

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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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS!

WE HOPE 5769
WILL BRING
PEACE WITH
JUSTICE AND
AN END TO WAR,
OPPRESSION AND
DISCRIMINATION
THE WORLD OVER.



JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

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

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

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JEWISH ★ SOCIALIST



INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

PRACTICAL SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GAZA

Breaking ranks ■ Sisters' victory ■ 43 Group ■ Secret Jews
BNP make-over ■ Rudolf Rocker ■ Nuclear power

In the week that two converted fishing boats – Liberty and Free Gaza (see cover photo) – peacefully challenged Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, Israeli peace pioneer, Abie Nathan died in Tel Aviv at the age of 81. This brave, principled and determined man, anchored his Peace Ship off the coast of Tel Aviv. It was home to his extraordinary radio station, Kol HaShalom, The Voice of Peace. Each day he signed off with Hey Jude sung by John Lennon, who had partially funded the ship, and the message: 'Shalom, salaam and peace to all our listeners'.

Kol Hashalom was just one of his many extraordinary projects which gave hope to Palestinians and inspired a generation of human rights activists. He flew solo to Egypt in a bid to talk peace, broke the law in speaking to members of the PLO and, in the 1970s, went on repeated hunger strikes to try to force the Israeli government to make concessions for peace with Egypt.

As well as his efforts to bring peace to the region and justice to the Palestinians, Abie Nathan shipped emergency supplies to victims of war, earthquakes and famine all over the world, including to Biafra, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Lebanon and the former Zaire.

Today, while the US and UK wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan,

and the Israeli government builds more and more settlements in the West Bank and tightens the screws even further on Gaza, peace campaigners from the UK, USA, Ireland and Australia, have courageously sailed into the ghetto that Gaza has become. For over two years Israel has severely restricted access to Gaza, blocking aid shipments and trade. As a consequence, Gaza's economy has collapsed, forcing most industries to close and dramatically increasing malnutrition rates among children. Today, 80% of families in Gaza are now completely dependent on United Nations food aid; over 200 people have died as result of not being able to leave the enclave for medical treatment and hundreds of Palestinian students, who have places at universities abroad, have been denied exit visas by Israel.

These people, like Abie Nathan in the 1960s and '70s, are putting their governments and the international human rights community to shame by refusing to stand by and watch as the Israeli government, with US and European support, tries to destroy or drive out an entire nation. We need to draw inspiration from them and the courageous few who are risking their lives and their futures to fight for a peaceful and just future for all of us.

Cover photo: Peace activists of various nationalities sail out of the southern Cypriot port of Larnaca in two converted fishing boats – Liberty and Free Gaza – on their way to the Gaza Strip on 22nd August 2008 in a bid to break the Israeli blockade on the enclave. Photo: STEFANOS KOURATZIS/AFP/Getty Images

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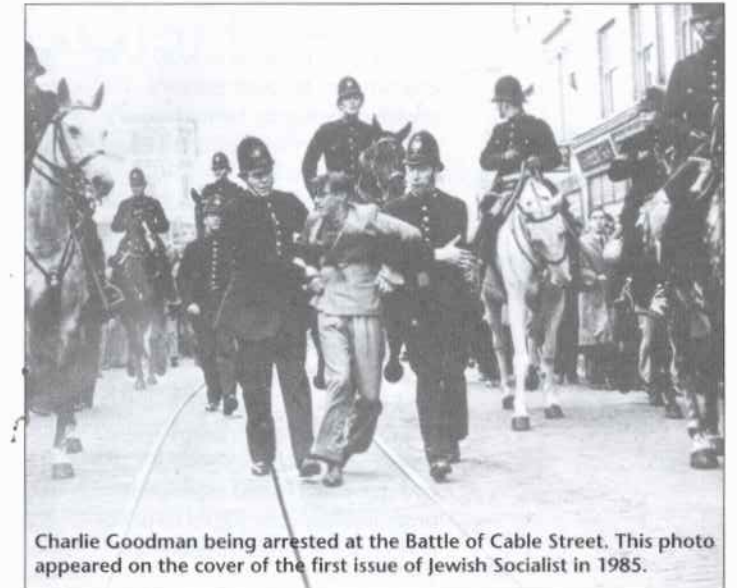
Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Charlie Pottins and David Rosenberg
Printed by The Russell Press, Russell House, Bulwell Lane, Basford, Nottingham NG6 0BT.

Footprints and barricades

The dramatic story of how the people of the East End blocked the path of Oswald Mosley's fascists in the 1930s is being physically retraced through a walking tour. David Rosenberg, a member of the Jewish Socialist editorial committee, launched his Antifascist Footprints walk in July.

The walks start at Aldgate East – or Gardiners Corner as it was known in the 1930s – where tens of thousands stood to block Mosley's path. It ends in Cable Street, where Jewish and Irish communities united to build barricades, preventing the fascists from terrorising the East End's inhabitants. Along the way David explains how the fight against Mosley's Blackshirts took place in so many arenas – on the streets, on housing estates, in the workplace, in youth clubs, in the press and through community institutions. He describes the experiences of ordinary people who became significant through this struggle, and highlights the role of organisations such as the Jewish People's Council, the Independent Labour Party and the Communist Party in mobilising resistance.

The next Antifascist Footprints walk takes place on Sunday 28th September 2008. Further dates and online booking at www.eastendwalks.com



Charlie Goodman being arrested at the Battle of Cable Street. This photo appeared on the cover of the first issue of Jewish Socialist in 1985.

Monitoring the territories

While debates rage about the rights and wrongs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and possible solutions, the Israeli human rights organisation, B'Tselem, continues to provide personal testimonies and clear statistical information showing what is really happening on the ground.

Its annual report for 2007 makes chilling reading. That year Israeli security forces killed 379 Palestinians, 54 of whom were under 18 years old. B'Tselem estimates that 35% of the victims were not engaged in any hostilities when they were killed. It blames the number of fatalities on 'illegal easing of the military's rules of engagement' and 'approval of operations that constitute disproportionate attacks'.

Last year 295 of the 379 Palestinian fatalities occurred in Gaza but the B'Tselem report shows that systematic human rights abuses continued to be practised in the occupied West Bank.

