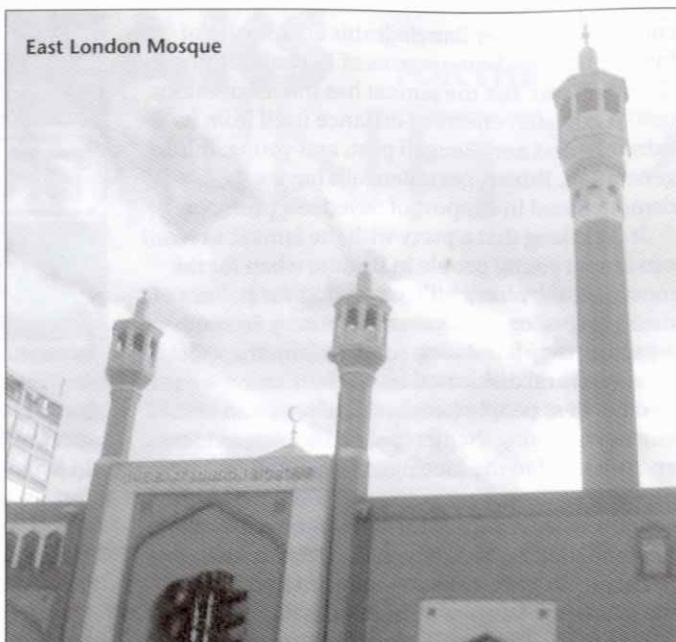
Today, most of those born in London still refer to Bangladesh as 'home', but in practice Bengal is distant from their daily lives and probable futures. Within the community, Bengali secularists appear today as archaic as the political left. Islamic brotherhood is a more potent tool in the fight against discrimination. Claire Alexander, author of *The Asian Gang: contesting Britishness*, writes: 'Islam stands as a psychological barricade behind which...Bangladeshi young people (usually men) can hide their lack of self-esteem and proclaim a functional strength through the imagination of the umma'.

The agency of change

An older generation of British Bangladeshis saw Islam as one aspect of a plural, many-layered identity; for their children and grandchildren it has become the basis of a monolithic ideology, the supreme identity in the struggle for political and socio-economic interests. It is also both poverty and racism.

The context of this mobilisation is both global and local. The Islamists have managed both to articulate and project a persuasive political meta-narrative after 9/11, and to appeal to young people in east London by focusing on issues of drugs, crime and unemployment. Their local success is in part a consequence of the state-sanctioned ideas of

East London Mosque



multiculturalism which dominated society during their upbringing. They have been able to use, adapt and extend such ideas by taking them far from their 'liberal' origin, and joining very different movements which yet proclaim the same objective of 'equality'.

The impulses and actions of what might in another age have been seen as working-class anger have thus acquired a more plausible emancipatory narrative in Islamic fundamentalism. Religion has been the agent of empowerment for many Muslims in the struggle against racism, imperialism and the extremes of capitalist inequality. That this has been facilitated by state funding along faith lines is a fact few are ready to confront.

The fight of secularists against racism and poverty appears bland compared to the ardent certainties of religion. In Bangladesh, secularists and the left have been marginalised and suppressed by the post-2001 ruling coalition. While the Bangladesh Nationalist Party – and George Galloway in London – seek to ride the Jamaat-e-Islami tiger for political gain, the prospects of this strategy for resolving the enduring questions of social justice, equality and diversity are dim. Jamaat and other fundamentalist groups are sowing the seeds of future conflict, as well as obscuring more hopeful and humane pathways to equity and harmony for Bengalis, in both Britain and Bangladesh.

Delwar Hussain is a researcher in Bangladeshi politics and the Bangladeshi diaspora

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FORBIDDEN ANALOGY

In the brochure it said
Modern bungalow on farm in picturesque scenery
Ideal for North York Moors and coast.
when we got there
the bungalow was OK
but next to the orchard
there was barbed wire everywhere
high concrete walls
and there were 20,000 ducks
in a shed with no windows
Dave Rosenberg said:
'...and we never knew it was there...'
(Duckslager by Michael Rosen)

In J M Coetzee's novella *The Lives of Animals* a Jewish poet, Abraham Stern, boycotts a lecture given by the writer Elizabeth Costello (a gentile) because he is offended by Costello's comparison between the fate of animals in abattoirs and the fate of Jews in the Holocaust. Costello is unambiguous in her condemnation of the systematic violence wreaked on animals in the modern, industrialised world: 'Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.'

In his letter to Costello, Stern protests: 'If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead.'

It is easy to dismiss Costello's analogy as fanatical. Postponing such a judgement, however, allows for a rethinking of what counts as 'extremist', 'fundamentalist' and 'beyond the pale'. Who draws the map that arranges 'centre' and 'margin'? More often than not, the political and moral layout is determined not by honest discussion but by the balance of power. And nowhere is this mapping of the field more contentious or more dubious than with regards to our moral attitude towards animals.

Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* powerfully stages the debates around the 'forbidden analogy' of animals and the Holocaust. In fact, the analogy appeared some 30 years earlier in Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story 'The Letter Writer', in which the fate of animals is described as an 'eternal Treblinka'. Singer was a vegetarian, and moral consideration for animals is a recurring theme in his work. 'The Letter Writer' provides the title for Charles Patterson's book *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, which regards the systematic exploitation and killing of animals as a model for the human genocide of the Holocaust.

Of course analogies necessarily compare things that are not equivalent. Read closely, Elizabeth Costello is of the opinion that the analogy between humans and Nazis in relation to animals is indeed flawed: not because it exaggerates reality, but because it understates it. The basic facts involving the manufacture of 'animal products' illustrate this dwarfing. Anonymous, Israel's leading animal rights

organisation, provides these statistics on its website (www.anonymous.org.il): 'More than 150 million fowls of this kind are killed in Israel every year ... In addition, many chicks are killed as "surplus" animals even before reaching the fattening facilities – the yearly number of incubated eggs is 220 million.' The numbers for cattle are equally staggering: 'More than half a million cows, bulls and calves die each year in the beef industries for Israeli consumers.' Hens in the egg industry suffer a dreadful fate: 'Behind every egg, there is a hen imprisoned for a lifetime in a dungeon, where she can never spread her wings even once. Her beak is mutilated, and she is starved for a month. When she can no longer lay enough eggs, she is sent to slaughter. The male chicks are thrown to their deaths either by starvation or suffocation soon after hatching.'

As more and more animals are born to die to meet the consumer demands of an increasingly ravenous humanity, analogies with the Holocaust become both more and less applicable. More, because systematised slaughter – carried out rationally (in vast, mechanised factory farms) and even 'humanely' ('free range' farming is becoming the conscientious hideaway of the carnivorous bourgeoisie) – cannot but recall the efficiency-driven killing facilities of the Third Reich. Less, because the sheer dimensions of the current enterprise, which now far exceeds farm animals and includes 'population management' or 'conservation' projects of all the earth's wildlife, transcends the ideological focus of the Nazi regime. Yet so many from across the political spectrum the suggestion that humans treat animals as Nazis treated Jews is deemed an illegitimate, preposterous claim.

Ilana Hammerman, fiction editor of the Israeli publishing house, Am Oved, ruled out translating *The Lives of Animals* into Hebrew on the grounds that it may offend Holocaust survivors. This is not to say that the Holocaust is held in Israel (or outside) as an event beyond comparison and political use. Far from it. Increasingly, Israelis have come to think of themselves as 'virtual survivors', potential victims of an ever present Holocaust. The Holocaust is regularly on call to sanction Israel's policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians and the country's Arab neighbours. The Holocaust as the ultimate reference point enshrines Israel's eccentric position in the region as both bully and victim.

It was only when Coetzee published his collection Elizabeth Costello, with *The Lives of Animals* as one of its chapters, that the latter was finally made available in Hebrew. Now Patterson's *Eternal Treblinka* has been translated into Hebrew by Oded Volkstein.

There is a knee-jerk reaction in the outright refusal to contemplate the connections between humanity and animality, and the ethical claims of what we may call our shared creaturely existence. We must recognise that there is a huge investment in claiming not simply that there are significant differences between humans and animals, which is

The Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer broke a taboo when he described the fate of animals as an 'eternal Treblinka'. ANAT PICK makes a deeper exploration of this analogy

obvious, but that they somehow constitute a difference in value between human and animal life. The injunction against comparing the fate of animals with that of the Jews during World War II speaks volumes about the cultural anxiety that underlies our brutal treatment of other animals. We find rationalisations for our elaborate cruelties, but ultimately it all comes down to just one thing: our conviction that our lives are simply worth more than theirs.

There is supposedly a religious justification for the notion that human life is inherently more valuable than non-human life. But one need not be an atheist to see this doctrine of 'human chosenness' – of man made in the image of God – as self-serving. The ancient Greek philosopher Xenophanes noted that if horses could paint, their Gods would no doubt look like horses. Nietzsche, too, understood that God is made in the image of man and not the other way around. Divinity, untainted by human self-interest, must be conceived as neither human nor animal, that is, as something wholly 'other'. Moreover, if we consider the concept of chosenness, a paradox immediately arises: for only the non-human could legitimately pronounce human distinctiveness. It makes no sense for humans to award themselves this special status; it is a travesty of the very notion of election.

Then there is also the curious double nature of Holocaust narratives themselves. On the one hand, the notion of species is at the heart of the Holocaust. We find it in the perpetrators' denial of the humanity of the Jews and in the reverse (nonsensical) commonplace that the Nazis 'behaved like animals'; in the image of Jews as 'lambs for the slaughter'; the clichés about Nazi animal lovers; and most potently, perhaps, in the resounding question of Holocaust literature of how to retain one's humanity in the face of Auschwitz. At the same time, however, linking the fate of animals to that of the Jews is disavowed as blasphemous and ethically repugnant.

Rigorously sifting 'legitimate' from 'illegitimate' rhetoric – specifically where it concerns the notion of species – discloses a profound insecurity with regards to the boundaries between human and non-human. If, as literary critic Daniel Schwarz has urged, we must 'keep the Holocaust human', this is precisely because the Holocaust radically challenges the meaning of humanity. To simply reject the analogy between Jews and animals as 'blasphemous' and 'heretical' is to refuse to engage fully with the Holocaust itself.

Much Holocaust writing and reading is devoted to the moral salvaging of humanity from the wreckage of World War II. Restoring humanity (defined through the familiar categories of free will, rationality, self-respect, morality, and language) from what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has called the 'shipwreck of dignity' is the leading reparative principle behind a large portion of Holocaust narratives.

In his book *The Holocaust in American Life*, for instance, Peter Novick says that in the United States the Holocaust has become 'the path to wisdom – the cult of the survivor as secular saint.' This fusion between secular and religious is telling. It speaks the language of Humanism, the 'devout atheism' of our times. To be sure, this humanist project is by now so

habitual as to have become intuitive. It is also seductive, since its aim is to assert human dignity in the face of atrocity. But such a project (shared by virtually all sides of the political debate, including socialists) is increasingly vacant. The Holocaust is not an event that demands the salvaging of human identity, but conversely, one that begs the revaluation of the conventional understanding of 'human'.

For the Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, this project is more than just vacant, it is positively indecent. Turning survival into a moral victory was offensive to Levi, whom the Holocaust taught precisely the unintelligibility of the moral labels of 'survival' and the 'triumph of the human spirit'. As Levi shows in his ironically titled masterpiece *If This is a Man* (especially in the section 'The Drowned and the Saved'), to conceive of human identity in such elevated moral terms is to deny the realities of Auschwitz, in which survival and ethics coincided only by chance. Like Levi, Singer's Jewish refugees are unusual readers of the Holocaust. They are highly critical of the humanist quest to retrieve humanity, however battered, from the living hell of the Nazi death camps.

'Eternal Treblinka'

Herman Gombiner, Singer's main character in 'The Letter Writer' lost his family in Europe, and now lives alone, an exile, in a shabby New York apartment. When Herman discovers a mouse in the flat, he feeds her and names her Huldah (Hebrew for 'rat' and the name of the Biblical prophetess). Singer's text and its character are haunted by the Holocaust, which returns in memories, dreams, and in Herman's philosophical musings. Interestingly, nearly every mention of the Holocaust is followed by a passage on Herman's concern for the mouse. When he suspects that Huldah has died, Herman eulogises her: 'What do they know – all those scholars, all those philosophers, all the leaders of the world – about such as you? They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka'.

Why this seemingly perverse pairing of the mammoth Jewish Holocaust with the puny life of a mouse?

To most readers a mouse in the text is much like a mouse in the home: a threat to sanitised human environment. It calls for some critical pest control. As with Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello, here it is easy to dismiss Herman's love for a mouse and his equating human with animal life as symptoms of the character's morbid eccentricity. The critic Lawrence S. Friedman says that 'eternal Treblinka' is no more than an expression of Herman's mental crisis.

But in 'The Letter Writer' as in other stories (such as 'The Parrot', 'The Slaughterer', 'Cockadoodledoo') Singer is persistent in his attentiveness to animal life and death, precisely in its smallness and insignificance. And is not one of the chilling 'lessons' of the Holocaust that human life too can become, in an instant, just as vulnerable and insignificant?

Like Herman Broder of *Enemies: A Love Story*, to which 'The Letter Writer' is a kind of prelude, Herman Gombiner is largely defined through his failing physicality. He is a 'short man, in oversize pajamas, emaciated to skin and bone, with a scrawny neck and a large head ... a body worn out by illness and undernourishment....' He suffers from 'tremors of the hands and feet', and feels himself a 'corpse returning from its own funeral'. His pneumonia is accompanied by a loss of life-force, and a resignation in the face of pain, illness and death. In his anorectic, apathetic state, Herman resembles not the archetypal Holocaust survivor, but that other, deeply troubling Holocaust figure: the Muselmann.

'The so-called Muselmann,' wrote Jean Améry of his time in Auschwitz, was 'the prisoner who was giving up and was given up by his comrades, no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions.' At the limit of humanity, claims Agamben in the book *Remnants of Auschwitz*, the Muselmann embodies 'the moving threshold in which man passes to non-man' and 'makes it forever impossible to distinguish between man and non-man.' For Agamben, Levi, and also Singer, the Muselmann who is the only authentic 'relic' (or witness) of the camps, lingers in the twilight zone of species and forces us to radically revise our understanding of what it means to be human. After the Muselmann, to be human is as much a matter of indignity as of dignity, of bare bodily functions as rational thought, of blind physiology as of autonomy and consciousness. Humanism, which defines humanity solely in terms of its moral and rational capacities, is thus a falsification of what it entails to be human.

So the fundamental question posed by the Holocaust may not be how to remain human in the shadow of atrocity, but instead, and far more honestly, as Agamben put it: 'What is the ultimate sense of belonging to the human species? And does such a sense exist?' Auschwitz's reply was to expose the contingency of human identity. The Muselmann reveals the inhuman potential in every human being. After the Holocaust the sovereign subject of Enlightenment Humanism becomes an ironic refrain, a reminder of the vulnerability and extreme savagery of humanity.

Are there ethical consequences to the Muselmann's critique of humanism? If self-respect, self-possession and responsibility are rendered pointless by the appearance of the Muselmann, then ethics needs to begin elsewhere. Do we not owe compassion and moral consideration precisely to those who cannot demand it, or who are too weak (or perhaps even too saintly) to fight for it? At this point, all the rational hair-splitting that conspires to tell us that animals are simply too 'dumb' (mute and unintelligent) to warrant our moral attention, falls apart.

When in 'The Letter Writer', Rose Beechman takes care of the dying Herman she is in a sense helping the one who, like the Muselmann, or like an animal, does not ask for help. Singer is subtly subverting the liberal principle of 'obligatory communication', which assumes a speaking and free-willing subject as the proper beneficiary of a

universal morality. Is not Singer refuting the feigned universality of this moral subject when he presents us with a protagonist whose humanity has been called into question? Read in this way, it is not surprising that Singer's characters, for whom the parameters of the human no longer hold, extend their ethical consideration to non-human animals. For this reason in Singer the Holocaust leads, if not directly then at the very least logically, to the practice of vegetarianism as a 'non-humanist' ethics.