Among many testimonies is that of 65-year-old Subhiyah al Wazir from Nablus. Her husband Abu Shaquer woke her after hearing gunfire at 2am. At 4am their son phoned them to say that soldiers were calling through a loudspeaker for people to evacuate their building. 'We opened the door to my house to go out, and then I turned back to get my ID card. At that moment I heard two gunshots. I turned around and saw my husband lying on the floor bleeding ... at around 4.45 a Red Crescent ambulance came and took my husband to the hospital but they couldn't save his life.'

B'Tselem explains that Israel's military orders permit soldiers to fire live

ammunition at a suspect who is fleeing a house, without warning, and without ascertaining their identity.

In addition to the hundreds of Palestinians who were killed, B'Tselem documented 74 cases of Israeli security forces – soldiers, border police, regular police – beating, humiliating or threatening Palestinians. B'Tselem has requested that criminal investigations be opened in each of these cases.

During 2007, Israeli security forces detained more than 6,000 Palestinians from the West Bank. Most of them were interrogated by the Israeli security agency, 'using methods that constitute forbidden ill-treatment'. B'Tselem cite the 'shabach' position: 'While held in the interrogation room for 5-8 hours a day, the detainee is tied to an ordinary chair that is fastened to the floor, his hands bound behind his back with metal cuffs. The cuffs are attached to a loop on the backside of the seat ...

Remaining in this position for hours, day after day, causes intense pain in the back, neck, shoulders, and wrists.'

Israeli military orders also permit them to hold individuals for up to six months in administrative detention where there are 'reasonable grounds to presume that the security of the area or public security require the detention'. Administrative detainees, usually around 830 in any given month, were generally not charged.

The report graphically describes restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank. During 2007 this movement was controlled by 102 checkpoints. Of these, 36

were the last control point between the West Bank and sovereign Israeli territory, usually several kilometres from the Green Line. The vast majority of them were located deep within the West Bank. Hebron alone has 16 checkpoints. Movement in and out of Nablus is restricted to four staffed checkpoints.

B'Tselem claim that these checkpoints maintain an effective geographical split of the West Bank into six discrete areas. Their report adds: 'The large majority of Palestinians who are victim to these restrictions are not personally suspected of threatening Israeli security ... these restrictions constitute a form of collective punishment.'

Meanwhile, Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories continue to grow. The settler population increased by 4.5% in 2007, three times the rate of growth of the Israeli population generally, and 40% of West Bank land is now allocated to settlements.

According to B'Tselem, 'the massive scope of land seized by Israel for the benefit of settlements, and the geographical layout of these lands, infringes the Palestinians population's right to enjoy the natural resources of the West Bank and limits their possibilities for urban and economic development.'

In East Jerusalem, planning restrictions make it very difficult for Palestinians to obtain permits for new construction. In 2007 the municipality demolished 69 Palestinian dwellings in East Jerusalem that were built without a permit.

For further information about B'Tselem and their work, go to www.btselem.org

North by north west

If Zionist leaders in Britain saw Israel's 60th birthday in May as an opportunity to unite Britain's Jewish community behind Israel's government, they got more than they bargained for.

On the same night as thousands of community members were bussed in to a 60th birthday celebration in Wembley, headlined by American comedian Jackie Mason, Interchange Studios in North London, was packed out for a counter-event called 60 Years – What a State! organised by the Jewish Socialists' Group. The counter-event raised money for organisations committed to peace and justice in Israel/Palestine and the diaspora.

With a line-up of top performers from Jewish, Muslim and Christian backgrounds, all 250 tickets for What a State! sold out before the day of the event. Participants included the comedians Jeremy Hardy, Mark Steel and Shazia Mirza, poet and broadcaster Mike Rosen, and the compere was JSG member and comedian Ivor Dembina. They were joined on stage by Palestinian activist, Bassam Aramin, who was sentenced to seven years in Israeli prison when he was 17 years old, but later helped to found Combatants for

Peace – a joint Israeli-Palestinian group. Even worse than imprisonment, Bassam endured the loss of Abir, his 14-year-old daughter, who was shot by Israeli security forces on her way home from school in January 2007. Despite all this, he seeks reconciliation rather than revenge. His message to the event was to fight the common enemy of the Palestinian and Israeli people – the Occupation.

Combatants for Peace received £200 from the money raised. Other beneficiaries were: the Israeli human rights organisation, B'Tselem, which documents human rights abuses in the Occupied Territories; Friends of Bil'in, who are campaigning against the separation wall; and, here in the diaspora, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.

Meanwhile, over at Wembley in North West London, despite the best efforts of the 'entertainment troupe' of the Israeli Defence Forces, there were heckles and walk-outs as Jackie Mason launched into his 'comedy' routine targeting blacks, women and gays. There were complaints, too, about the event starting an hour late. It seems that Zionists can't even be punctual with their racism.



From top: Shazia Mirza, Mark Steel and Jeremy Hardy performing at 60 Years – What a State!

Photos: Elena Heatherwick

AFRICAN LIBERATION SUPPORT CAMPAIGN NETWORK

The African Liberation Support Campaign Network (ALISC) is a UK-based solidarity group set up by Africans forced into exile in the 1980s because they opposed Structural Adjustment Programmes that were further impoverishing Africans for the benefit of western capitalists and local allies.

ALISC Network supports groups in Africa fighting to put power into the hands of the African majority, which, for them, means 'out of the hands of transnational profit-making companies,

international banks and the wealthy African elite'. One task the ALISC Network has set itself is to publicise what these groups are doing – and to explain the history of resistance in Africa: how during slavery and colonial occupation, African women and men fought back. They want to highlight resistance past and present.

ALISC Network is led by Africans, and run by its members with help from supporters and volunteers. It receives no funding from any governments or Non-Governmental Organisations. It

supports social movements in Africa today, such as the Cameroonian People's Union and Women of Zimbabwe Arise, which are fighting for health care, education, food and housing.

The network also supports a magazine called Kilombo, which was launched by African political exiles in Britain in 1997 to address the lack of reporting of Africa's home-grown struggles for social justice.

For details of ALISC and Kilombo visit www.kilombo.org.uk

Atheist and internationalist who savoured Yiddish



Harold Rosen in front of the mural commemorating the Battle of Cable Street.
Photo: Guy Smallman

brother to live with her parents and various relatives in Nelson Street, behind the London Hospital. He never saw his father again, and his mother couldn't work as she had had polio when she was young. As a family, they had to rely on the generosity of the extended family and Jewish charity, which wasn't always forthcoming as there were, as we might say now, 'citizenship issues'.

So, the circumstances of his upbringing were dominated by poverty, anxiety and loss. Harold joined the Young Communist League when he was about 16 and it was where he met my mother, Connie. Many times my parents told my brother and me that the attraction of the Communist Party at this time was that it appeared to them to be the only group or outfit that was prepared to defend them. Neither the Jewish organisations nor the Labour Party seemed to take the threat of fascists and fascism as seriously as the Communists.

The four years before the Second World War had, I think, the most powerful hold over Harold. It included, for him, the Battle of Cable Street, the solidarity work for the Spanish Civil War, the massive and successful rent strikes in Whitechapel and Stepney, the election of Communist councillors, his 'discovery' of the delights of going to see Olivier at the Old Vic, hearing Auden and Isherwood read, hitchhiking and camping in France and meeting 'intellectual' Communists in the student movement at University College, London, attending meetings with people like Krishna Menon to call for Independence in India and much more. He wrote about some of this in his autobiographical stories, 'Are You Still Circumcised' (Five Leaves Press).

He wasn't in the British Army during the war because he was a US citizen – for all his life, actually. I always understood this to be a consequence of what he regarded as the likely risk of becoming stateless at the point at which he would have to renounce US citizenship and apply, probably unsuccessfully as a Communist, to become British. He was called up in the last months of the war in Europe, expecting to go to Japan, but

in fact found himself posted to Frankfurt and then Berlin as part of the occupying Army. This, too, seems to have had a strong effect on him, and I often pleaded with him to write about it.

He taught English language and literature, first in grammar schools in north-west London and then in one of London's first comprehensives, Walworth, on the Old Kent Road. At the same time, he was part of a pioneering organisation, the London Association of the Teachers of English. Most of his intellectual effort from the early 1950s onwards went into developing ideas of English teaching in secondary schools.

My brother believes that it was the libertarian and flexible ideas he developed in this sphere that brought him into conflict with the Communist Party, rather than a big disagreement over Hungary or Stalin. In 1957, my parents left the Communist Party. This was a massive wrench for both of them. They both felt that it had been an organisation that had in many ways nurtured them. Over the decades following, it was a great struggle for both of them to accept that their 'enemy' had not made up the accounts of the Gulag. If they were going to hang on to socialist ideas, it would have to include an understanding of how and why it had gone wrong in the Soviet Union.

Readers of Jewish Socialist, might be interested in knowing what kind of Jew Harold was. His mother and Zeyde were atheist Communists, but he was brought up in a home where his Bubbe made a Seder and celebrated Chanukah anyway. He didn't have a barmitzvah. His grasp of Yiddish wasn't as good as my mother's, mainly because his mother and Bubbe didn't speak it, but his Zeyde did. He had many, many Yiddish expressions and phrases that he loved to say and savour. He was an atheist all his life and felt no contradiction between holding to this set of ideas and calling himself Jewish. He had absolutely no attachment to Israel and Zionism. When I came back from school on one occasion with stories of how my Jewish friend said that the kibbutzim were socialism in practice, I remember him saying, 'Can Arabs join these kibbutzim?' And when I said that I didn't think so, he said, 'So this is socialism for one people, is it? What kind of socialism is it that excludes people? That sounds more like a National Socialism. And we know where that leads, don't we?' That would have been when I was about 13 in 1959.

Harold always described himself as a socialist and an internationalist, and he often expressed himself through his Jewishness, whether that was through his use of Yiddish and Yiddishisms, or through his sense of the history of different kinds of Jews in the places he had lived or visited. One of his favourite reads was Jewish Socialist. He was a subscriber and he was forever recommending to me articles from the magazine that he was concerned I hadn't read.

MICHAEL ROSEN remembers his father Harold who died on 31st July 2008 at the age of 89



CHANGE
THE
WORLD

So who needs another Cold War?

As the smoke starts to clear, **CHARLIE POTTINS** looks at what – and who – is behind Georgia's attack on South Ossetia

While people around the world were trying to stay focused on the Olympics, the world's great powers faced each other in the most frightening confrontation since the Cold War. It all blew up suddenly over a piece of territory that few people had heard of, or could place on a map, let alone understand its significance.

At 11.30 on the night of 7th August, Georgian forces attacked the breakaway region of South Ossetia, firing salvoes from multiple rocket launchers at the capital, Tskhinvali. The old Jewish quarter was among districts badly hit. The object seemed to be to terrorise civilians into flight, as well as destroying narrow streets near the centre to clear a way for Georgian tanks.

Planes also joined the attack. A local hospital, which was itself hit, said it had treated 224 people for injuries, while another report said 500 bodies had been dug out from rubble. As Russian troops and tanks crossed the border, and Ossetian fighters emerged – some attacking Georgian civilians as well as soldiers – the number of casualties rose to four figures on each side, as did the numbers of refugees fleeing in either direction.

Whatever the legal and historical rights and wrongs, Georgia's attack had shown little concern for the lives of people it presumably claims as its citizens. Many Georgians, whatever their views on Ossetia, could not see why their government had launched such an offensive, knowing the likelihood that Russia would intervene to assist the Ossetians, whose breakaway status has lasted for over a decade.

Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, had promised when elected that he would 'normalise' relations with Russia. In the evening before the missiles began, he had announced a ceasefire following earlier clashes, and promised to negotiate regional autonomy for South Ossetia, guaranteed by the Russians.

After launching its attack, the Georgian government, in arguments reminiscent of Serbian nationalists, claimed it was the Ossetians who had started it by attacking Georgian villages. It also claimed there had been a Russian build-up of forces over the border. Then President Saakashvili proudly announced that his forces had 'liberated' South Ossetia – just before the Russians rolled them back right into Georgia.