For Herman, humanity is always part animal, in the same way that animals are to an extent human. If the Holocaust revealed humanity as an impossible dream, Singer's ethics are founded on the realisation that humans and non-humans alike can be reduced to the merely physical, to 'bare life', of which, if we dare to gaze at the Muselmann's ruined humanity, we will be reminded.

If the Holocaust proves anything at all, it is that human (Jewish, disabled, queer, communist) bodies are animal bodies. The monotony of assembly-line production of corpses, the withered physiques of the Muselmänner should once and for all terminate our delusions of grandeur: we too can become no more than pieces of meat. Like the rest of creation we too obey what the wonderful philosopher and mystic Simone Weil termed 'the mechanism of the world'.

We go to great lengths to ignore the Holocaust's unravelling of human identity. In popular 'Holocaust culture' this forgetting takes the paradoxical form of a grandiose Remembrance. I believe that remembering the Holocaust in this way amounts to a sort of wilful forgetting, a reluctance to really see and think. To bear the weight of an 'eternal Treblinka' is, on the contrary, to approach the Holocaust with something more than the sacred stillness of human commemoration.

Singer refuses to make memory the safe haven for human piety whose hidden agenda is always the maintaining of existing beliefs and conditions: the continued killing of countless humans and non-humans alike, of all of those who fall outside the radius of our moral radar. As in Rosen's poem 'Duckslager', animals are the main victims of this ethical blindness. Not seen or heard, they are conveniently converted into mere 'products' for human consumption.

But the primary commodity fabricated in the abattoirs and laboratories is neither nourishment nor scientific knowledge – but human supremacy itself. In a serial gesture of human mastery over the natural world, power is exercised as if for its own sake, in an endless and self-regenerating cycle of violence. To dare contemplate an animal Holocaust would in fact rescue humanity from this ugly and violent fate. To speak of a systematic campaign of terror against animals prods the most persistent bastion of identity, beyond which signal, however dimly, intimations of other lives.

Further information

Anonymous for Animal Rights
www.anonymous.org.il/english.htm

PeTA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
www.peta.org/

Patterson, Charles. *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* by Charles Patterson (Lantern Books, 2002)

The Séance and Other Stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer (Penguin, 1974)

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Are the young, thinking Jews being targeted by a new Jewish fundamentalism? **CLIFFORD SINGER** investigates

'What are the key values needed to perfect our world?' asks the voiceover. A good question deserves a good answer, and it is provided by the words that float across the screen: 'Social Responsibility ... Women's Rights ... Environmentalism ... Activism ... Equality ... Freedom of Speech.'

Chanukah: This is Your Light is one of 20 introductory films on Aish HaTorah's website, and presses all the right buttons for the young progressive Jew. Aish (as it likes to be abbreviated) is a success story of Jewish outreach, with its mission to 'stem assimilation by reaching out and building bridges between Jews of all persuasions'. It boasts 2 million web visits each month, a mailing list of 170,000 subscribers, and offers programmes in 80 cities around the world. Aish is also the inventor of 'speed dating', and hosts popular evenings where Jewish singles meet each other in quickfire succession.

The organisation has been praised by Bill Clinton, Michael Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, Al Gore, Ariel Sharon, Shimon Peres, Elie Weisel, Larry King and Steven Spielberg, who is quoted as saying: 'Thank you Aish HaTorah for the good work you do and the message you put out. I could have used you in my life about 25 years ago.'

The breezy prose on Aish's website, with its tales of personal growth and acts of kindness, suggests an organisation that is liberal and broadminded, with a dash of Californian self-help therapy. But the values that guide Aish are not those of Liberal, Reform, or even Modern Orthodox Judaism. Its credo is that of the ultra-Orthodox Haredi movement. Aish HaTorah (Fire of the Torah) insists on the inerrant truth of the Bible, which it believes was dictated by God to Moses.

However, Aish differs from traditional Haredi groups in three ways. Firstly, its outreach work, which aims to convert secular Jews to Orthodoxy, is its overriding priority, not merely a spin-off. Orthodox converts – or ba'alei teshuvah (those who have repented) – make up most of its membership, and its yeshiva programs combine traditional Talmudic studies with intensive training in outreach and leadership skills.

Secondly, it has hitched its social conservatism to an aggressively neoconservative stance on the Middle East. Its donors and well-wishers may include liberals and conservatives, but the political voices on its website extend from the right to the far right: Benjamin Netanyahu, Daniel Pipes, David Horowitz, Alan Dershowitz, Dore Gold, Natan Sharansky, Melanie Phillips and Charles Krauthammer.

Third, it advocates a 'one step at a time' approach to Judaism, allowing members to develop their observance at their own pace. For Aish, this is testimony to its openness and tolerance, and it has certainly succeeded in attracting those who would be otherwise repelled by the 'black hat brigade'. But critics say Aish uses this approach to hide its true aims from prospective recruits. Aish's outreach work is focused mainly on the under-30s, who it attracts with slick advertising and hip graphics that give little hint of its ultra-Orthodox agenda. Some parents have accused it of having a cult-like influence on their children.

How has Aish overcome such controversy to become a multi-million dollar operation, occupying a prominent place in Jewish life? The organisation began life as a small yeshiva in Jerusalem in 1974, founded by US-born Rabbi Noah Weinberg. Weinberg came from a non-Hasidic tradition – known as Lithuanian Judaism or Mitnagdim – but was influenced by the success of the Hasidic Lubavitch leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who pioneered Orthodox outreach in the 1960s.

Schneerson was part of a generation of Orthodox Jews that had fled to the US to escape the Holocaust. At first, the community was inward-looking, keen to insulate itself from the 'treyf' (unkosher) state that was now its home. But as it grew in confidence, Schneerson's followers began to recruit among other Jews. At the same time, there was increasing concern among Jewish leaders over out-marriage and assimilation rates. By the late 1960s approximately one in six US Jews were marrying non-Jews, a three-fold increase on the previous decade. And many Jews were leaving the community, in some cases to join new religious movements like Hare Krishna and the Unification Church (Moonies), which had disproportionately high Jewish memberships.

For some Jews influenced by the counterculture, Schneerson's Hasidism, imbued with celebration and mysticism, provided an alluring alternative to the dreary ritual of mainstream Judaism. Others took their spiritual search to Israel, where they found a welcome in institutions such as those run by the charismatic Weinberg. Four years before founding Aish HaTorah, Weinberg had established the Ohr Somayach yeshiva, which was also dedicated to kiruv (orthodox outreach). But his split from Ohr Somayach heralded a more far-reaching vision. Adam Ferziger, Fellow in Jewish Studies at Bar-Ilan University, writes:

Ohr Somayach felt that success was determined by whether a newly observant student dedicated himself to a life of learning. Rabbi Weinberg, in contrast, hoped that once a student had adjusted to religious life, he would either become a kiruv worker or join the secular workforce. Through his interaction with other Jews, he would have the ability to help the weakly affiliated become observant.

Aish Hatorah has developed an entire ideology and system of outreach. In order to make sure that its approach is properly implemented, its leaders foster an 'Aish culture' among their students, who are viewed as the future of the institution. It is, indeed, this 'Aish culture' that is the most distinctive characteristic of Aish Hatorah's Rabbinical Ordination/Leadership Program (ROLP). Even the more traditional classes on subjects such as Talmud and Jewish legal codes focus on that which one needs to know in order to become an effective outreach rabbi.

Ferziger adds: *A particularly unique aspect of ROLP is the significant amount of time spent training the students to deal with questions that they will be asked when they are out in the field. The students*

practice simulation games in which they debate their position against rabbis who assume the roles of non-affiliated Jews, reform rabbis, potential donors, and so on.

Underlying Weinberg's zeal is his belief that 'if 20,000 Jewish kids were being killed each year, you'd be jolted into action and launch a movement to save them. Today, we're losing 20,000 Jewish kids each year through assimilation.' Aish rabbi Daniel Mechanic is even blunter: 'The Jewish people are currently experiencing a spiritual Holocaust. That is why Aish HaTorah stands at the front of the battle against rampant assimilation and intermarriage.'

The Aish armoury of tools to reach the uninitiated includes: Discovery seminars (one-day crash courses offering 'scientific' proof of the Torah's divine origins), Shabbatonim (Friday night discussions hosted by a rabbi), subsidised trips abroad (destinations include Israel, Australia and South Africa), and the Aish website (www.aish.com) translated into five languages.

The organisation tailors its message to niche audiences. Its New York website has the slogan 'Adventures in urban Judaism' and is full of attractive, clean-cut twentysomethings who look like a Gap advert. The UK site uses rave-type graphics and music to advertise its summer trips, entitled 'Ozzy Hip Hop', 'Israeli Trance' and 'New York Vibe'. 'Israeli Trance' promises white-water rafting, quad biking and beach barbecues along with an opportunity to 'thrash out' major issues such as 'Judaism meets science', 'Does God exist?' and 'Why do bad things happen to good people?'

Aish Los Angeles targets 18-22 year olds with a \$99 'Paradise Adventure Tour' to Costa Rica. It is a tempting offer but the devil is in the small print: 'This program is heavily subsidized. Participants agree to participate fully in all events and activities on the schedule to receive the advertised price... Failure to attend may result in the participant forfeiting his or her subsidy for that day (up to \$250 per day).'

Like the evangelical Protestant Alpha Course and Catholic Opus Dei, Aish has a particular penchant for the young and affluent, and restricts many of its activities to 'YJPs' – Young Jewish Professionals. New Yorkers can join the Aish MBA Community, a 'group of Jewish business leaders and students who are exploring their heritage while advancing their business acumen,' while London professionals can attend Aish in the City lunchtime meetings, hosted by media and telecoms corporation IDT.

Aish also offers an Executive Learning Program, providing personal tuition by a rabbi. Participants have included corporate executives and Hollywood stars. 'Learning one-on-one with a rabbi is what's "in" these days in the States,' Rabbi Ephraim Shore, a former Aish HaTorah executive director, told Ma'ariv in 2000. 'Celebrities will come, learn for an hour a week and then visit Israel – and they become our international ambassadors. Some may donate to Aish HaTorah and help the organisation with forming further contacts.'

Following a flattering full-page profile of Aish in the Jewish Chronicle in 2003, one mother wrote to complain: 'Aish prides itself on being dedicated to preventing intermarriage, something which I uphold. What I do not uphold is the way in which it attracts young Jewish men and women to take part in a cheap holiday and then, little by little, as they

attend their events and educational study groups they become "Aished". My son did exactly that... Aish has completely changed his life and mine.'

She added: 'I agree with [Aish UK joint executive director] Rabbi Schiff that "God would prefer 50,000 proud Jews" to "50 frum [religious] Jews". My son was a proud Jew and has now become a frum Jew. Many would applaud that, but not me. His life is ruled purely by the Torah. He will not eat in my house and adheres to every single mitzvah.'

Another parent wrote: 'Despite Aish's modern marketing methods, and what Rabbi Schiff claims... in reality Aish has no regard for the 21st century. It takes people born Jewish and turns them into extreme Jews, with no thought for their families. Aish would argue that its mission is to stop assimilation, but the reality is that it creates fanatical Jews, with little regard for the fallout effect.'

Similar views are expressed by a mother on Rick Roß's cult-watch website: 'Although I am resigned to my son choosing a very different lifestyle than mine, I feel it is a loss. My child can never travel with me, eat in my home – or really be a part of the rest of our family and friends. The hardest part is now I know that this is not what my son actually planned for himself, but rather the direct result of how he was influenced through what began as a vacation trip to Israel.'

In his 2002 paper for the Jewish Journal of Sociology, Aaron Tapper concluded that Aish exhibited each of the characteristics of a new religious movement (a term he preferred to 'cult'). He defined these characteristics as:

a charismatic leader; submission to authority; a rigid ideology, including a fundamentalist approach to theology; a promotion of apocalyptic beliefs; a communal lifestyle; isolation from one's family; hate and/or fear of outsiders; active missionary work, including attempts to convert outsiders to its way of religious life; and an excessive focus on fundraising.

Noting the contrast between the organisation's public and private face he added:

Aish HaTorah is much more open and candid about its ultra-Orthodox perspective in the environment of its yeshiva, whereas in other venues – such as in its outreach centers and the programmes offered there – Aish HaTorah advertises itself as a pluralistic, all-inclusive environment.

In Aish's defence, many former members testify to having benefited from their time in the organisation, and Tapper possibly overstates his case when he compares the Unification Church's strategy of 'love-bombing' (enveloping recruits in feigned love) to the 'extremely warm environment, in both [Aish's] outreach centers and its yeshiva'. Aish's nurturing of an all-encompassing 'Aish culture' perhaps has closer parallels with some Leninist organisations, raising the prospect that Aish represents the Socialist Workers Party of orthodox Judaism.

However, Tapper should be commended for asking the right questions when so few others have. Mainstream Jewish institutions and media outlets have fawned over Aish HaTorah while failing to offer any scrutiny of its outreach methods. Even if Aish's activities have divided only a minority of

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families, that is a troubling record for a 'pro-family' organisation, and at the very least community newspapers like the Jewish Chronicle have a responsibility to follow their readers' concerns.

One reason Aish is given such an easy ride is that many Jews share its obsession with 'marrying out'. Even the mother who despaired of her son's transformation felt compelled to preface her letter by proclaiming her opposition to intermarriage.

But there are cracks in the veneer. While Aish has made great use of the internet, so have its critics. At Ba'al Teshuvot Anonymous (www.offthederech.blogspot.com), former members discuss the kiruv movement, where, in the words of the site's editor, 'the ends justify the means'. One contributor writes: 'Ohr Somayach and Aish have really bad reputations not just because the world is anti-fundamentalist but because many of us who spent time in their hallowed halls have told our survivor tales to the world.'

Contributors are particularly critical of Aish's claim that the Bible contains hidden, divinely-inspired codes. This notion forms the centerpiece of its Discovery seminars, which use 'scientific' methods of research to explore the authenticity of Judaism and its relevance today'. Aish claims more than 200,000 people have attended the seminars, and guest hosts have included actors Ed Asner, Kirk Douglas and Elliot Gould. Ominously, the seminars employ a system called Failsafe, 'based on analytical techniques used by the Mossad'.

In 1994, the respected journal Statistical Science published research by three Israelis, Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips and Yoav Rosenberg, which appeared to show that the names and dates of birth or death of important Medieval rabbis were encoded in the Hebrew text of Genesis. They used specially written computer software to look for equidistant letter sequences, in which words are formed by taking, say, every 50th letter within a certain passage. The theory was championed by Harold Gans, a former US Defence Department cryptologist and Aish lecturer, who claimed to have found evidence of other codes.

Aish had no doubt about the significance of these findings. Its Discovery blurb states: 'The Torah Codes definitely exist. They foretell names and places of events throughout human history: Holocaust, Sadat, AIDS. Torah Codes cannot tell us information we don't already know. But what they do tell us is that the author of the Torah knew minute details of world history, to our very age.'

Unfortunately for Aish, most experts thought otherwise. Mathematicians Dror Bar-Natan and Brendan McKay uncovered similar 'codes' in War and Peace and Moby Dick. They later co-authored with Maya Bar-Hillel and Gil Kalai a detailed refutation in Statistical Science, and were among more than 50 mathematicians and statisticians who signed a public statement that declared: 'The almost unanimous opinion of those in the scientific world who have studied the question is that the theory is without foundation. The signatories to this letter have themselves examined the evidence and found it entirely unconvincing.'

Meanwhile, Menachem Cohen, Professor of Bible at Bar-Ilan University, rejected the theorists' textual reading of the Bible. And Barry Simon, an Orthodox Jew and IBM Professor of Mathematics at California Institute of Technology, criticised both the theory's science and its use within outreach: 'Can one tell a

lie to non-religious Jews to get them to keep Shabbos? Everything that I regard as central to Judaism tells me that the answer is "no". Not only do I, a halachic [religious] layperson, think this, but also rabbanim [rabbis] that I've consulted say unequivocally that something you even suspect may be false should not be used as part of outreach.'