Who fired the first shot, and just what happened between the ceasefire talk in the early evening and a massive rocket attack a few hours later, remains a mystery. But both for Western powers and Russia there is a visible bigger picture. As Ossetians and Georgians were rescuing what they could from the rubble of bombed homes, business media were reassured that the pipeline carrying Caspian oil through Georgia (thus avoiding Russia and Iran) had not been affected by the fighting. Nor, it seems, has Georgia's application to join NATO, which can steam ahead according to Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

That might go against the restriction on new members with unresolved border disputes or ethnic conflicts. But NATO, or at least the United States, is already involved in Georgia, although one result of the latest ill wind was the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Iraq.

Israeli journalist Shraga Elam notes that, according to a Pentagon spokesman, there are 127 US military trainers there, of whom about 35 are civilian

contractors: 'In addition to the trainers, 1,000 soldiers from the Vicenza, Italy-based Southern European Task Force (Airborne) and the Kaiserslautern-based 21st Theater Sustainment Command, along with Marine reservists with the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines out of Ohio, and the state of Georgia's Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry participated in "Immediate Response 2008".'

'Operation Immediate Response 2008 was held from July 15-July 30, with US personnel training about 600 troops at a former Soviet base near Tbilisi, the largest city and capital of Georgia. The goal of this operation was allegedly teaching combat skills for missions in Iraq. The Marines [have already] left the country, but not the airmen.'

Elam also cites reports of Israeli involvement, such as one by Yossi Melman in Haaretz. 'Melman wrote on 25.6.2008 that Georgia became a real El Dorado for Israeli arms dealers and numerous representatives of the army and intelligence services. Some former generals like Israel Ziv and Gal Hirsh (with his company Defensive Shield) are very active there.'

Melman wrote: 'Gal Hirsh and Israel Ziv are mainly training and consulting Georgian army units. They are using the "chain" method common among Israeli arm[s] dealers: a main contractor wins a tender and then employs sub-contractors, in this case Israeli officers and former Shin Bets employees.'

The Jerusalem Post has also reported that Israel supplied remote-piloted surveillance drones, such as one that the Russians shot down in May, as well as automatic tank turrets, military electronics, communication systems, munitions and artillery controls. Some Georgian Jews in Israel were reported to be clamouring to go back and fight the Russians as volunteers. The website Debkafile says that Israeli military advisers in Georgia took part in the assault on Tskhinvali.

If this is true, Russian Senator Boris Spiegel might have something uncomplimentary to say about Israel's proud officers. Spiegel, President of the World Congress of Russian Jewry, has called for a world tribunal to investigate Georgia's 'war crimes' during the past week's round of fighting, according to Ha'aretz (18th August 2008). Spiegel went as far as accusing Georgia of conducting genocide.

We needn't go that far to ponder the wisdom of Israel, with no peace so long as it maintains occupation in Palestine, and continuing to claim that it might have to go to war on Iran, letting itself get involved in war in the Caucasus. Georgia's 70% spending on weapons may be El Dorado for a few, and there may even be promises concerning Caucasus oil. Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Strategic Affairs Avigdor Liberman paid an official visit to Azerbaijan on 15th - 18th August 2007 to explore what were termed mutual political and economic interests. More recently Shimon Peres and the Azerbaijani president took the opportunity to meet during the Olympics in Beijing.

Meanwhile, as the World Jewish Congress announced a new humanitarian fund to 'rescue' Georgian Jews from the conflict, Prime Minister Olmert was heading for Moscow to persuade the Russians not to supply new weapons – specifically air defence missiles – to Syria. It's all clever stuff if you disregard what's happening on the ground to ordinary human beings. And it could all go so terribly wrong.

A TIME TO BREAK RANKS

On Sunday 29th June 2008, Trafalgar Square was filled with thousands of people who had 'come out' as supporters of Israel. Henry Grunwald, President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, under whose auspices (along with the Jewish Leadership Council) the event was held, told the crowd: 'We are proud to be British, we are proud to be Jewish and we are all proud to support Israel'. Union Jacks were dotted like sails in a sea of blue-and-white Israeli flags. It was hailed as 'the first ever UK 'Salute to Israel' parade'. But Nelson on his column, unless he turned a blind eye, would have had a sense of déjà vu.

The scene was a reprise of the Israel Solidarity Rally held in the same place six years earlier when tens of thousands of British Jews assembled with placards proclaiming 'Yes to peace, No to terror' and 'Israel, we are with you'; slogans that begged certain questions. Who exactly were 'we' (or indeed 'you')? Why say 'No' to terror but not to occupation, closures, collective punishment and demolition of homes? These questions went unasked: the mood in the square and across a broad section of the British Jewish population was not exactly reflective. Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to rally round.

It was shortly after Operation Defensive Shield, when Israeli troops had entered the West Bank in force. Television viewers and newspaper readers were assailed with scenes of devastation in Jenin, Ramallah and elsewhere. But seen through the eyes of Ariel Sharon, it might have been the other way round: Palestinians laying waste to Tel Aviv or Ashdod – or the Warsaw ghetto. 'This is a battle for survival of the Jewish people, for survival of the state of Israel', declared Israel's Prime Minister at the time.

As the collective clamour leading up to the rally grew louder, someone close to me wrote in a private email: 'I would go so far to say – speaking entirely for myself – that it is getting hard to hold on to any Jewish identity at all when it bears no relation whatsoever to the mindless nationalism one is forced to listen to from Jews round the world every day.' Though speaking for herself, her words spoke for many others who felt (as another friend put it) 'the untenable position of being Jewish today'.

It was not untenable if you endorsed the placards that said, in effect, 'Yes to occupation, No to Justice' and 'Israel, we are you'. If you accepted the nationalist formula in which individual, community, faith, culture, people, history, tradition, land and state merge into one amorphous blob, then being Jewish was a perfectly tenable proposition. But if you didn't, the choice was stark: Either tolerate having your Jewish identity taken from you – or take it back.