Aish was particularly galled by the opposition of Orthodox experts and tried unsuccessfully to silence them – not with science but with a rabbinical ruling that warned: 'It is clear and certain to me that all those who fight against the issue of hints at equidistant skips do a very great injustice, and even those who fear God's word who join these fighters and become, God forbid, partners in this impure construction are destined to be brought to account.'

Meanwhile, some Christian writers seized upon Bible codes to find evidence for their own beliefs, leading Aish to further tie itself up in knots as it attempted to defend the concept while denigrating many of its proponents. But still Aish clings to the theory. Perhaps it fears that to let go now would undermine the whole edifice of Bible 'proofs'. Or perhaps it just cannot resist the power of an outreach tool so seductive to an audience brought up on The Matrix, Harry Potter and The Da Vinci Code.

Aish is less reticent about sharing ground with the Christian fringes in its enthusiasm for intelligent design – the concept that evolution is not a natural process but is directed by a supernatural 'designer'. Most other Jewish organisations, left and right, religious and secular, see it for what it is: an attempt by a Christian fundamentalist organisation, the Discovery Institute (not linked to Aish's Discovery seminars), to impose a creationist agenda on US schools and institutions – an agenda that is spreading to Britain and other countries.

But Aish is a keen proponent. An article on its website, 'Rationality vs Randomness', by nuclear physicist and Discovery lecturer Gerald Schroeder, concludes: 'randomness cannot have been the driving force behind the success of life. Our understanding of statistics and molecular biology clearly supports the notion that there must have been a direction and a Director behind the success of life.'

When a judge ruled against forcing high school science teachers to teach intelligent design in Dover, Pennsylvania, the Anti-Defamation League, showing uncharacteristic insight, stated: 'For Jews and other religious minorities, it's an important issue because the religious freedom we have through the separation of church and state has allowed us to flourish as communities and has enabled us to be equal partners in this country.'

Aish disagrees. One website contributor writes: 'Jewish leaders should stop worshipping at the wall separating church and state, and stop trying to be more pious about that separation than the US Supreme Court. Let them focus their energies instead on the preservation of a 3,500-year tradition.'

Ironically, Aish's attempts at reconciling science with God have proved too much for some of the Haredi rabbis it follows. In 2005 another article by Schroeder, 'The Age of the Universe', was withdrawn from the Aish website. Schroeder uses relativity theory to argue that each of the Bible's six days of creation equates to a segment of the universe's real age of 15 billion years. When the article was reinstated, the following passage had

been added: 'Let me clarify right at the start. The world may be only some 6,000 years old. God could have put the fossils in the ground and juggled the light arriving from distant galaxies to make the world appear to be billions of years old. There is absolutely no way to disprove this claim.'

Aish shows no such vacillation in its stance on the Middle East. Despite traditional Haredi antipathy towards Zionism, Aish has adopted a right-wing brand of Israeli nationalism that mostly manages to avoid the Z-word. Many articles on its website are reproduced from American conservative journals such as The Weekly Standard and National Review, and the themes are depressingly familiar: the Palestinians are solely to blame for their predicament; the territories are 'disputed', not occupied; the Gaza pullout is a reward for terror; the illegal settlers are heroes and patriots.

According to its statement of policy, 'Aish is an apolitical organization, takes no political positions, and endorses no parties or candidates.' Some of its articles carry additional disclaimers such as 'Aish.com is non-political, and the ideas expressed here are those of the author alone.' Yet web visitors will search in vain for counterbalancing views.

A section of Aish HaTorah's website is devoted to Jerusalem's spiritual and historical importance for Jews – and why it is of less significance for Muslims. Aish's Old City yeshiva remains the focus of its activities, and it is currently building a spectacular outreach centre opposite the Western Wall, on land sold to it by the Israeli government for the token price of one shekel. Aish supporters are invited to donate to a \$40 million fund to help build and equip the high-tech centre. Its highlight will be the 'state-of-the-art Kirk Douglas Presentation Theater' which features a '15-minute multi-media extravaganza that will put Aish HaTorah on every tourist itinerary'.

In 2001 Aish set up two pro-Israel lobbying groups. Hasbara Fellowships, launched jointly with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, trains university students to be 'effective pro-Israel activists on their campuses', and supplies them with speakers and resources. Like Aish, it has stepped beyond 'advocacy' and opposes giving up occupied land to the Palestinians. And, like Aish, it plays host to the controversial right-wing polemicist Daniel Pipes, who argues that Israel 'must achieve a comprehensive military victory over the Palestinians'.

Aish also founded Honest Reporting, a web-based operation that monitors the media for 'anti-Israel bias'. Honest Reporting has claimed to be independent from Aish for several years, but its UK branch, launched earlier this year, boasts an Aish-registered website domain name and contact address. Honest Reporting is particularly critical of the British media and last year gave its annual 'Dishonest Reporter' award to the BBC, which it accused of 'naivete, dishonesty, forcing facts to conform to a narrow worldview and, arguably, a desire to inappropriately influence events'.

A favoured tactic is to bombard reporters who have criticised Israel with angry emails. Journalists Robert Fisk and John Pilger have both reported having their in-boxes swamped with abuse following censure by Honest Reporting. The Guardian's David Leigh told a similar tale: 'Emails clicked in to the letters page by the hundred, all making the same weirdly alliterative points. This followed publication of a Guardian article

trying to understand the motivations of the Palestinian bus driver who ploughed into a queue this month, killing eight Israelis. The mysteriously similar emails – from all over the world – started coming in, too, to our foreign editor; to our website; and to the personal email address of our Middle East correspondent, Suzanne Goldenberg. They were inconvenient, and also sometimes a bit scary in their violent tone – "The bloody Guardian... Have you killed a Jew today?... Are you anti-Jewish?"

Aish HaTorah's increasingly hawkish stance on the Middle East mirrors American Orthodoxy's rightward drift. Jack Wertheimer, Professor of American Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, writes:

Orthodox organizations have forged political alliances that are anathema to the organized Jewish community, with some courting Evangelicals and others on the religious right. The just-completed 2004 presidential election campaign illustrated how out-of-step Orthodox Jews were with the mainstream of the American Jewish community. Pollsters have put the overall Jewish vote at 75% for John Kerry and 24% for George W Bush. The Orthodox vote is believed to have gone in the reverse proportion, with three quarters of Orthodox voters supporting the candidacy of Bush. (By contrast, one pollster has claimed that Reform Jews went for Kerry by a margin of 85% to 15%.) Some have dismissed this sharp disparity as an aberration caused by the desire of Orthodox Jews to reward Bush for what they perceived as his strong support of Israel. But this begs the question of why Orthodox Jews should have looked at things this way, whereas other Jews had entirely different interests or perceptions. It is far too early to tell whether the Orthodox vote, which in previous elections conformed to the strongly Democratic tilt of the Jewish community, will continue to favor Republican nominees. But for now, the divide within the Jewish community suggests a very different political mind-set operating in the Orthodox and non-Orthodox camps, and it is unlikely to change anytime soon.

One reason for this right turn may be that organisations like Aish do not simply reflect Orthodox Jewish opinion but help to shape it. While an often rancorous debate has taken place on the political influence of America's pro-Israel lobby, little has been said about the influence of lobby groups on the Jewish community itself. Perhaps Hasbara Fellowships has less impact on campus life than it does on the Jewish students it recruits as its ambassadors. They are inducted into a political culture in which the voices of hardline neoconservatives take centre stage while even moderate voices for territorial compromise are sidelined.

Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt, Aish's joint UK executive director, told the Sunday Times last year: 'Up to 150, 200 years ago, you had no secular Jews. I don't know when the rot started, but the Enlightenment brought in this concept of humanism, telling Jews they could live secular lives. The floodgates opened. And all these hitherto Orthodox kids just ran.'

If the way back to Orthodoxy is through Aish, then today's young Jews would be wise to keep running.

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WAR FRAGMENTS

LONDON

Two large national protests organised by the Stop the War Coalition, and many localised protests, organised by a range of groups, took place in the UK this summer. Despite being called at very short notice they involved tens of thousands of people. Jewish Socialists' Group member, David Rosenberg, spoke at the 22nd July demonstration in London on behalf of European Jews for a Just Peace. He said:



'I am here to tell you that the Jewish people and Israeli civilians are not at war with the Palestinians and the Lebanese people; and that Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel are protesting against the actions of the Israeli military. This evening in Tel Aviv, the Peace Bloc – Gush Shalom – are rallying around the slogan: Ceasefire Now – End the killing in Gaza, Lebanon and Israel. More and more soldiers are refusing to serve in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories. Earlier this week, in the heart of America, 500 Jews in San Francisco protested outside the Israeli consulate and 18 were arrested. When Israel bombarded Gaza recently, 300 Jews in Britain took a full-page advert in The Times to condemn the collective punishment of the people of Gaza...

'There are many Jews who despair at the actions of the Israeli government but do not speak out. They are intimidated by accusations that they are self-haters, that they are helping the antisemites, that they support Hamas and Hezbollah.

'European Jews for a Just Peace are not intimidated. We are not self-haters. It is precisely because we are so aware of our Jewish history that we hate oppression; we

hate injustice; we hate the collective punishment of a people – and we will say so. We do not aid the antisemites but we work for a future that is as secure for the Jewish people in the world as any other people. There are people who use criticism of Israel as a cover for antisemitism. We challenge them, we oppose them and so should you. Antisemitism is no friend of the Jews and no friend of the Palestinians either.

You do not have to share or support the ideas of Hamas or Hezbollah to say that the bombardment of civilians is wrong; detention without trial of thousands of Palestinians is wrong; discrimination between Jews and non-Jews in Israel is wrong; or to say that the Israeli government should negotiate with the democratically elected Palestinian government, which means: negotiate with Hamas...

Protests in Israel united radical Jewish groups and individuals with Israeli Arab protesters. The largest protest at the height of the war brought 10,000 people on to the streets of Tel Aviv, which, given Israel's population, would be the equivalent of 100,000 marching in the UK.

TEL AVIV

Veteran peace activist Uri Avnery's told the protestors:

'The black flag of illegality flies over this war. The black flag of mourning hovers over all of us. It is being said that we are a marginal group, that we are outsiders that the huge majority opposes all that we are doing... We are outsiders. We are the few facing the masses that thirst for war. But next month or next year, every one of us will proudly proclaim: I was here! I called for a stop to this accursed war! And thousands who are cursing us now, next month, next year, will claim that they, too, were here, that they, too, opposed this mad war...

'I say to Ehud Olmert: stop this madness! The war has gone to your head. You are intoxicated by it. You are a junkie of war, a war from which nothing good will come. Stop, before it is too late...

'I say to Amir Peretz: many of those here have voted for you. You have lied to them! You have cheated them! You pretended to be a social reformer. You promised to take money from the army and invest it in education and welfare. Now you have become a man of death and destruction, you have become a monster! Stop, before it is too late...

'I say to Hassan Nasrallah: you have carried out a dangerous provocation. You

have provided the warmongers with a pretext. You have played their game. Let us stop this right now! Let us begin to negotiate – Israel, Lebanon and Syria – to exchange the prisoners, to put an end to bombs and rockets...

'I say to our Palestinian partners: we have not forgotten you! We know about the atrocities that happen every day in Gaza and the other occupied territories. We must co-operate in order to put an end to this war, to exchange the prisoners, to make peace between our two peoples...

'I say to the Lebanese people: as an Israeli, I feel deep shame for what we are doing to you! For the devastation we have brought on you... When this madness is finally over, we shall struggle together – Israelis and Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese, Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel – so that we can live a normal life, each in his free state, side by side in peace!

Adam Keller, one of the leaders of Gush Shalom, the radical peace bloc, describes the atmosphere on the march:

'The narrow King George Street through which we passed is in the downtown area of Tel Aviv, rather rundown though ... which has a

considerable right-wing element but also

enclaves of students and bohemians. Demonstrators chanted: "We shall neither die nor kill in the service of the USA!"; "Children want to live in Beirut and Haifa!"; "Peretz, Peretz, resign, peace is more important!"; "A million refugees, that's a war crime!"; "Olmert, Peretz and Ramon get out of Lebanon!" ... But the slogan repeated again and again, alternating in Hebrew and Arabic, was: "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies!"...

'The two most popular stickers circulating in the crowd were Gush Shalom's "Bring the Soldiers Home" ... and the Bereaved Families' Forum's "It Will Not End – Until We Talk!". An enterprising activist had produced at his own expense a sticker reading "We shall all lose!", a faithful replica of the colours and graphic style of "Together we shall win!", the sticker mass produced and distributed in the past weeks by the patriotic/commercial Leumi Bank...

'The Likud Party headquarters, which the march passed, seemed deserted and lifeless. "They can afford to be lazy, Peretz is doing the dirty work for them," remarked an activist, who shortly afterwards furiously tore down a poster of the Labour Party leader left over from the elections of four months ago...

'Crossing the busy Allenby Street, we got

Despite the attempts by Israel's government and the Jewish establishment here to unify Jewish people behind the US/UK-backed Israeli war on Lebanon, significant cracks have appeared and through those cracks the voices of protest are heard

Photos: Simon Lynn

HAIFA

From Hannah Safran of the Haifa vigil of Women in Black, describing their demonstration at the height of the war.

We are having a terrible day today. While we were demonstrating at our regular Women in Black square (30-40 people in all), we were bombed on both sides. It felt like being targeted from close [range]. We had to abandon the vigil and look for shelter. We came back 20 minutes later and completed the vigil on time. As we were travelling home, there was a second attack and we had to stop the car and look for shelter.

When we came home we opened the newspaper to read letters of women from Lebanon. The devastation is horrific. Has Israel gone crazy or have we not noticed what a mad country we live in?

It is 5.45pm now, and we [have] had two attacks since then. I am off to our daily demonstration of Women Against War in front of the Foreign Office and all the foreign press. We will not be silenced. War must be stopped now. Every minute counts as people's lives are in danger. Do all you can to stop this madness. Only someone from outside can put pressure on Israel to stop. I have to hurry. Be well and let's pray for better days.



to the designated site of the rally, Magen David Square, at the entrance to the Carmel Market. "Welcome to the Demonstration of the Ten Thousand, the largest demonstration to date against the criminal Lebanon War! Move along, move along!" boomed the loudspeaker from the podium... The thousands that did not find a place in the square flowed over into the Nahlat Binyamin pedestrian mall and other neighbouring streets.

FACTFILE:

The most reliable estimates for the number of deaths in Lebanon range between 900 and 1,200, with around 4,000 others wounded. It is believed that nearly 90% of the deaths were civilians and more than a third of them were children. The Israeli casualties were 157 which included 118 soldiers and 39 civilians; 860 others were wounded. Of the civilian deaths 18 were Israeli Arabs.

REFUSENIKS

With the onset of the war the number of army refuseniks has increased.

First to refuse during this war was Staff Sergeant Itzik Shabbat, a 28-year-old TV producer from Sderot, who is considered an outstanding commander. He refused to comply with an emergency order to report for reserve duty in the territories in order to free forces in the standing army for Lebanon war.

He said: 'I know people will attack me and ask how could I not take part in this war when Qassams are falling on my hometown and Katyushas on the towns in the north,' but, he added, 'only this type of opposition ... will put an end to the madness that is going on now and will shatter the false feeling that the entire home front supports this unnecessary war

that is based on deceptive considerations... Someone has to be the first to break the silence and it will be me. It is a shame that my order was signed by another Sderot resident, Defence Minister Amir Peretz.'

Those who submitted to the call up have also carried out acts of refusal at the front. First Sergeant Omri Zeid, an artilleryman from Tzfat, refused to shell Mjadara, a Lebanese village. Zeid was ordered to shoot 150 shells at the village. Zeid took up his backpack and told his fellow soldiers: 'I am not willing to be part of an army which shoots at women and children,' whereupon he departed. He did so one day before his discharge from his annual one-month service term. Zeid is not being tried for his refusal, though. He was officially discharged one day later, as scheduled

HATRED, SPITTLE AND NO THOUGHT OF PEACE

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi gives a personal account of a demonstration within the Jewish community

Along with a few other supporters of Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJP), I turned up outside the Jewish Free School in Kingsbury on Sunday 23rd July, venue of a rally called by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. We were intent on countering the organisers' support for Israel's actions in Lebanon.