Taking it back calls for the opposite of rallying round. It means coming out and openly breaking ranks with the likes of the legions amassed in Trafalgar Square in spring 2002. In the six years that have elapsed, more and more Jews in Britain have made up their minds: it is time to break ranks.

Breaking ranks is an ancient Jewish custom. It goes back to Abraham who, after literally breaking the ranks

of idols in his father's workshop, left his childhood home to go his own way. And while Judaism, like any other rich and complex human tradition, has many different currents, there is a strong vein of iconoclasm and independent-mindedness running through it. So much so that, to quote Isaac Deutscher, 'The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition.' (Indeed, this paradox itself belongs to a Jewish dialectical tradition.) Seen in this light (which is not necessarily the light in which they see themselves), the Jewish Socialists' Group, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, even Jews Against Zionism (both the secular and Satmar varieties) are following in Abraham's footsteps.

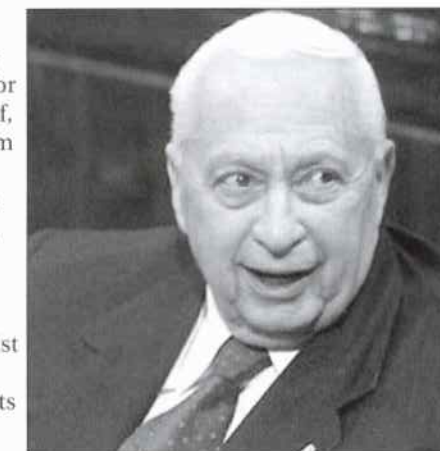
But in an atmosphere of 'mindless nationalism', when unity is the supreme value and loyalty the cardinal virtue, different expressions of Jewishness are liable to be seen in a different light: as self-hatred and betrayal. On its own terms, I suppose, this makes sense. But why accept these terms? Whose identity is it anyway?

Mike Marquess, in the closing words of his new book, *If I am Not For Myself*, remarks: 'The people who call us self-haters want to steal ourselves from us – appropriate our selves for their cause – and speaking as a self, I'm damned if I'm going to let them get away with it.' Mike, a self-described anti-Zionist atheist, is a signatory of 'A Time to Speak Out', the declaration with which Independent Jewish Voices was launched in February 2007. Not that you have to be either an atheist or an anti-Zionist to sign the document or to sympathize with its broad-based message. But his words go to its heart – and to the heart of the book that goes by the same title, *A Time to Speak Out*, soon to be published by Verso. The book comprises short essays on Israel, Zionism and Jewish identity. There is no party line, only a shared commitment to human rights and social justice. Each of the 27 contributors speaks 'as a self'; and, speaking as a self, each in their own way breaks ranks with the ringfence of solidarity around Israel.

Given that Mike is right about 'our selves' being appropriated for 'their cause', does it really matter? Why not 'let them get away with it'? There are several reasons. It's a chutzpah; it is a form of identity theft; it hijacks a heritage that is a common possession and travesties a tradition that defies classification; it is coercive; it is divisive; it rewrites history to fit a nationalist agenda that conduces to collective denial; and it empowers those who presume to speak on behalf of 'the Jewish people' as a whole or its British branch, notably vis-à-vis the Middle East.

Which brings us back to the parade in Trafalgar Square this summer, at which the Chief Rabbi spoke to the crowd that had gathered to salute Israel. First,

As individual Jews come under increasing pressure to unite behind their 'leaders', **BRIAN KLUG** puts the case for disunity



Ariel Sharon, who claimed to be the 'Prime Minister of the Jewish people'.

Brian Klug is co-editor with Anne Karpf, Jacqueline Rose and Barbara Rosenbaum of *A Time to Speak Out: Independent Jewish Voices on Israel, Zionism and Jewish Identity*. Verso, October 2008.

Stop press

Britain's Foreign Office has licensed £5.5 million arms sales to Russia and about the same to Georgia. But David Cameron says he'll stop Russians shopping in London. That'd learn 'em!

he weighed the causes of the conflict on the scales of judgement: 'Today, because of Israel, there is at least a chance of peace', he said judiciously. 'Yet every time Israel proposes peace, it is greeted with terror and suicide bombings, Katyushas and Kassams.' Then, addressing the enemy in absentia, he extended the hand of friendship: 'We say to the Palestinians: You have a right to a home. All you have to do is to recognise that the Jewish people also has a right to a home. Let us live together side by side in peace.'

I do not doubt that this was well-intentioned. But who is the 'we' on whose behalf he was speaking? Whom did he mean when he said 'Let us live together'? Sharon saw himself as 'the Prime Minister of the Jewish people', and here was the Chief Rabbi saying 'Take me to your leader', as if he were the Prime Minister of Israel! It sounds surreal. But in this script the surreal is the real. For if we're all one, then it comes to the same thing: any distinctions are purely internal and have no bearing when dealing with the external world. Israeli Prime Minister, UK Chief Rabbi, President of the Board of Deputies: all are ambassadors of the unified 'Jewish people'. Each, in their own way, speaking as a collective self, says the same thing. Any of these officers of the nation can make an offer on its behalf to 'the Palestinians', without feeling the slightest bit silly.

If the Chief Rabbi's interventions in the Middle East conflict were just a contribution to the theatre of the absurd, we could let him get away with it. We could say: Let him take our name in vain, while we

get on with our lives. But first, he can do harm. His grand gesture in Trafalgar Square, like Barak's 'generous offer' at Camp David, was actually more an incitement to anger than an invitation to peace. Gently stroking the crowd with his message, he was inexorably pouring fuel on the flames. Moreover, he is not the sole offender. Our name is taken in vain over and over again by 'community leaders' who appear to represent us, as Jews, to the world. If we acquiesce, we collude. If we do not break ranks, we acquiesce.

There are those who say that we should not 'wash our dirty linen in public'; that the argument over Israel is private business to be conducted behind closed doors. Many of these same people march in open support of Israel, waving their flags and holding their placards aloft. I am glad they feel confident to 'come out' as Jews. But they cannot have it both ways. If it is kosher to rally round in public, then it is kosher to break ranks in public. The alfresco displays of solidarity with Israel in 2002 and 2008 have flung the doors wide open. Whether we like it or not, we are all bang in the middle of the public square.

In Britain and elsewhere, an open battle is being fought among Jews, a battle that is, in its own way, as crucial in its bearing on the future as the conflict in Israel and Palestine. It too is over ownership, but not of land. At stake is an altogether different kind of claim: Who owns the deeds to the title 'Jewish'? This is our Trafalgar. Nelson on his column may look away, but for us on the ground this is a luxury we cannot afford. Ours not to turn a blind eye.

While successful in forcing the council to withdraw its decision and to rethink its policy on domestic violence services in Ealing, our experience has also sounded a warning bell to secular progressive groups in particular.

The current drive towards 'cohesion' represents the softer side of the 'war on terror'. At its heart lies the promotion of a notion of integration based on the assumption that organising around race and ethnicity encourages segregation.

At the same time, in the quest for allies, it seeks to reach out to a male religious (largely Muslim) leadership, and it thereby encourages a 'faith'-based approach to social relations and social issues.

This approach rejects the need for grassroots self-organisation on the basis of race and gender inequality but institutionalises the undemocratic power of so-called 'moderate' (authoritarian if not fundamentalist) religious leaders at all levels of society.

The result is a shift from a 'multicultural' to a 'multi-faith' society: one in which civil society is actively encouraged to organise around exclusive religious identities, and religious bodies are encouraged to take over spaces once occupied by progressive secular groups and, indeed, by a secular welfare state.

In the process, a complex web of social, political and cultural processes are reduced by both state and community leaders into purely religious values, while concepts of human rights, equality and discrimination are turned on their head.

The problem with the state accommodation of religion – even so-called moderate religious leaderships – is that they work against and not for equality and justice.

Since 9/11, we have witnessed the rise of religious intolerance in all religions, which has in turn fostered a culture of fear and censorship.

The failure of the British state to de-link the state from the Christian church – coupled with its anti-civil liberties agenda and disastrous foreign policies – has fuelled a faith-based politics of resistance amongst Muslims.

In the event, many have become ever more vigilant in the protection of their religious identity, as borne out by increasingly loud demands from religious and even fundamentalist leaders within black and minority communities. Such demands – for blasphemy laws, for state funding for separate religious schools, for female dress codes, and for customary laws for family affairs to name but a few – have nothing to do with challenging racism or poverty, but everything to do with ensuring that all state institutions accommodate 'authentic' religious identity: an identity which depends on the control of female sexuality.

Such demands, by their very nature, deny the numerous progressive religious and even secular or feminist traditions that exist within minority communities.



Photo: Judy Greenway and can be seen at www.flickr.com/photos/judygr/2679610442/

In this context, the sentiments recently expressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chief Justice concerning sharia law are very telling: in the rush to be tolerant or sensitive to religious difference, they create the space for the most reactionary and even fundamentalist religious leaders to take control of minority communities, and they enable a climate which allows religion to define our roles in both private and public spaces.

Their sentiments appear contingent on the false assumption that black and minority cultures are intrinsically opposed to universal human rights principles, and that they do not contribute to the body of law based on such principles that now inform the English legal system. In doing so, they allow religious and cultural contexts to become the overriding framework within which those from ethnic and religious minorities are perceived, inevitably drawing on very narrow assumptions about religion and the role of women.

It is these political developments that have compelled groups like SBS to defend ever more vigorously the secular black anti-racist and feminist spaces that we created in the late 1970s and which, until the '90s, we were able to take for granted.

This is now our most important struggle in addressing gender-based violence, in the face of attempts by the state and religious leaders to corral us into specific reactionary religious identities in the name of 'cohesion', on the assumption that we live in a post-racist, post-feminist and classless society.

This is the significance of our successful challenge to Ealing Council: it highlighted the urgent need to develop a politics of solidarity within and between communities which recognises that what is at stake is no less than the fight for secular, progressive, feminist and anti-racist values – a fight which is embodied in our name.

Pragna Patel is chair of Southall Black Sisters and a member of Women Against Fundamentalism.

First published in the New Statesman on 4th August 2008. ©All rights reserved New Statesman 2008.

DEFENDING SECULAR SPACES

In the name of sensitivity to religious difference, a space is created for reactionary religious leaders to take control of minority communities. PRAGNA PATEL documents a far-reaching victory

On 18th July 2008 at the High Court, Southall Black Sisters (SBS) won an important legal challenge affirming its right to exist and continue its work. At stake was a decision by Ealing Council to withdraw funding from SBS – the only specialist provider of domestic violence services to black and minority women in Ealing – under the guise of developing a single generic service for all women in the borough.

The council sought to justify its decision on the grounds of 'equality', 'cohesion' and 'diversity'. It argued that the very existence of groups like SBS – the name and constitution – was unlawful under the Race Relations Act because it excluded white women and was therefore discriminatory and divisive!

The challenge succeeded in revealing that the council had deliberately misconstrued and failed to have proper regard to its duties under the Race Relations Act in reaching its decision, and it was forced to concede that it would have to reconsider its position afresh.

Ealing Council's cynical use of the government's confused and contradictory 'cohesion' agenda to cut our funding has profound implications for the

human rights of black and minority women in particular.