We had cause to be grateful for a benign police presence as we five women stood behind some railings with our banner calling for negotiation, not occupation. For more than two hours we attempted to engage with the many hundreds of people arriving to endorse mass murder and illegal collective punishment.

Our handwritten placards were ripped up and scattered on the pavement. Burly men attempted to pull down our banner. Middle-aged matrons gobbled in our direction. Enviously bronzed teenagers swore, smirked and gestured abuse. Bewildered small children followed their parents, learning hatred from the cradle.

Are you comfortable knowing that Israel kills 10 Arabs for every Jew? 'Yes!' they howled, grinning insanely. 'We should kill more. British bombers killed more Germans than Brits. There are more Arabs than Jews. Let them die.' Do you really believe that flattening Gaza and bombing Lebanon back to the Stone Age will bring about peace? 'Israel has the right to defend itself,' they spat. 'They are all terrorists trying to destroy

us. We have to smash them first. We have to destroy Hezbollah and Hamas.'

Don't you think it is time, after all these years, to negotiate and allow Palestinians the chance to build a viable state of their own? Don't you care that more and more desperate young Muslims will turn to terrorism because of Israel's actions? 'All of biblical Israel is ours. They are all backed by Iran and Syria. The world is on our side.' The ranting went on and on.

Smash, kill, destroy. Was this the language of a peace-loving democratic state?

Over the past four decades I've often tried to persuade British people that it is possible to look critically at Israel's role in the Middle East without being antisemitic, and that being Jewish does not entail supporting every Israeli action. But never before had I encountered right-wing Zionism in full spate. Call me naïve, but I found it terrifying and shocking and it reduced me to floods of tears. Was there no one in this throng who could talk about Arabs as fellow human beings? Was no one thinking about peace rather than war?

Honestly, there was a mere handful of such people, a tiny minority willing to discuss a way forward which acknowledges Arab as well as Jewish rights.

The majority want Israel to fight on, regardless of the cost, while Bush and Blair give them every encouragement. Armageddon here we come.

FELLOW TRAVELLERS

HELEN PEARSON describes a mutually instructive coach journey to a demonstration

As we were waiting for the bus down to the national demonstration against Israeli action and international inaction in Lebanon on 5th August, Claire and I were relieved to see two women we knew. We were travelling on the coach put on by Friends of Al-Aqsa, a national Islamic organisation based in Leicester, which campaigns for Palestinian human rights and the protection of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. These two women, Jasmine and Samira, had come to a recent meeting where Claire and I had spoken about our trip to Palestine and Israel.

As the only non-Muslims on the bus, I wasn't sure how we would be received. Though I looked forward to some interesting exchanges of views, I felt a bit nervous too. As it turned out we need not have worried as the dozen or so women instantly made us feel welcome.

For most of the demonstration we stuck with two of the women, Noor and Howa. I did feel uncomfortable when, at one point, we were sandwiched between Hamas and Hezbollah supporters shouting, 'We are all Hezbollah', and Noor seemed to be shouting along with them. Towards the end we lost Noor, and Howa seemed pleased to be with two old-timers like us, as it was the first time she had been on a demonstration. She didn't bat an eyelid when we told her we were Jewish; we had prefaced this revelation by talking about our recent visit to Palestine.

Once back on the bus, Noor finally got around to asking us, in a most polite and gracious way, about our motivations for coming. We said straight away that we were Jewish and we were appalled by the disproportionate actions of Israel in both Lebanon and Gaza. She was visibly surprised to hear this. We explained that we belong to a local Jewish group, Just Peace Leicester, and that the group started as a spin-off from a Second Generation group, some of whose members had

decided they wanted to be more politically engaged as children of Holocaust survivors.

At the beginning of the march Claire had picked up a petition from an Israeli anti-war group asking for supporting signatures. We showed this to the women as proof that there was a critical voice within Israel, and asked if they would sign it. They passed it around and it ended up with every single person on the bus signing it. I really don't think this would have happened at the beginning of the day and it felt like an important piece of solidarity with Israeli activists.

It is hard to express how important our encounter with these women was for Claire and me. When we stopped at the motorway services, Noor came up to us and with emotion in her voice, told us how honoured she was that we were with them, and she hugged us. When we said goodbye to the women at the end of the day, there were more hugs. The next week I wrote a letter, which was published in the Leicester Mercury, signed by myself, Claire and Noor, talking about how we had demonstrated together and that we hoped this set a good example for the power of mutual understanding across barriers.

If these women are fully signed up to the aims of Friends of Al-Aqsa, we are certainly not on the same page. The Friends' website does not seem to accept the legitimacy of Israel and the history section makes no mention of the Holocaust. They do, however, explicitly state that not all Jews are Zionists and that blanket antisemitism in the opposition to Israel is not acceptable. I suspect that possibly, a bigger issue for the women we met, than the fact that we are Jewish, is that Claire and I are avowedly secular, but we did not discuss this issue with them. However, through meeting and talking with them, a bond was formed which I feel has advanced the cause of mutual respect and struck a blow against antisemitism in a place where it is danger of growing.

We have seen some of the women again, on the Leicester vigils, and now Noor has invited us to attend an event which is part of a move from within the Muslim community to reach out to other groups in the city. A few weeks ago Just Peace Leicester received an invitation from a local Muslim organisation, IMAD, to speak at a meeting about the crisis in Lebanon. These developments give me hope that a space maybe opening up where we as Jews will be able to make common cause with other communities around issues which affect us all.

I do not think working with these Islamic organisations will be straightforward, for all kinds of reasons, but I think it is important to find a way to do so. For me, breaking down prejudices about Jews, is not just about how I am defined through my stance on Israel and Palestine. I live in a city which has a huge Muslim population. I want, as a citizen, and openly as a Jew, to make a contribution within the place that I live to creating shared goals with people who might on the face of it have little in common with me. I believe this, too, will foster mutual respect and in the process help combat antisemitism.

Photo: Simon Lynn



FROM WHERE I'M STANDING

Beyond the Holocaust

The more unjustified Israel's actions, the quicker people are to try and justify them by invoking the Holocaust. When the Israel Defence Force was bombing blocks of flats in Beirut, normally decent members of the Jewish community in Britain explained it by saying: 'We' didn't fight back against the Nazis, and 'we' are never going to let that happen again.' This, apparently is the 'lesson of the Holocaust'.

But it is not only Israel's supporters who summon up the Holocaust to describe terrible events. In a mirror image of Israel's justification for its actions, many of those who oppose Israel try to impose the opposite 'lesson of the Holocaust': that 'they' should have learnt to be humanitarian after what happened to 'them'.

Comment on the recent Lebanon war on both sides was littered with Holocaust analogies, with the aim not of illuminating the events but of jolting Jews into learning one lesson (be tough) or the other (be merciful) from this episode in their history. This would carry little weight if Jewish people were not primed to respond to such tactics by the distorted and partial version they are taught of their own history.

As children, many of us learnt about biblical history, ending with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE, and recent history starting with the destruction of Europe's Jews by the Nazis. The 1900-odd years in between were a hazy period of recurring persecution, relieved by the wisdom of the occasional rabbi – Akiba, Rashi, Maimonides.

The reality of diaspora life in post-Biblical times is that, in most parts of the world where Jews lived, there were long periods of stability. Of course there were episodes of harsh persecution and longer periods of low level discrimination but there are many examples of Jews flourishing and living peacefully with their neighbours.

But the official story of the Jews always headlines the persecution and discrimination. The longstanding communities in India, North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf are barely mentioned. The Golden Age in Spain, the intellectual achievements which gave Vilna the sobriquet 'The Jerusalem of Lithuania', the artistic, social and intellectual heights reached by Jews in Germany – are just punctuation marks in the litany of oppression. Culminating in the Holocaust.

According to this historiography, everyone hates the Jews, nothing can be done about it and therefore life in the diaspora (galut, in Hebrew, which has the negative meaning of exile) is a catalogue of persecution leading inexorably to Auschwitz. When life is good for Jews – as it was for many in pre-Nazi Germany – they are deluding themselves and letting down their defences. When life is bad for Jews – as it was in the Inquisition – that is only to be expected given that we are exiles from our own land and aliens in other people's.

So those who invoke the Holocaust in defence of their actions or in challenging the actions of others,

are tapping a deep cultural seam. Elevating episodes of persecution above the times when we have flourished has served a number of political purposes, both internal and external to Jewish communities, and as a result many Jews believe that, without antisemitism, we would have merged into the societies around us and would not be able to envisage a Jewish future.

Anyone whose identity rests on such foundations will be deeply attached to the pain and loss that has come to signify the Jewish condition. Anyone who uses the Holocaust to describe current conflicts, such as the war in Lebanon, feeds this notion that Jewish continuity depends on hatred and grief. Bound together by the terror of annihilation, every conflict involving Jews becomes an existential threat.

Crimes like those of the Nazis cannot be undone, and although some of the perpetrators were brought to trial, there have been no mechanisms for enabling the survivors come to terms with their history so that it does not continue to poison their lives and the lives of future generations.

For the Jews, though, the imperative is not to come to terms with the past. It is as though we are stuck in the early stages of grief, our loss all-engulfing. The idea that life will ever be normal again – that there might be moments, days, and even weeks, when we are not mourning our loss – seems like an obscenity. In those early days after a loved one has died, we hold on to our grief, prod it, worry the mental wound; the pain is a measure of how much we valued the person who is gone and our relationship to them.

So, for many Jews, the idea of reconciliation is an obscenity, an insult to the memory of those who were murdered. But this is the opposite of the truth. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to help individuals and the society as a whole to move on from the terrors of Apartheid. Is that an insult to the children shot down in Soweto or the people massacred in Sharpeville?

In Rwanda, where 800,000 people were slaughtered in less than four months, the people have turned to traditional community courts, where prisoners must ask forgiveness for their crimes before being released. Does this mean that Rwandans don't feel that pain of their loss? That they don't suffer at the memory of friends, wives, husbands, children, having been shot or hacked to death with machetes because of the ethnic group marked on their ID cards?

If anything is a desecration of the memory of those who died at the hands of the Nazis, it is the perpetuation of grief either to generate support for the insupportable or to lay special imperatives on Jews. We need to move on to the next stages of grief, past anger and guilt, past looking for someone to blame, to some kind of acceptance. It would commemorate their lives better if we looked for ways of living with the truth – and living with each other.

Julia Bard

AN UNJEWISH STATE

The belligerent language and war cries of the Israeli leadership today has its roots in the early days of Zionism, says Yakov M Rabkin

The recent Israeli actions in Gaza and Lebanon have affected the image of the socialist branch of the Zionist political establishment in Israel. Hopes were high when Amir Peretz, the veteran labour leader, was appointed Defence Minister. This Moroccan proletarian reared in the Ashkenazi socialist mould was expected to transform the army's bellicose instincts and divert some of the funds and attention usually bestowed on the army to social priorities. Yet, Peretz has acted no differently from his predecessors.

One of the reasons this has happened can be found in the history of Socialist Zionism, the branch of the Zionist movement that triumphed both internally (by marginalising Vladimir Jabotinsky's right-wing Zionists) and internationally (by establishing the State of Israel with the accord of the United Nations). At the same time, the Socialist Zionists failed to win acceptance from Israel's neighbours, which worried the political scientist Hannah Arendt. Writing during the hostilities provoked by the establishment of the state by David Ben-Gurion in 1948, she observed:

And even if the Jews were to win the war, ... [t]he 'victorious' Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders, absorbed with physical self-defence. ... And all this would be the fate of a nation that – no matter how many immigrants it could still absorb and how far it extended its boundaries (the whole of Palestine and Transjordan is the insane Revisionist demand) – would still remain a very small people greatly outnumbered by hostile neighbours.

This is the failure that continues to plague Israel in spite of its peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt: people in the region continue to resent and reject 'the Zionist entity'.

Ben Gurion was bent to create facts on the ground, to prevail through power. In a speech to a congress of his political movement in 1922, he 'declared the intentions which,' says the Israeli political scientist Zeev Sternhell, 'he was to hold throughout his life:' The one great concern that should govern our thought and work is the

conquest of the land and building it up through extensive immigration. All the rest is mere words and phraseology, and – let us not delude ourselves – we have to go forward in an awareness of our political situation: that is to say, in an awareness of power relationships, the strength of our people in this country and abroad.

Ben Gurion's socialism, Sternhell reminds us, was inspired by the German nationalist socialism of the years immediately following the Great War. It was close to the thought of Spengler, who in turn had paraphrased remark by Heinrich von Treitschke: 'Socialism means power, power and again, power.' Sternhell coined the term 'nationalist Socialism' to describe Ben Gurion's actions bent inter alia upon wresting the Jew from tradition.

While biblical Israel was conquered through war, Jewish tradition identifies allegiance to God, and not military prowess, as the principal factor in the victories mentioned in the Bible. After the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, Jewish life underwent a metamorphosis that rejected the use of force. Tradition interprets the destruction of the Temple and the ensuing exile as divine punishment. Gratuitous hatred among the Jews is held to be the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome; sexual transgressions, murder and idolatry, that of the first exile in Babylon. But are these pacifist values anchored in the Jewish worldview or are they simply an historical accident? The medieval Jewish Spanish poet Yehuda Halevi expresses this doubt through one of the protagonists of Kuzari: 'Such would be the case had you freely chosen humility: but you were so constrained. And should you gain hegemony, you too would kill.' (Halevi, 37-38)

In the event, the shift took place well before the Jews gained any hegemony. It happened in Russia, home to millions of Jews concentrated in the Pale of Settlement. The great majority felt both impatience and exasperation at the official restrictions and unofficial persecutions they were forced to endure. The shock, anger and frustration at the pogroms found an outlet in radical, often clandestine parties that preached violence. Jews flooded into the Russian oppositionist movements, many of them firmly internationalist. But at the same time, they founded several specifically Jewish ones (including the socialist Bund, anti-pogrom self-defence groups, and the various Zionist parties). While other Jewish communities the world over remained faithful to the tradition of non-violence, that tradition came under increasing attack in Russia.

Haim Naham Bialik, a Russian author who later became a cultural icon in Israel, stoked the fires of revenge and violence. He castigated the survivors of the Kishinev pogrom, heaping shame upon their heads and calling upon them to revolt not only against their tormentors, but also against Judaism: 'let fists fly like stones against the heavens and against the heavenly throne'. Joseph Brenner, another Russian poet, also rebelled against the Jewish tradition. He radically transformed the best known verse of the Jewish prayer book. 'Hear, O Israel, 'The Lord is your God, the Lord is one!, one of the first verses taught to children and the last to be spoken by a Jew before his death. Brenner's revised verse proclaimed: "Hear, O Israel! Not an eye for an eye. Two eyes for one eye, all their teeth for every humiliation!"

Russian Jews made up not only a majority of the founders of the State of Israel; they also became the most influential group within its military elite. The man who did more than any other Zionist to introduce unchained terror into Palestine was the Russian Avraham Stern, a member of several paramilitary groupings. Moshe Dayan, Ezer Weizmann, Yitzhak Rabin, Rehavam Zeevi, Raphael Eitan and Ariel Sharon are all descendants of Russian Jews, whose propensity for the use of force can only be likened to their estrangement from Jewish tradition. By completely rejecting Judaism and its cult of humility, the Russian Jews could acquire a newfound confidence in their own strength, and in their capacity to reconquer and defend Israel.

The earliest Zionist settlers projected on to Palestinian reality the clichés of bygone Russia: the Arab threat was often likened to the murderous shadow of the pogroms. But their actions were like those of all settler groups in a foreign territory: they took up arms to defend their settlements. The arrival of masses of European Jews following World War II, and the Zionist interpretation of the Shoah created a cultural fusion of immense power: a self-image of the just victim. The secular version of Jewish history had eliminated the privileged relationship between God and his people and made the Jews the victims of an historical injustice. The American theologian Marc Ellis observed that the Zionists turned 'innocence in suffering into innocence in empowerment'.