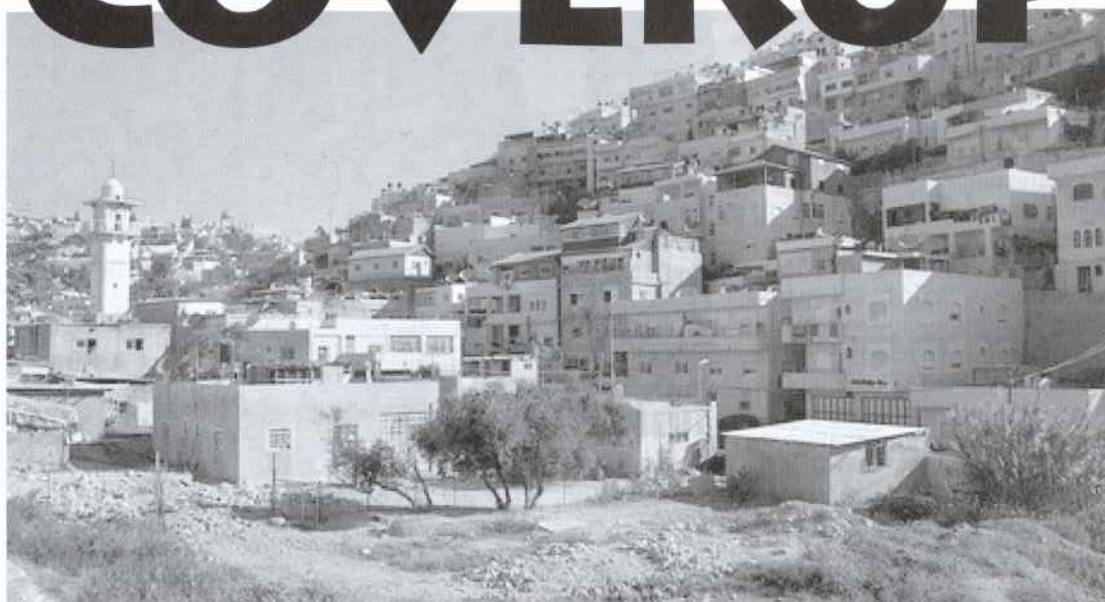
Specialist services like ours are needed not only for reasons to do with language difficulties and cultural and religious pressures on women.

Women turn to us because of our considerable experience in providing advice and advocacy in complex circumstances: where racism and religious fundamentalism (the political use of religion to seek control over people, territories and resources) is on the rise in the UK and worldwide; where legal aid is no longer easily available; where privatisation of what were once important state welfare functions is accelerating; and where draconian immigration and asylum measures are piling up.

These developments threaten our very right to organise and challenge abuses of power by state and community leaders. Secular spaces are being squeezed out of minority communities.

The SBS challenge to Ealing Council represents a key moment for black and minority groups that have organised politically to counter racism and other forms of inequality based on gender, caste and ethnic divisions between and within communities in the UK.

THE GREAT COVERUP



Archaeology in Israel is being hijacked by an organisation with a specific political agenda, says **YONATHAN MIZRACHI**

Recently a group of archaeologists got together with residents of the village of Silwan in East Jerusalem to create an alternative archaeology tour called 'From Shiloah to Silwan'. The group offers tours to the village of Silwan, which is located south of the Temple Mount, just outside the Old City, a few dozen metres from the al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock.

The choice of Silwan village and the co-operation with residents of the village were not coincidental. In the 1990s, the City of David archaeological garden, part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park, was transferred to the management of the Elad association. This private organisation has a right-wing ideology with a campaign to gain control over Silwan and replace its original residents with Israeli settlers. Elad finances all the archaeological excavations that are conducted in public areas in the village, and has invested large amounts of money in order to convert the archaeological garden into one of the most visited sites in the country.

The Elad association's tour talks mainly about King David, a little bit about the Second Temple (a historical period that is referred to in archaeological terms as the Early Roman period), the Jews in the 19th century and the settlement of Jews in the region in the 20th century. This account completely ignores scores of archaeological and historical strata, and deals mainly with one stratum (the days of King David), which itself has become a much debated subject.

The tour has been described as tendentious and biased: intending to cause the visitor to identify with the activities of the Elad association and to impart legitimacy to its activities. Such activities are conducted in opposition to the village residents and even in opposition to the law. The tour teaches hardly anything about the development

of the city, its origins and life within it.

The City of David archaeological garden contains within it artifacts from the beginning of Jerusalem around 5,000 BCE up to the 11th century CE nearly continuously. After the cessation of habitation in the 11th century CE the area of the village became inhabited again around the 16th century. The site is of great importance because of the archaeological findings that trace the beginnings of the city's development from a modest settlement in the Chalcolithic era (5,000 - 4,000 BCE) up to the fortified city in the Middle Bronze Age II, that is around 1700 BCE.

The alternative archaeological tour in ancient Jerusalem is intended to present archaeology as a cultural discipline and not as a political instrument. An archaeology that is not concerned with searching for the truth or untruth of the Bible. In the opinion of members of this group, it is not the role of archaeology in Israel to prove or to refute the existence of one king or another. Archaeology concerns itself with strata and eras and not with historical figures. The group represents the past of Jerusalem in conjunction with the lives of residents of the village in the present. The focus was on ancient Jerusalem (the City of David) because in that complex place, this is where the city began its journey. Near the Temple Mount – an extremely sensitive spot – injustices are being done in the name of archaeology: open areas, roads and paths that served village residents in the past have been converted in recent years into excavation zones that are closed to the residents, and which complicate their lives. The use of archaeology against the local residents is damaging to archaeological research itself in addition to harming many residents of the village.

Our tours are conducted by two guides: one is an archaeologist and the other is a village resident. In

conjunction with the archaeological story of Jerusalem, its beginnings and its development, they tell the story of today's villagers. The tour will focus on the archaeological findings that are open to the general public. At other points in the tour, residents tell of life in the village and the difficulties imposed by the efforts of the Elad association to take over the village.

Our tour aims to present an archaeology that bridges different eras and cultures and permits

residents in the present to continue to be part of the place in which they live and not to feel threatened by the rich past that is located under their village. Members of the group believe that the past of Jerusalem, like the past of every place, does not belong to any specific person or group. The past belongs to all residents and to all who visit the site.

Yonathan Mizrachi is a founder of the group offering A Alternative Archaeological Tour: From Shiloah to Silwan.

REMEMBERING MAHMOUD DARWISH

A little poem to Mahmoud Darwish

When a poet dies
do all the words in the world run after him,
clinging to the edges of his soul?
do the metaphors drink a hurried sip of coffee until
they can taste the grains on their tongue, get up and
collect their things?

When a poet dies
where will his identity card, whose number is fifty
thousand, live?
what will his map look like?
which country will he long for?

when a poet's heart explodes, do its memories spread
like rays of the sun, the sound of gunshots, or
running feet?