Zionism has negated the traditional Jewish attitude to war. In our day, Israeli and Diaspora Jews number among the outspoken advocates of the strong-arm approach to both the Arab-Israeli conflict and the intervention in Iraq, and, more generally, 'the clash of civilisations'. What is not clear is whether this represents a true shift toward pugnacity among the Jews. According to reputable opinion polls taken after two years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2003) and hundreds of civilian victims among Israeli Jews, the percentage of American Jews in favour of force to resolve the



conflict in the Holy Land hardly exceeded 8%. Revulsion at the use of force continues to hold a dominant position in Jewish life, despite the incontestable cumulative impact of, first, Zionism and then, the Holocaust.

The Neturei Karta, uncompromising opponents of Zionism in all its forms, decry the use of force and express fraternal feelings towards the Arabs:

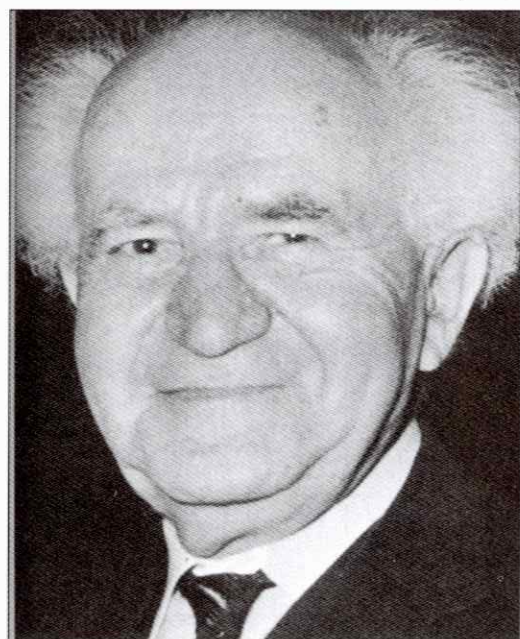
To all our Arab and Islamic brethren around the world, let the message go forth today, that your quarrel is not with the Jewish people, the people of the Torah. We stand with you in your suffering. We feel your pain. We are with you. It is the task of world Jewry to remain patriotic citizens of the lands of their dispersion and pursue peace with all men.

It would appear that the Jewish adversaries of Zionism, a clear minority today, remain surprisingly close in their commitment to peace and justice to the mainstream Jews. They focus on the root causes of the conflict – dispossession, expulsion and occupation. It remains to be seen if the split that Zionism, and its emphasis on the use of force, has wrought among the Jews is ever going to be bridged. It is quite clear, however, that this emphasis is part of the legacy of Nationalist Socialism nurtured and practiced by Ben Gurion. Amir Peretz should not be blamed for remaining loyal to it.

Yakov M Rabkin, Professor of History at the University of Montreal, is the author of *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Zed Books, 2006). His analyses of the Middle East appear on radio and television as well as in several daily papers.

Demonstrating against the war in Lebanon, alongside Jews for Justice for Palestinians, members of Neturei Karta, orthodox Jews who oppose the existence of the State of Israel

Israel's first Prime Minister and Defence Minister, David Ben Gurion



ZIONISM HAS NEGATED THE TRADITIONAL JEWISH ATTITUDE TO WAR. IN OUR DAY, ISRAELI AND DIASPORA JEWS NUMBER AMONG THE OUTSPOKEN ADVOCATES OF THE STRONG-ARM APPROACH TO BOTH THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT AND THE INTERVENTION IN IRAQ, AND, MORE GENERALLY, THE CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS.

WITNESS TO TRAGEDY

Fifty years ago, two major events shook the world and shaped the thinking of a generation. In the Middle East, Israeli forces invaded Egypt in what turned out to be a joint attempt with Britain and France to seize back the Suez Canal and topple Nasser. In Eastern Europe, after Khrushchev's 20th Congress speech denouncing the crimes of Stalinism, Soviet tanks went in to suppress the uprising in Hungary.

PETER FRYER was a young Daily Worker correspondent who was going to tell the truth about Hungary. What he saw and heard so shocked him that when the Daily Worker suppressed his despatches, he published them as a book, *Hungarian Tragedy*, for which he was expelled from the Communist Party. With Peter Fryer's permission, we publish an extract, not only to bring the book to new readers, but to rekindle hope for genuine freedom and socialism for new generations.

Here I was back again in the first foreign country I had ever visited, a country whose people I loved and on whose soil I felt safe and among friends. A country where all my private symbols for the past 14 years, most of all the red star of the Soviet Union, were the official insignia. A country where 'we' were in power. A country where a new life was being built... A bitter awakening was in store for me. Magyaróvár Halfway through the morning the barrier was lifted and a car came through and drew up in front of the customs house. Inside were German Red Cross men and a German journalist. The car was full of food and medical supplies; something had happened at the town of Magyaróvár, ten minutes drive along the main road to Győr. They did not know what, but it was reported that many were wounded. They intended to leave the supplies at Magyaróvár and then try to get through to Budapest to see what was needed there... they agreed to squeeze up and take me...

There was an air of tremendous tension in the town as if some terrible natural calamity had taken place. It was a feeling such as hangs over a British mining town when a pit disaster draws crowds to the pit-head. Some women were crying. No one smiled. From the disjointed phrases, we learned that a demonstration had been fired on the previous day by men of the secret police. There were 80 dead and between 100 and 200 wounded. We must see the bodies of those who had been murdered. But first would we go to the revolutionary committee, which was in session at the Town Hall?

The Hungarian tricolour and the black flag of mourning flew side by side from almost every house. In everyone's buttonhole there was a scrap of red, white and green ribbon and, pinned with it, a scrap of black ribbon.

The revolutionary committee received us with great courtesy. It had been set up after the events of the previous day, and was in continuous session, mainly organising food supplies and arranging contact with the similar committee at Győr, the county town. The 20 members of the revolutionary committee were all local men; none could be called an emigré. Some were Communists, but rank-and-file Communists, not officials...

Most of the committee members were former members of the Social Democratic Party, who for

one reason or another had dropped out of political activity since the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party were merged in the Hungarian Working People's Party in June 1948. Magyaróvár, its population of 22,000 almost entirely working class, had elected a town council with a Socialist majority in 1945. But after the merger of the two parties the people's own creative initiative, their desire to build socialism, was stifled. They were neither consulted nor drawn into the administration of their own affairs. The Party bosses ran the town by issuing orders...

The trade unions were a farce – dominated by Party puppets, and existing not to protect and improve the wages and conditions of their members but to 'mobilise' them in the struggle for higher production... The people had been promised a better life, and were prepared to co-operate to the full to achieve it. But life grew worse instead of better... This was the story the revolutionary committee told me...

On Wednesday and Thursday the word had spread round the factories and streets of the fighting in Budapest. By Friday the whole town was in ferment, and at about 10 o'clock in the morning the people poured out of their houses in a spontaneous demonstration. They were unarmed, and at that stage they did not want arms. Their only weapons were red, white and green flags, and occasional rough posters bearing the two fundamental demands of the national uprising: 'End the Russian occupation' and 'Abolish the AVH.' (Hungarian Security Police. JS)

There were 5,000 people in the demonstration... They were entirely peaceful – except that wherever they saw a red star they tore it down. This was not an expression of their desire for the restoration of capitalism. It expressed their desire for an end of Soviet occupation, for the removal of the Soviet symbols that had been thrust down their throats in place of bread, for the silencing of the empty slogans that had been dinned into their ears in place of truth.

The crowd... drew near the AVH headquarters where a huge red star stood out against the sky. 'Take down the red star,' they roared.

The reply was a hoarse word of command, the rattle of machine gun fire, the mowing down of those in the front ranks; then the screams of the wounded.

No warning was given... There was not even an initial burst of firing into the air, or over the people's heads. At the command of AVH Lieutenant, József Stefko, two machine guns hidden behind the windows of the headquarters pumped bullets into the thickest part of the crowd. AVH men also threw hand-grenades. The firing went on for four minutes, and some of those wounded were shot again in the back as they tried to crawl away. Men and women, students and workers, children and even an 18-months-old baby were among the victims.

Nothing could now restrain the crowd, and they rushed to the army barracks to pour out the story to the soldiers. Without hesitation the soldiers broke open the armoury and gave the people weapons.

There was a fierce battle for the AVH headquarters, in the course of which one of the detachment's four officers was killed, another was captured and lynched and the other two were wounded and taken to hospital...

When we had listened to this story, the revolutionary committee insisted that the German and English journalists go out on the balcony and address the crowds, and then visit the cemetery to see for themselves the victims of the atrocity. Interpreters were provided, and we faced a crowd of several hundreds: soldiers, workers, students and women. The German said simply that medical help was on the way from West Germany. I did not know what to say; my heart was too full to do more than tell the people that the British people had not yet any reliable news of what was happening in Hungary, that I would make it my business to tell them as speedily as possible, and that I was sure that as the news spread medical aid would be on its way from Britain too. I have tried to keep the promise to tell the truth I made that day...

DISHONOURABLE ALLIANCE

CHARLIE POTTINS talks to veteran Israel dissident MOSHÉ MACHOVER about his memories and analysis of the Suez War Fifty years ago Israel, Britain and France invaded Egypt under a secret agreement which the British government denied even existed. For Moshé Machover, reaching adulthood in Israel, it was a time of postponed decisions. Due to a 'snafu' by military officialdom his call-up was deferred for a second time, past a war in which he lost several friends. An isolated stand against the war by the Israeli Communist Party delayed his decision to break with the party.

I asked Moshé how he had come to join the Communist party in his youth, and what it was like.

'I was in Hashomer Hatzair, the socialist-Zionist youth movement. Some of us had problems with their unstable amalgam of Zionism and Marxism. I was more attracted to the Marxism. We were 16 at the time. We challenged the idea that we must form a kibbutz. What had this to do with the class struggle? We were influenced by reading Borochoy, and rejected 'constructivism'. We were ripe to become communists.

'The Communist Party was about half and half – it had a substantial Jewish membership but had stronger influence in the Arab sector where it was the only authentic party.

'There was a split in Mapam in 1952 over the Prague trials. The left split for the wrong reasons – supporting Stalinism. It was led by Moshe Sneh, who was really still a Zionist, but thought we had to tie our fate to the Soviet Union as a rising power. He was a fantastic public speaker. Because they were to the left it was natural for us to join them, even though we had different ideas. They formed the party of the Socialist Left, then they joined the Communist Party in 1954.

I should be interested to know what J R Campbell, editor of the Daily Worker, or Mick Bennett, assistant editor, or George Matthews, assistant secretary of the Communist Party, who suppressed the dispatch I wrote about Magyaróvár, would have said to the people of that town if they had been in my place. Would they have insulted their grief with warnings about 'counter-revolution', delivered a little homily about 'White Terror'? Would they have addressed them in the lofty, omniscient tones of the Daily Worker editorial of the day before, the day this abominable mass murder took place:

'What has happened in Hungary during these past days has not been a popular uprising against a dictatorial Government. It has been an organised and planned effort to overthrow by undemocratic and violent means a Government which was in process of carrying through important constructive measures.'

When they were taken to see the dead, as I then was, how would they have described them? As fascists? Reactionaries? Counter-revolutionaries? I should like to know.

Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Congress opened our eyes, but it was the Hungarian revolution and its suppression that exposed Stalinism for what it was. The Suez war worked the other way. What delayed our split was Suez. The Communist Party had a reasonable line.

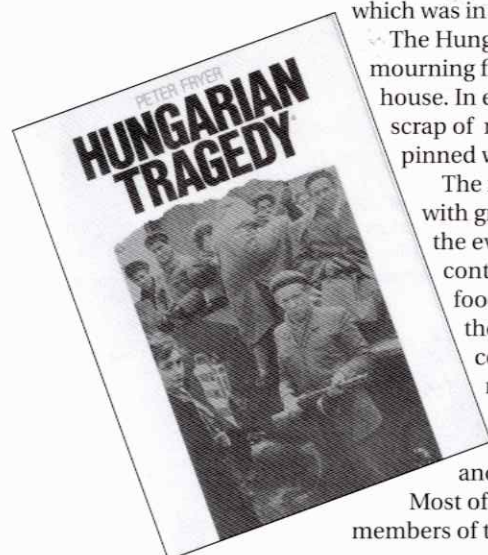
'I could see later that their criticism of Zionism was very superficial. They had had a better analysis in their early days. But the Soviet Union supported the creation of Israel. They voted for the partition of Palestine: Resolution 181 of the UN General Assembly (27th November 1947). Stalin had a false picture. He thought he could extend Soviet influence in the Middle East as well as undermining British power. The Soviet government encouraged Czechoslovakia to sell arms which were very important to the Israeli forces. They also allowed Jewish volunteers from the eastern bloc.'

Remembering how my Zionist enthusiasm had been dampened when I realised Israel and Britain were fighting on the same side, I asked Moshé whether the 1956 war had come as a surprise.

'The soldiers were surprised when they were taken to the south. They had been expecting war with Jordan. Britain had also been worried about this. The British had a problem at the Sèvres meeting – they had a treaty with Jordan. In the months leading to the war, the Israeli army made raids in the West Bank.

'This was my generation in the army. The paratroops were led by Sharon, and the raids were under his command, as had been the one on Kibya in 1953, when many civilians were killed.

'Kafr Kassem was a sideshow of the Suez war. The Israeli army declared a curfew in the Little Triangle. There was a massacre when workers came home from work who had not heard of the curfew order. They had left for work in the fields early in the morning. They came home in the evening and



were massacred by the Border Guards.'

In the years before Suez, Nasser had been putting out feelers about opening talks on accommodation, informal peace, with Israel. The public did not know, but 'there were indications'. Dom Mintoff, the Prime Minister of Malta, had tried to set up contacts. Maurice Orbach the British Labour MP was also involved. Some Israeli Foreign Office officials did have contacts. Prime Minister Moshe Sharett was in favour. But Ben Gurion had different ideas. He was afraid that in uniting the Arabs, Nasser would become 'a new Atatürk'. He wanted to cut the Egyptian leader 'down to size'.

Peace feelers were not the only secret. In 1954 a series of bombings in Egypt hit cinemas, railway stations, and a US Information Service library, among other targets. Egyptian police arrested a network of Israeli agents, several of them young people well known in the Egyptian Jewish community, which suffered as a result. The operation seemed to be aimed at persuading Western powers that the Nasser regime could not maintain security, possibly even delaying Britain's withdrawal from the Canal Zone. Two leading agents were executed on January 31, after what Israeli media insisted was a 'show trial'. The Israeli public were kept in the dark about what had been happening, but Defence Minister Pinhas Lavon had to resign on 17th February 1956 over the 'security mishap', though he denied authorising the operation. Years later a military intelligence employee stated that she had been ordered to forge a letter implicating Lavon with responsibility.

Whatever the truth, Ben Gurion returned from Sde Boker to become defence Minister, and then Prime Minister. During his self-imposed 'exile' at the Negev kibbutz, he had been visited by senior army officers like Moshe Dayan. Ten days after Ben Gurion took office, Israeli forces commanded by Ariel Sharon attacked Egyptian posts in the Gaza strip and killed 38 Egyptian soldiers, supposedly in retaliation for the death of an Israeli cyclist in a border crossing incident.

Moshé points to the bigger picture in the background to this. In May 1950, Britain, France and the United States had signed a Tripartite Declaration guaranteeing the 1949 armistice lines as borders between Israel and the Arab states [hence wiping Palestine off the map] and undertaking to supply them with arms for their defence, internal security, and the 'defence of the region'. This was followed up by the Baghdad Pact, linking Turkey, Iraq – and later Iran and Pakistan – and Britain, with US backing, as an eastward extension of NATO to 'contain' the Soviet Union. Egypt was encouraged to join, but Nasser declined. He told US Secretary of State Dulles: 'The Soviet Union never occupied our country; it has no imperial past in the Middle East. I don't see why I should turn my country into a base to threaten the Soviet Union with nuclear warheads when they have never threatened us. The communists are at most an internal danger to Egypt, but one that can be dealt with by social reform.' The pact was signed on 24th February. Four days later came the Israeli raid on Gaza.

On 9th March the United States announced that it was stopping arms shipments to Egypt and Israel (which was being supplied mainly by France at this time). But the US would supply Egypt with arms

gratis – as it had agreed to supply Iraq – if only Egypt joined the Baghdad Pact.

Nasser had a different plan. His government approached Czechoslovakia for arms. In April he set off for Bandung in Indonesia for the Afro-Asian summit which was to give rise to the 'non-aligned' movement. Egypt recognised the Chinese People's Republic whose premier Chou En Lai had attended Bandung. The Czech arms shipments began arriving in October 1955.

The West's reaction was mixed. Nasser was warned to 'remember Guatemala' – where, in 1954, the CIA had brought down the democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz regime that was receiving Czech arms. He replied: 'To hell with Guatemala.' In public, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was more cautious, acknowledging that Egypt was an independent state entitled to buy arms where it may. On 12th October he told US Jewish organisations that the United States was not going to sign a security pact with Israel. Egypt was told that the US and Britain would finance Egypt's Aswan dam, if Egypt kept in line.

On 19th July 1956 Nasser accepted the deal with strings, only to be told that Dulles had withdrawn the offer. The following week Nasser announced to cheering crowds that to finance the dam, Egypt was going to nationalise the Suez canal.

The British and French governments had no restraint. In secret talks at Sèvres, near Paris, they agreed with Israeli representatives a plan to attack Egypt. The French thought they could end backing for the Algerian liberation struggle. Eden half-convinced himself he was refighting the pre-World War II battle with appeasers and dictators. But he insisted the Sèvres agreement be kept secret from the United States, not to mention the British public, and wanted written records destroyed.

British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd was anxious about the effect on Arab opinion. Britain had fostered the Arab League and had treaties with Iraq and Jordan. Eden had urged Israel to make territorial concessions, and warned that the RAF would come to Jordan's aid if it was attacked by Israel. In the months leading up to Suez, Israeli forces had carried out several raids on the West Bank in 'reprisal' for Palestinian infiltration. Nasser promised support for fedayeen but most were coming from Jordan. When Israeli reservists were called up, they thought war with Jordan was coming and were surprised to be sent south to the border with Egypt.

One person who correctly predicted that Britain might use Israel to try and topple Nasser was American journalist I F ('Izzy') Stone. His June 1956 comment in his widely read I F Stone Weekly was quoted in Al Hamishmar, the Mapam newspaper. Just as well Ben Gurion had brought in the left-Zionists Ahdut Ha'Avodah and Mapam to reinforce his government, with war coming.

On 29th October 1956, Israeli forces invaded the Gaza strip and Sinai. Two days later British and French planes bombed Egyptian airfields and naval defences. While the bombing and fighting raged, a farcical exercise in hypocrisy was played at the UN. In the early hours of 4th November, responding to a resolution for a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces, Israeli representative Abba Eban announced: 'Israel agrees to an immediate ceasefire provided that a similar answer is forthcoming from Egypt.' Israeli

troops were already nearing Sharm el Sheikh, on the tip of Sinai. But there was consternation in the British and French governments.

Their collusion with Israel was meant to be secret. They had said that their intervention was solely aimed at separating the two belligerents. A ceasefire before their troops had landed would spoil everything. Eden was in particular trouble, with unrest among reservists and anti-war demonstrations demanding his resignation. The French government used its influence with Ben Gurion and, at noon, Israel's representative told the UN Secretary General that his position had been misunderstood. Israel's compliance with UN resolutions would depend on Egypt being prepared to enter peace negotiations, end economic boycott, free Israeli shipping in the canal, and recall the fedayeen under its control. The French and British governments then announced that they still believed intervention was necessary.

The war ended with Israel temporarily in control of Gaza and Sinai, and Ben Gurion proclaiming the 'Third Kingdom' of Israel, boasting that the army now controlled an area three times the state of Israel: 'This was the most glorious military operation of the Jewish people and one of the most wondrous in world history.' Declaring that 'our army did not infringe the territory of Egypt, and did not even try to infringe it', he went on to recall that 'the maritime commerce of Israel started in the Red Sea in the time of Solomon,' and cited accounts of a Hebrew community on the 'island of Yotvat' (Tiran) in the 6th century. The entire Knesset – apart from the CP members – sprang to their feet and sang Hatikvah.

It soon became clear that the United States would insist on Israel withdrawing. But Ben Gurion, evoking the Biblical phrase 'the whole land is mine', still spoke of 'liberating the territory of the homeland' as a war aim yet to be realised. So much for Israel only wanting recognition of its 1949 borders – except for overseas consumption.

Amid the euphoria of victory, few Israelis questioned the war or criticised their leaders. But it had not been all triumph. Even those who did not care about Egyptian and Palestinian military and civilian losses, or the sight of Egyptian soldiers deprived of their boots and sent to struggle home across rock-strewn Sinai, might have asked about Israeli losses.

Israeli paratroops were sent to secure the eastern entrance of the Mitla pass before the arrival of the main armoured forces. But their commander decided to exceed orders and try to capture the pass itself. Some 40 men were lost in his reckless bid for glory. Many of them had been Nahal conscripts, drawn from the youth movements. The commander was Ariel Sharon. 'I lost some friends in that adventure,' says Moshé. 'Sharon did not mind the cost.'

'Suez was a pivotal event in the 20th century, not just in the Middle East but for Europe,' Moshé Machover believes. 'It gave impetus to the formation of the European Union because of the conclusions France drew from it. As for Britain, 10 years before Suez the Empire was virtually intact; 10 years after there was hardly any Empire left. Suez was the last attempt by Britain to act as an independent imperial power, and the only serious departure from the post-1945 policy of acting as a



Demonstration against the Suez War in 1956

go-between for the US and Europe.'

British attempts to topple Nasser by a combination of military action and intrigue had proved a flop. Both the United States and the USSR made it clear that the old order was finished, and not just in the Middle East. Eden went, while Nasser was boosted as a leader in the Arab and wider 'Third world'.

Israel had revealed an appetite for territory, though it would have to wait for another war, and more US backing to realise it. But Moshé believes the special relationship with France had an important by-product while it lasted. 'Israel told France at Sèvres: "We are being asked to do something very risky. We want something big in return." The deal was that France helped Israel go nuclear. Shimon Peres, as Director General of the Defence Ministry, was the key person in this French connection.' ('Fifty years ago I had the privilege of introducing new arms systems to the Israel Defence Forces that provided Israel with a powerful deterrent that is still valid.' Shimon Peres, The Guardian, 4th September 2006.)

In 1961, Malta's Dom Mintoff gave an interview to Ma'ariv describing how Nasser had authorised him to act as mediator in January 1956 to contrive a 'chance' meeting for him with Israeli representatives. He also showed reporters a British Foreign Office telegram, marked 'Top Secret', addressed to the Governor of Malta: 'It is very undesirable for Nasser to visit. Make sure that Mintoff's explanation to Nasser does not say Britain is stopping it.'

The Communist Party had retained Moshé's respect as the only party in Israel to oppose the Suez war. But eventually he and other dissatisfied members broke from it to form their own Marxist group, around the magazine Matzpen. Though never large, it played a seminal role in developing ideas which contributed to today's radical dissent in both Israel and the Jewish diaspora and pioneering Israeli-Palestinian contacts.

In 1961, under the name 'N Israeli', Moshé Machover and Akiva Orr published a book called Shalom, Shalom, v'ein Shalom – Peace, Peace, and there is No Peace – which looked at the background to Israel's wars. It has never been translated into English but that may soon be remedied.

Articles from Matspen and the theoretical magazine Khamsin are now being made available in Hebrew, Arabic and English on this website: www.matzpen.org/index.asp?p=100

DIDN'T WE DO WELL?

This year marks 350 years since the Jews were readmitted to Britain, and **TONY KUSHNER** is unhappy about Jews being used as an example to other immigrant communities

Not surprisingly, the 350th anniversary of the readmission of the Jews to Britain in 1656 has been the focal point for celebratory narratives of the subsequent history. 'There's hardly an area of British life to which they haven't made a contribution,' Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks told Radio 4 listeners. Sacks, knowingly or unknowingly, was echoing the Duke of Edinburgh at the time of the tercentenary dinner, held at the Guildhall in 1956. The Duke, for once avoiding too many ethnic slurs, thanked Anglo-Jewry for all they had done for the country, as well as congratulating its ancestors' good sense in coming to England (presumably in the 350 odd years between expulsion in 1290 and readmission the Jews had simply tried other places and found them not to their liking, as if they were some ungrateful tourists who suddenly realised that Blackpool was a much better bet than the Costa del Sol). To be fair to the Duke, unlike his more po-faced successors in 2006, he did have the good humour to congratulate the Jews also for 'having stuck it out here for 300 years'.

But, more seriously, what does particularly mark out the current commemorations of readmission in 2006 from those 50 years earlier is not the mutual backslapping and expressions of gratitude that have taken place – tolerance and openness being praised on the one hand, and giving and loyalty on the other. It is that, implicitly or explicitly, the Jewish example has been raised and praised for others to follow. Meg Munn, parliamentary undersecretary with responsibilities for women and equality, stated that the 'Jews have been able to integrate into the life of the country without losing their distinctive identity as Jews'. It was, she added, an 'example of how members of an immigrant community can succeed as individuals and as a community, and make a huge positive contribution to the country at large'. One hundred years ago, the Chief Rabbi acknowledged, 'the same abuse directed today at other minorities was said about Jews'. It could take three generations for a new community to integrate, he cautioned.

There are various Whiggish assumptions behind such majority and minority statements that need to be unpacked, not simply for the sake of maintaining a critical British Jewish historiography, but also for the wider ramifications and assumptions about other groups of migrant origin in Britain. These assumptions mark a return to the inter-War Chicago school model of race relations as put forward by Robert Park: that a group coming in is bound to find hostility because of its strangeness. Nevertheless, by the second or third generation there is accommodation on both sides, then acceptance, without the necessity of full assimilation having taken place. Hostility becomes a thing of the past, and if it persists, then the fault may lie with the minority group itself through failing to acculturate.

Implicit in the praising of the British Jewish model is the current governmental obsession that other groups, especially Muslims, are failing what Conservative politician, Norman Tebbit, in 1990, termed the 'cricket test'. Britishness, as envisioned by Gordon Brown and New Labour may be far more open and diverse than that imagined by Norman Tebbit, but it is support of a diversity that is ultimately unified under one flag and one loyalty. With such a construction of Britishness, Jews in Britain with all their ethno-religious distinctiveness, far from causing problems are thus singled out as an example to all. As Tony Blair put it, for 350 years the Jewish community 'has shown how it is possible to retain a clear faith and a clear identity and, at the same time, be thoroughly British.... As the oldest minority faith community in this country, you show how identity through faith can be combined with a deep loyalty to our nation.'

But we get a very different perspective to that provided by Jonathan Sacks, Tony Blair and others by exploring two periods: the contemporary and the immediate post-War era. It will be less comforting to those who perceive Britishness or Englishness as being inherently open and tolerant. Instead, it will focus more on national exclusivities and less on the behaviour of minorities in response to it. The comparison made will not only be temporal – it will also be between responses to Jews and to Muslims in Britain. Through the second comparative gaze it will suggest that, rather than regard attitudes and responses to migrants as being generational and naturally redemptive in the long term, it is more productive, if depressing, to identify racisms: traditions of hatred that are not unchanging but which are stronger and less reconstructed in some cases rather than others.

I will start in 1947, perhaps the worst year in modern British Jewish history and, revealingly, one that has, until recently, been subject to collective amnesia. It was a year that climaxed in a series of antisemitic riots across Britain and started with a Sunday Times editorial addressed 'To British Jews', which accused them of failing to denounce properly 'outrages' in Palestine and therefore of refusing to perform their 'civic duty and moral obligations'. Such demands for expressions of local loyalty and the failure to acknowledge either divisions within British Jewry or the transnational/diasporic complexity of its identities have a depressingly familiar ring to them. And this violence and these accusations of dual loyalty took place not in the 1900s, as referenced by Jonathan Sacks, that is at the time of mass Jewish immigration, but when a second generation was well established and a third generation was beginning to emerge.

Plenty of evidence could be called upon to show the popular animosity towards Jews in the immediate post-War period. Rather than a restraining factor, when there were references made to the persecution and mass murder of the Jews during the War, it was to provide further ammunition for the attack, rather than to elicit sympathy: with regard to the bombing of the King

David hotel in 1946, wrote one observer, 'I could not have loved a Jew before, [but] now I think Hitler was more right than wrong in his idea of extermination.'

Whilst British-Jewish conflict was the catalyst for much of the violence and animosity, underneath were the domestic tensions of austerity Britain and the sense that Jews were somehow alien, un-English. Again parallels could easily be drawn with the so-called 'northern riots' in 2001, including elements of minority militancy, articulated in one specific British Jewish case in the form of violent anti-fascism and muscular Zionism of the 43 Group. It was made up of 'tough Jews' in their early 20s, including, rather remarkably given his later camp persona, Vidal Sassoon ('bash up and go' anti-fascism, to coin a phrase). It has close parallels with the streetwise young Muslims who have refused to take harassment from the BNP or the police without resistance.

At other times during modern British history, immigrant and minority groups that have previously been well integrated and part of local culture, such as the Germans during the First World War and Italians during the Second World War, have been separated out, interned and deported by the British state without any serious popular opposition, not even from those who were their close neighbours. The focus then, should be the

exclusivities of Britishness and Englishness rather than the behaviour – or more often the alleged behaviour – of the minority group itself. In that sense, the British Jewish model of integration after 350 years can guarantee nothing to others.

Moreover, the 15 or more generations of Jews in this country since readmission have faced many different and contradictory pressures, not all of which have been conducive to feeling 'at home'. In short, there have been too many cricket tests and too many conditions set on taking the toys off the conveyor belt. To risk stretching the metaphor of the Generation Game (and Brucie, its host) to breaking point, it has been not so much a 'good game, good game' after 350 years, as one, to enter football cliché land, of two halves, consisting of positive and negative forces. Yes, Philip, we have done well to stick it out.

To conclude: existing simultaneously, tolerance, intolerance and toleration cannot be simply added up or subtracted to give some final total, which, when entered on some British Jewish scoreboard, shows how successful we've been so far. Should we be thanking Britain, then, including the Royal Family, for its often conditional acceptance and occasional forays into exclusion and violence? At this critical moment in British and world affairs, we need less celebration and more interrogation of history – Jewish or otherwise.

Tony Kushner is the author of *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester University Press, October 2006)

OUTCAST OF THE GHETTO

Many accepted versions of Anglo-Jewish history imply that sometime, somewhere there was an early stage of solidarity across class and caste. Big divisions are dated to the 1880s with the shocking arrival of new, unassimilated East European immigrants, or perhaps back to 1858 when Jews were granted the vote, or the 1830s when a few became able to climb into the British elite without being baptised.

In his 1892 introduction to *Children of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill dedicates his book to a past Jewish community undivided despite wealth or poverty, old or new status. The vision was of course a fiction. Zangwill spent the next 30 years following his fantasy of homeland security through such 'lands without people' as Uganda, Libya, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Angola, Mexico, Canada and Galveston Texas before declaring the Zionist movement dead. In his personal life he embraced The Melting Pot, the name of his most successful play.

Children of the Ghetto carried a huge load of community expectation. As a fiery young journalist on Jewish Standard: The English Organ of Orthodoxy, Zangwill himself had patrolled the boundaries of the acceptable in Jewish fiction, attacking the scandalous novel *Reuben Sachs* – the passionate, bitter assault on ambitious 'Maida Vale Jews' by the rebel feminist poet Amy Levy.

Zangwill did it his way – with a comic parody of adultery, greed and murder by one 'Amy Danby':

[Now] the heart of the Rabbi was dark with lust and he plotted a deadly sin,
And the ladies' gallery blushed with rouge
and was heavy with fumes of gin.
In a pew our hero is reading the last of the novels of Zola, bound
In morocco, it looks like the prayer books of the members who slumber around....

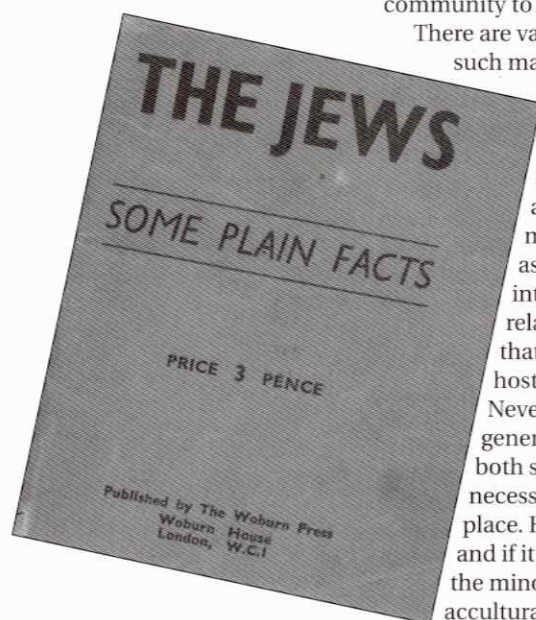
This got him into quite unexpected trouble when Jewish Standard's readership misunderstood the spoof as a further onslaught on pillars of their community. (The Salman Rushdie affair comes to mind). Quickly Zangwill dashed off a sick-making poem of apology called 'The Hebrew's Friday Night':

The Father from the Synagogue returns (A singing bird is nesting at his heart),
And from without the festive light discerns
Which tells his faithful wife has done her part
To welcome Sabbath with domestic art. He enters and perceives the picture true,
And tears unbidden from his eyelids start, As Paradise thus opens on his view,
And then he smiles and thanks his God he is a Jew.

Amy Levy, an outcast from this cloying communal idyll, committed suicide. Twelve years later Zangwill regretted his role, recalling the dead Levy's 'genius': '[she was accused] of fouling her own nest. [but] what she had really done was to point out that the nest was fouled and must be cleaned out.'

The tightly guarded boundaries of the 19th-century Anglo-Jewish community were challenged by the feminist poet Amy Levy, writes **AMANDA SEBESTYEN**

Booklet handed out during the Second World War, giving people 'chapter and verse' on Jewish achievements to counter antisemitism





Amy Levy

But already 'Grandchildren of the Ghetto' (the second half of *Children*) had repaid a moral debt to Amy Levy by showing a dinner table of rich and variously assimilated Jews discussing a controversial novel called 'Mordecai Josephs'. Zangwill's heroine, 'a shy dark little girl' like accounts of Levy herself, has 'agreed with every word of it'. Without exception, the more conformist and corrupted characters ape the younger Zangwill's own words, condemning the book's author for 'fouling the nest' and writing to make money, dismissing any possibility that hatred of the Jewish establishment could have been based on genuine personal experience.

Perhaps it is some memory of this tangled relationship between the two writers that made the head of Persephone Books, who have republished Amy Levy in England for the first time in over a century, suggest to me that 'she [Amy] was in love with Zangwill and he married somebody else'. In reality, it seems Levy was a more complete and complicated outcast than that.

So who was Amy Levy and, perhaps even more importantly for today's critics of the Jewish Establishment, who was Reuben Sachs?

The 18th century offered places to Jewish immigrants to trade in naval ports, and Levy's ancestors in the Moses and Joseph families became prosperous in Portsmouth and Falmouth. Her immediate family in London was extremely well off most of the time, occasionally sinking to rooms in Bloomsbury. Highly educated, unusually travelled, often in mental suffering, Amy Levy was positioned for unique and painful insight into the prosperous circles 'within and without' which she moved. Her feeling for injustice seems always to have been keen: one of her earliest known poems dramatically captured the hunting to death of another racial outcast, a Romany woman with her child.

Amy was the first Jewish woman to study at Newnham College, Cambridge, but left before she graduated. Her short story 'Cohen of Trinity' shows an ungainly Jewish misfit who kills himself just as his writing of 'a force, a fire, a vision' seems about to compel the respect of the Anglo-Saxon elites who have always loathed him.

Levy's sense of exclusion as a woman was even more personal. At Cambridge she started her long poem vindicating Xanthippe – Socrates' angry and derided wife who still features in the Oxford English Dictionary as synonym for a 'shrewish, scolding or ill-tempered' female. Levy looked back at having 'to fight her way unknown and single-handed, to compete with a guild of craftsmen all more or less known to one another' in her essay 'Women in Club Life', commissioned by Oscar Wilde when he was editing *Women's World* magazine. She laughed at the mainstream appetite for stories of 'Felines and Femines' (catfights) in 'The Romance of a Shop', her novel of four sisters striking out to earn their own living as photographers – updated *Little Women* who become *New Women*.

That book (ostensibly without Jewish characters) touches on themes that will recur: a fascination with the changing city streets; a nervous breakdown; and 'an old, old story... the strife of a woman who demands respect, with the man who refuses to grant it'. There's also a submerged sense that for a woman to be witty and clever, or even to stand out too far as beautiful, is dangerous, potentially fatal. The sister

who cracks Wildean epigrams and turns people's heads in the street dies an awful death.

The writer needed networks desperately. Her closest friends became Eleanor Marx, Olive Schreiner, trade unionist and suffragist Clementina Black, translator Constance Garnett – all socialists and *New Women* as well. But Levy was certainly an unorthodox element in that new socialist wave. She had a satiric eye for conformity there too, in her pitiless story of a bored young woman desperate for a husband, stalking a well off 'Socialist of the advanced type, [with] not an atom of humour'.

After Cambridge Amy went abroad and probably fell in love with 'Vernon Lee', pen name of the maverick lesbian art critic and science-fiction writer Violet Paget.

It is so long gone by, and yet How clearly now I see it all!

The glimmer of your cigarette, The little chamber, narrow and tall.

Perseus; your picture in its frame; (How near they seem and yet how far!)

The blaze of kindled logs; the flame Of tulips in a mighty jar.

Florence and spring-time: surely each Glad things unto the spirit saith.

Why did you lead me in your speech To these dark mysteries of death?

Levy returned even more embattled with the 'tribal limits' of the Jewish establishment, which she presciently named *The Community*. 'The Jew, as we know him today, ...leading his eager, intricate life, living, moving and having his being both within and without the tribal limits; this deeply interesting product of our civilisation has been found worthy of none but the most superficial observation,' Levy wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle*, going on daringly to critique not just Dickens' 'bad fairy' Fagin and Scott's masochistic Jessica in *Ivanhoe*, but George Eliot's Daniel Deronda with its 'sincere and respectful' but ludicrous attempt to depict contemporary Jews as saintly Zionist dreamers.

It was Levy's explosive contribution to the genre, her novel *Reuben Sachs*, which summoned up a thundercloud of furious disapproval and may have helped to kill her. When she inhaled charcoal fumes at 28, Amy Levy had already written many poems about suicide, about love tormented by 'thy misprision and my impotence' and unhappy wakings from cloudy dreams:

'My heart in some dream-rapture saith, It is she.

Half in a swoon,

I spread my arms in slow delight. – O prolong, prolong the night, For the nights are short in June!

But poems like this also celebrated the constant return of hope, love, life. Others actually joked about failed flirtations, and these were flanked by verses from 'my urban muse' about the joys of summer in the city, and the independent life looking at everything that passed from the freedom of a bus.

The verse does come back, disquietingly, to a sense of being damaged and wrongly made – whether because of deviance from 'the pitiless order of things' (a phrase that also haunts Reuben Sachs); or because of the poet's increasing, isolating deafness; or perhaps, more confrontingly for us, because Levy sometimes seems to feel her Jewishness itself as a defect. She certainly sees the prosperous extended family as a hotbed of stress,

mental illness and concealment. The idea of every Jewish family hiding its own 'black sheep' is repeated in essays, in articles and in this novel.

Reuben himself is the model son: 'a nice gay time you appear to be having, old man: Jewish Board of Guardians, committee meeting; Anglo-Jewish Association, committee meeting; Bell Lane Free Schools, committee meeting – shall I go on?' asks his rebellious cousin Leo Leuniger who longs to live in Cambridge, 'Up there [where] it is freer, purer; life is simpler, nobler'.

Levy undercuts Reuben's civic and social ambition – he calculates 'it consolidates one's position both ways to stand well with the Community,' while he works himself to death struggling up the Conservative Party and turns his back on an inconvenient love. But Leo, 'who knew nothing about politics, [and] gave himself out as a social democrat,' is also seen as a snobbish escapist, protected by an upper class university friend who is probably in love with 'little Leuniger', while Leo himself persuades himself into a crush on the mousy Lady Geraldine, his friend's older sister.

Petty dramas of caste and class, Sephardi or Ashkenazi, Anglicised or 'within the tribal pale' are played out. On every page are outbursts of distaste, disgust. These Jews are 'sallow', 'awkward', 'coarse', gambling-mad, ignoble, ugly; they are 'bouncing, gaily attired daughter[s... and] wily sons of Shem', who can only mate for clan advantage.

The licensed goys who come for dancing and good food are shown as no better, while the earnest convert to Judaism is ludicrous: 'Mr Lee-Harrison was staying at our hotel one year at Pontresina. He was a High Churchman in those days, and hardly knew a Jew from a Mohammedan.'

The author's voice is equally cold towards this society's female misfits in their glorious clothes, though somehow Leo's near demented mother and the 'gnomelike' heiress Esther (with her cruel Wildean epigrams) resist Levy's efforts to dismiss them. It is as if Levy is trying out all the routes available to human sympathy and finding them blocked.

Her heroine, the stately Sephardic beauty Judith Quixano – poor, humble and not very clever – is almost a precursor of Trilby, which became the first modern mega-seller in 1894. But in Reuben Sachs, a eugenic tragedy takes place in reverse.

When a statuesque blonde woman of the people, Trilby, renounces her engagement to a weak and oversensitive (half-Jewish) artist in the face of pressure from his genteel family, she then falls into the clutches of the Satanic Svengali. When the tall, dark and beautiful impoverished 'aristocrat', Judith, is forced to renounce her love for the ambitious Reuben – his family's pressure separating him from the one person who 'was necessary to him' and 'from the best that life had to offer him' – she hands herself over to the Anglo-Saxon convert Bertie Lee-Harris, 'as obstinate as a mule, and as whimsical as a goat'. A cruel sexual mismatching is further stressed at the grand wedding, with Bertie 'smashing the wine-glass vigorously with his little foot, and sipping the wine daintily from the silver cup'. Both Amy Levy and George du Maurier (Trilby's author) show their heroines literally towering above anyone who seems to be on offer.

Reeling from this blast of revulsion, it is hard to see the other side, which fin de siècle sexual outcast

Amy Levy shares with that other Anglo-Jewish outlaw, the gay Pre-Raphaelite, Simeon Solomon, and which propels Reuben Sachs to its unexpectedly tragic conclusion. This is the spectre of 'love cast out' and the counterposing idea of a 'life force', pagan, Judaic, classical or just human, which will somehow allow loving to triumph in the end.

Levy's own feeling for her Jewishness persisted partly for reasons she puts into the mouth of Reuben Sachs: 'If prejudice died, if difference of opinion died, if all the world, metaphorically speaking, thought one thought and spoke one language, there would still remain those unspeakable mysteries, affinity – and love.'

Her attachment was based on daily street culture, like the Jewish joke: 'The most hardened Agnostic deserter from the synagogue enjoys its pungency, where the zealous alien convert to Judaism tastes nothing but a little bitterness' ... [It is] 'a heritage of the ages too precious to be lightly lost; a defence and a weapon wrought for us long ago by hands that ceased not from their labour... Not for all Aristophanes can we yield up our national free-masonry of wit, our family joke, our Jewish Humour.'

When Levy warned that sexual segregation and the obsessive matchmaking of a parochial community were driving Jewish men and women of any wealth of culture [to find] their friends of the other sex in the Gentile camp', she did so in the *Jewish Chronicle*. She did not join the 'ever increasing minority of eager women beating themselves in vain against the solid masonry of our ancient fortifications [but then] sometimes succeeding in scaling the wall and departing, never to return' – unless her death could be taken as that departure.

When Bryan Cheyette writes of these past (but sadly not gone) controversies that the 'hysterical quest for conformity indicates... the dehumanising impact on Anglo-Jewry of the ambivalent Jewish stereotype', I have a personal reason to wince. For my father, multicultural Britain arrived too late. On arrival from Hungary in the 1920s he saw the available two Anglo-Jewish identity choices – good or bad Jew – and picked another: 'not Jew'. I remember his bitter little joke that 'In England they don't have Jews; only Jewish people'. The life of neurotic denial never ceased to irk him, and in old age I could see him making crabwise advances towards describing his heritage in a less defensive way. That was 25 years ago, when being different started to seem like something one could celebrate.

These late-Victorian scandals have resonances today. The maddening template of 'good Jew v bad Jew' now reads 'good Muslim v bad Muslim', with an additional vicious irony: official representatives of the Jewish community seem to have climbed into the basket with their oppressors, showing little softness towards the next group of immigrants subject to the same traumatic loyalty tests.

The new battle lines being drawn up between 'Judaic-Christian heritage' and 'Eurabia', and the apparently eternal blinking timidity of a 21st-century Jewish community seldom daring to step over their side of the line, make me angry to my soul. I've experienced the pain these mental eruptions bring to the excluded and self-excluded, and so I salute and commemorate Amy Levy and Simeon Solomon who broke the boundaries and paid the price.

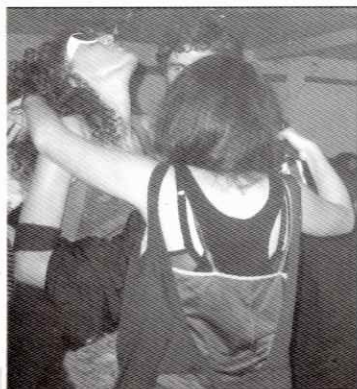


Israel Zangwill

ONE STEP BEYOND

Jewish Socialist magazine welcomes **JEWDas** – a group that can put the edge back into Edgware, the radical into Radlett and even do interesting things in Bushey

Scenes from the Jewdas Punk Purim



In a corner of a Camden café, some time last year, sit a series of eccentric figures. They sit round the same table, despite having lived centuries apart, in a manner not unlike the Babylonian Talmud. Korach sips a black coffee while muttering inaudibly about all the people being holy, while Elisha Ben Abuyah sings Greek songs and flicks through the heretical books secreted in his overcoat. With them is the slight figure of Spinoza, just returned from his nephew's barmitzvah.

Next to him sits Jacques Derrida, eyeing the world, puffing on his pipe. He's waiting for a meeting to take place. He's not sure who to expect, but is sure it will be an Other of some variety. It's not long before the proud beard of Karl Marx announces itself, accompanied by his new friend Martin Buber. As the minutes lapse, the group around the table swells as Emma Goldman, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky and Franz Kafka all join in the good natured chat. Franz Rosenzweig texts to say that he's held up on the Northern Line.

After briefly touching on deconstruction, dialectical materialism and international revolution, the assembled company get to the key question of the hour. 'What's happened to the Jews?' asks Marx. 'What's become of their revolutionary spirit?' Trotsky warms to the theme. 'They used to be radicals, anarchists – what now? I've seen them driving around in 4x4s and living in huge houses with offshore bank accounts.' Now they're all clamouring to comment, lamenting the move from the East End of London, mourning the shift of Israel from a socialist country to a little piece of America. The move from Beigels to Bagels is considered particularly symptomatic.

As the hubbub rises, a calm voice cuts through. 'We're asking the wrong questions,' ventures Derrida. 'The question is: where are the Jewish radicals? They haven't gone, we just can't hear them. They need a space, a voice, a mode of expression. They need a movement.' And hence Jewdas was born.

We are the traitorous Jews within the community. The Jews who find themselves hideously misrepresented by the self-appointed establishment of Anglo-Jewry. Who cringe whenever the Board of Deputies makes a pronouncement over what the Jews think; who shudder to think what Jonathan Sacks whispers into the Prime Minister's ear; who don't remember electing the government of Israel to speak on their behalf.

Embracing party, protest, tomfoolery, anarchy and drum and bass, Jewdas is a space for all who

want to build new Jewish identities, whether through writing a new Shulchan Aruch, reclaiming Yiddish, celebrating diaspora or subverting the state. We want to live at the tzitzit of Jewish life, those holy fringes where the binary polarities of Jew/gentile (as well as gay/straight, male/female sacred/secular) break down. We want to recreate the bond between Judaism and radicalism, Judaism and the avant-garde – links that should never have been broken. Seeing no need to choose between reclaiming and subverting Judaism, we do both at the same time.

We are both new and old. On the one hand what we do is utterly of its time, rejecting the drab suburban materialism and sycophantic Zionism of previous generations of British Jews, embracing multicultural post-modernity and revelling in the play of identities. On the other, we have wells of radical history to draw upon. Close to home, the Jewish anarchists of the East End (from whom we have appropriated the slogan 'The New Rabbis of Liberty'), who fought for workers' rights against the rabbinic establishment, held Yom Kippur Balls 'with music and dancing', and rewrote Maimonides' 13 principles as a socialist creed. Further afield we draw links to Israeli anti-Zionists, antinomian Hassids, Bundists and yiddishists, philosophers, renegade rabbis and false messiahs.

In case it was thought otherwise, we're not a closed shop. We aim to be a forum for all like(ish) minded Jews. Many articles are multi-authored and come from a range of contributors. There is of course a selection process, and rejecting articles from Jonathan Sacks with 'not radical enough' stamped across them is getting a little tiresome. So anyone with anything to contribute should email us at jewdas@gmail.com.

Back at the café, things are coming to a close. Korach goes back to his hole in the ground; Trotsky and Emma Goldman head for an underground rave somewhere in Leytonstone; while Buber goes off to start a neo-Hassidic socialist Hebrew commune somewhere in Suffolk. Marx considers going to the barber's but then decides otherwise, while Rosa Luxemburg nips down to Camden Lock to buy herself a Che Guevara T-shirt. Derrida sips his coffee before taking a call from his old friend Sigmund Freud. 'You know what, Ziggy,' he muses. 'I think it's all going to be ok. There's a whole new generation of young yiddishe freethinkers taking over the radical tradition and working as rootless cosmopolitans to undermine society. We can finally rest in peace.'

There is a pause from the other end of the line. 'Jacquesele,' says the founder of psychoanalysis. 'I have only one question. Is it good for the Jews?'

Website: www.jewdas.org

PUTTING FREEDOM FIRST

First published in 1967, this book's re-publication 100 years after the 1905 Revolution is a timely reminder that the historic process is much richer and more colourful than straight Red v White. Russia under the Czars entered the 20th century as a complex society, modern factories amid feudal conditions, advanced ideas amid barbarism.

Extreme conditions bred extremism. Terrorism, whether populist or anarchist, grew in response to brutal state violence, from mounted police whipping students to the authorities encouraging pogroms against the Jews. After the 1903 massacres in Kishinev and other cities, many young people lost patience with the Bund's emphasis on working class organisation and education, and its Marxist strictures against individual terror. Before long there was an anarchist group in Bialystok, its first literature a pamphlet from the Arbeiter Fräint in London, disguised as a Passover Haggadah.

Older artisans displaced by modern industry were attracted to Kropotkin's vision of a free, co-operative commune. Impatient young intellectuals were attracted by Bakunin's rejection of historical process, centralism and state.

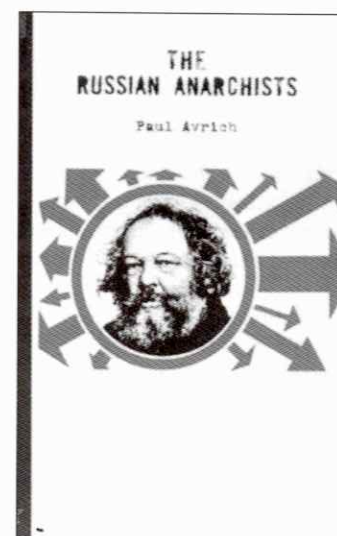
The Bund and other socialists were for organised self-defence, and by 1905 everyone wanted to lay their hands on arms. What distinguished some anarchists was

their fierce rejection of parliamentary reform and enthusiasm to attack the bourgeoisie regardless of political strategy. 'Would it make any difference which bourgeois one throws the bomb at?' asked Vladimir Striga, himself the son of well-to-do Jewish parents.

The distinctions between socialists and anarchists, and between anarchists and criminals, like Odessa's Balck Raven gang, were sometimes blurred.

When a bomb exploded at Odessa's middle class Café Libman, in December 1905, workers asked: 'Do the revolutionaries have nothing better to do?' and suspected the work of provocateurs. Some anarchists were drawn to mass struggle. The Moscow uprising was largely Bolshevik led, and the Forest Brethren to whom Avrich refers, who kept the Czar's army at bay for another year, were neither Russian nor anarchist, but Latvian socialists fighting a struggle that was at once social, agrarian and national.

The syndicalists brought the ideas of their Western counterparts to bear, seeing the workplace struggle as central. They underestimated the particular problems of backward Russia with its autocratic state and peasant majority; but their stress on self-organisation matched the rise of the soviets and anticipated possibilities for the future. The



THE RUSSIAN ANARCHISTS

by Paul Avrich

AK Press, £13

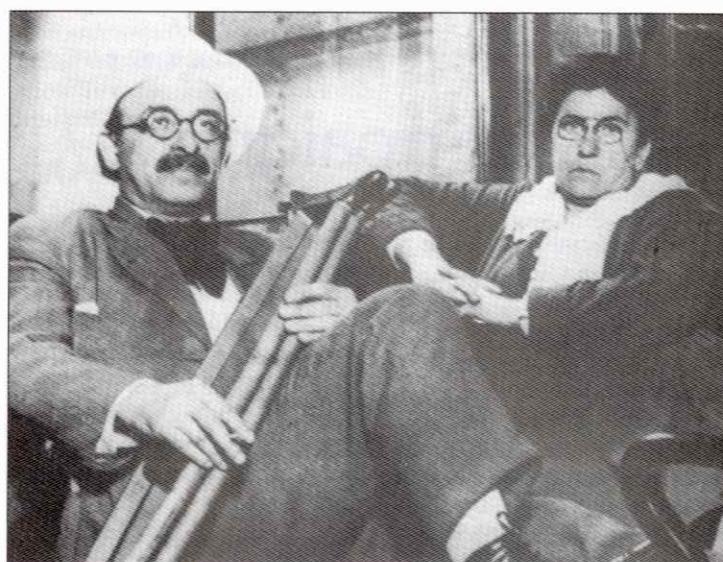
1917 revolutions brought a range of anarchist responses, from constructive participation through to an irrational destructive anti-intellectualism that must have been music to the ears of reactionary Black Hundreds.

Though not adding much to our knowledge of the Kronstadt sailors' revolt, tragically suppressed by the Bolsheviks, Avrich does throw light on the anarchist Makhno's peasant army in the south, at times a valuable ally to the revolution, at times a thorn in its side. Far from being antisemitic, as some have alleged, Makhno had many Jewish supporters. Ukrainian peasants named their commune after Rosa Luxemburg. But with the Ukraine's past, and reactionary forces rampaging, idealism and trust in spontaneity were not enough.

There were cruel injustices in the civil war period, though not all the libertarians were suppressed, some remaining relatively free until Stalinist repression began. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, initially sympathetic to the revolution, had been repelled by its dismissal of workers' freedom. Had some of the anarchists got their way, the revolution would have perished in chaos. Not liberty but reaction, supported by so many foreign powers would have triumphed. But had they and their ideas not been so brutally suppressed, they might have helped keep the revolution to its aims.

Charlie Pottins

A couple of tearaways:
Alexander Berkman and
Emma Goldman in 1917



EMBRACING PARTY, PROTEST, TOMFOOLERY, ANARCHY AND DRUM AND BASS, JEWDas IS A SPACE FOR ALL WHO WANT TO BUILD NEW JEWISH IDENTITIES,

INNER STORIES

OCCUPIED MINDS: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ISRAELI PSYCHE,

by Arthur Neslen

Pluto Press, £16.99

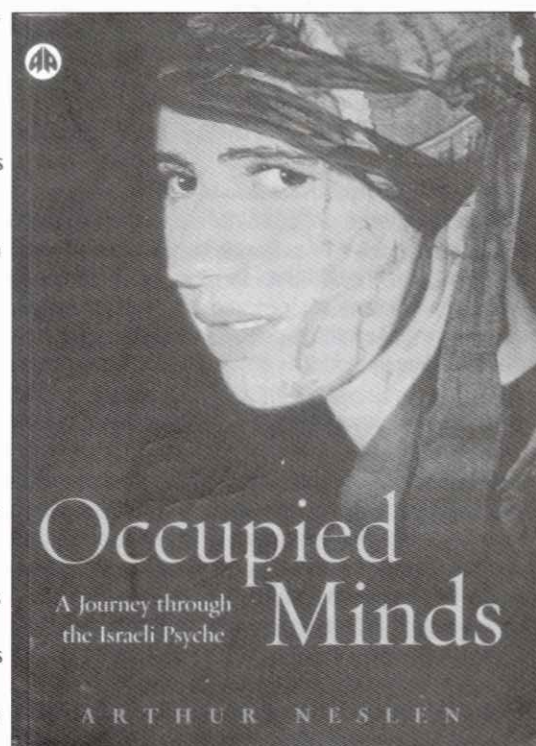
Arthur Neslen is a well published print and broadcast journalist, until recently the London correspondent for Aljazeera.net (the website's only Jewish journalist), and international editor for Red Pepper from 2001-2004. In a recent radio interview Neslen talked about the background to this book, written in the months leading up to Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan and published before the latest events in Lebanon, with their repercussions inside Israel. He stated then that people feel they are safe in a state that has the capacity to pulverise its neighbours.

The way that national identity has been constructed inside Israel highlights the difficulty for any diplomatic solution. The flight from persecution underlines the establishment and maintenance of the ideology of the state of Israel, as 'that terror' is invoked again to justify military action. He points out that there is a confusion of deterrence with security in tabloid speak, and believes that the best form of deterrence is good neighbourliness.

He writes in the introduction that he intends his book to be a platform for 'an unrepresentative but enlightening cross-section of voices to tell their own stories in their own way'. *Occupied Minds* is subtitled 'a journey through the Israeli psyche' and he has significantly chosen to interview Israeli Jews, rather than Israeli Arabs (some 25% of the population). A central theme is what it means to be a Jew,

particularly a non-believer and he focuses largely on interviews with those who might throw light on this theme of the relation between the Jewish religion and the state of Israel. The voices of intellectuals and former officials, cadres who have translated and 'delivered' the state ideology, are also dominant.

Neslen writes that 'occupation is not just a state of forced control. It is also a state of mind... Individuals in societies that see themselves as permanently at war often view each other through military field glasses, as combatants, infiltrators, morale boosters and traitors.' The book consists of around 50 personal stories, gathered from detailed individual interviews, organised in thematic sections, each with an editor's thoughtful and informative introduction. *Occupied Minds* is meticulously and rigorously researched and referenced, with detailed footnotes. It is an excellent book for the serious general reader on the Israeli-Palestine/Arab conflict, giving a broad, comprehensive spectrum of people, a confluence of ideas and



ideologies. For people who already have a certain depth of background understanding, clear of myths and misapprehensions, and to experts in this tragic conflict, it fills in the minutiae.

The psychological dynamic revealed through these interviews is the conflict within Israeli society around the struggle to establish a modern, secular Jewish identity, separate from metaphysical, historical Jewish roots. The historical dynamic is that of Zionism as a form of colonialism. If there is such a thing as 'the Israeli psyche' it seems a troubled one, living an insoluble paradox.

Rami Heilbronn



HALUTZIC VALUES

I'm worried about Israeli Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz. He may not keep his job for long.

When Halutz was air force commander someone asked what a pilot would feel, dropping a big bomb that would kill civilians. 'A slight bump in the plane,' replied Halutz, showing the bluff, no nonsense toughness we expect and love in IDF commanders.

Within a few hours of Hezbollah raiders capturing two Israeli soldiers, on 12th July, Dan Halutz knew what he must do. He went down to his bank and sold shares worth 120,000 shekels. Share indexes in Israel fell around 12% at the outset of the war. 'It was my portfolio of shares, on which I had lost 25,000 shekels,' Halutz told Maariv a month later. 'It is true that I sold the portfolio on 12th July but it is impossible to link that to the war. At the time, I did not expect or think there would be a war.'

Halutz means 'pioneer', so you can't blame him for being go-ahead, even if jealous Knesset members grumble about 'insider dealing'. But if the Chief of Staff who ordered the bombing of Beirut the following day did not know there was going to be a war, who did?

SIR ALF GARNETT

Sir Alfred Sherman, who has just died, graduated from the London School of Economics after the war, as did Professor William Fishman (author of *East End Jewish Radicals*). Their paths diverged, but some years ago fate provided a chance meeting in the street. 'Hello Alf!' called Bill jovially, 'ows the Communist Party?'

Sherman looked as though he wished the earth would swallow

him up. We did too, but we've had to wait.

'Will go far' would have been fair comment on young Alfred's report at Hackney Downs. After joining the Young Communist League and serving in the International Brigade, he went via the army, LSE, and The Observer to become an adviser in turn to Ben Gurion, Margaret Thatcher and Serb nationalist war criminal Radovan Karadzic. He had the honour of inviting France's National Front leader Le Pen to speak at a Tory conference fringe meeting.

Thatcher thought Sir Alf was 'brilliant'. The Russian immigrant's son is credited with inspiring her remarks about Britain being 'swamped' by immigrants. 'We could never have defeated socialism if it was not for Sir Alfred,' the baroness told his book launch last year. Hmm. Soon as we find out where he is buried Jewish Socialists will be off there with our dancing shoes.

GIYUS A BREAK, CYBERIM

So many letters and emails supporting Israel's actions in Gaza and Lebanon. Besides IDF reservists another army was called up. Under a programme called 'Giyus - Give Israel Your United Support', encouraged by Israel's Foreign Ministry, nearly 5,000 members of the World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS) downloaded 'Megaphone' software, which sent an alert popping up on their computers every time an article, internet poll or chatroom had anything criticising Israel, so they could instantly respond. 'Jewish students and youth groups are ideally placed to present another side to the debate,' says participant Jonny Cline.

Some strange responses answered things that had not been said. An Iraqi writer who described an Iraqi police raid as 'Israeli-style' was accused of believing Jews were descended from pigs and monkeys and ruled the world. Was some zealous Zionist student responding to a pop-up alert while experimenting with strange substances? Seemed the word 'Israeli' had triggered an automatic response. That made me think. What if replies were being automatically generated too? If so, the programme needed perfecting.

Enquiries led me to an amazing discovery at an Israeli-owned cybernetic firm somewhere in North West London. Not only was someone working on the software, but engineers were tinkering with what looked like reconditioned hardware from a Dr Who programme. 'We have had some teething problems,' the director admitted. 'The other week we assembled a large number of quite lifelike models in a field in Kenton. But in the heat some interference triggered faulty control mechanisms, so several began hurling themselves at the railings, giving off steam and spit, flailing their arms and shouting: "Exterminate! Exterminate!" He is hoping they can be modified in time for the university term.'

THINGS HEARD...

'He was on so often I thought they'd rename the BBC the Bibi Netanyahu!'

At least he won't have had to come through immigration. An Israeli came into Heathrow the other day, and they asked him 'occupation?'

'No, only tourism,' he reassured them.



Scotland's Jewish campaigners

Scottish Jews for a Just Peace are a group of Jews, centred mainly around Edinburgh but with supporters in all parts of Scotland. They are opposed to Israeli policies that undermine the livelihoods, and human, civil and political rights of the Palestinian people, and the ethical and political welfare of the Jewish people.

SJJP wants Jewish opinions that

are critical of Israeli policy to be heard in Scotland, and for the Scottish Jewish community to know that protest against Israeli policies is real and growing within the community.

They are working to develop contacts with and support for Palestinian people trapped in the spiral of violence and repression, and Israeli groups working with

them. It has been particularly supportive of Israeli army refuseniks

SJJP is a coalition of individuals with no official line on issues beyond general support for these principles and support for the right of Israelis to live in freedom and security within Israel's 1967 borders.

Website: www.sjip.org.uk