When a poet dies
perhaps the words stay here, on white papers,
bookshelves and computer screens
and all you can hear is that incredible music of longing,
the rhythm of the exhaling breath,
from the old walls of Jerusalem,
beyond Sawahra a-sharqia, into the desert,
where no one can be exiled.

Yael Berda

Identity card

Record!
I am an Arab
And my identity card is number
fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth is coming after a
summer
Will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
Employed with fellow workers at a
quarry
I have eight children
I get them bread
Garments and books
from the rocks.
I do not supplicate charity at your
doors
Nor do I belittle myself at the
footsteps of your chamber
So will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
I have a name without a title
Patient in a country
Where people are enraged
My roots
Were entrenched before the birth
of time
And before the opening of the eras
Before the pines, and the olive
trees
And before the grass grew
My father descends from the
family of the plough
Not from a privileged class
And my grandfather was a farmer
Neither well-bred, nor well-born!
Teaches me the pride of the sun
Before teaching me how to read
And my house is like a watchman's
hut
Made of branches and cane
Are you satisfied with my status?
I have a name without a title!

Record!
I am an Arab
You have stolen the orchards of
my ancestors
And the land which I cultivated
Along with my children
And you left nothing for us
Except for these rocks.
So will the State take them
As it has been said?
Therefore!

Record on the top of the first
page:
I do not hate people
Nor do I encroach
But if I become hungry
The usurper's flesh will be my food
Beware
Beware
Of my hunger
And my anger!

Mahmoud Darwish 1964

Mahmoud Darwish, who died in August, was born in 1941 in al-Birwa, a village in Galilee. On 11th June 1948 al-Birwa was taken by Israeli forces and the Darwish family became refugees. Seven-year-old Mahmoud became separated from his parents in Lebanon, but later the reunited family got home, only to find their village destroyed, and themselves declared 'present absentees' – they could remain in what was now the State of Israel, but were dispossessed of their lands. Mahmoud's father settled in a nearby village, Jadeidi, within sight of their land which had been given to a kibbutz.

From 1948-63, Israel's Arab citizens were under military government, and their movements controlled. Darwish was detained several times for leaving his village without a permit. When he started to write poems, he was accused of incitement and put in 'administrative detention' without trial. At that time he wrote 'Identity Card', one of his best known poems, expressing the anger

of a youngster growing up under these humiliating conditions.

He joined the Communist Party, and edited their newspapers. He was sent to Moscow to study then joined the PLO and worked at Yasser Arafat's Beirut headquarters. At school in Israel he had learned the Israeli Declaration of Independence. In Beirut he drafted the Palestinian Declaration of Independence which was adopted by the Palestinian National Council in 1988.

Darwish felt Arafat had conceded too much for too little in the Oslo Agreement. He became a critical independent figure, living in Paris, Amman, Ramallah, loved and respected, speaking for his people as a poet, better than any politician. His work was translated into 30 languages and there were calls for it to be included in the school curriculum in Israel.

'He is our heart, and our tongue,' said Issam Makhoul, an Arab MK and Communist Party veteran.

Charlie Pottins

Details of the organisation, the tours and general information can be found at: www.alt-arch.org

I'M STANDING

Faced with the threat of climate change and the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, **DEREK WALL** explains why we should still say: 'Nuclear power no thanks!'

Gordon Brown has put his trust in nuclear power, calling for a big expansion and reforming planning law to make it easier to build new nuclear power stations. He is not alone. James Lovelock, the scientist who came up with the 'Gaia Hypothesis', has called for a crash programme to replace fossil fuel burning power stations with nuclear power. Even the environmentalist, George Monbiot, has said nuclear may be necessary.

Climate change seems to strengthen the case for nuclear power because it is seen as a form of energy that does not generate greenhouse gases. But nuclear power cannot solve climate change and is a dirty, discredited technology.

The biggest problem is nuclear waste. It is dangerous for literally millions of years and no one has a realistic plan for dealing with it. The whole cycle of nuclear energy production – from mining uranium, to transporting it, to using it to produce electricity, to disposal of the waste – spreads deadly radiation.

Nuclear energy production will not create a more peaceful world. Far from being based on the principle of 'atoms for peace', it is closely linked to nuclear weapons proliferation. In official comment from Brown and Bush, however, this fact seems to apply only to Iran, even though Britain's first nuclear power station at Calder Hall produced plutonium for the country's atom bombs.

Nuclear power stations provide impressive terrorist targets. Nobody is going to stage a spectacular attack on a wind farm. Equally, Brown's plans for nuclear expansion follow a particularly risky and absurd line of argument. Ministers claim that they can plug the energy gap without increasing the generation of CO₂, yet because of public disquiet they are to be built next to existing nuclear power stations. Virtually all of Britain's existing reactors are close to the sea and, with climate change, will be put at risk by rising sea levels. Greenpeace have produced a detailed report on this risk (this can be found on their website, below).

Nuclear power is very costly. The decommissioning costs of existing reactors continue to rise. They were recently estimated to be £73 billion (see BBC report below). This factor makes it difficult for either the private sector or government to build them. The French company, EDF, recently rejected planned investment in the UK nuclear sector because of cost considerations.

Accidents are rare, but they are potentially catastrophic. The Windscale fire of 1957 spread radiation over much of Northern Britain; Chernobyl still blights much of the Ukraine. To say that the technology is better now, or that 'it won't happen here', is as convincing as the safety claims made for the Titanic on its maiden voyage.

Technical fixes always have political consequences and causes. A top-down, centralised society breeds top-down technology. High-tech solutions closely linked to the development of military science dominate the favoured discourse. Technological solutions have to be seen in a social context. If we live more ecologically and challenge the wastefulness engendered by capitalism, we can create a social just and ecologically sustainable

future. Tackling climate change demands an awareness of the social and political issues at stake rather than just looking for technological solutions. There are, however, some obvious ways of tackling climate change, while meeting energy needs.

We need to reject hair-shirtism and tokenist personal solutions. It is not appropriate to blame individual consumers and to call for cuts in living standards. In a market-based system everything is made to appear to be about consumer choice and individual action. But if the correct policies are not in place, individual decisions about consumption will make little difference in tackling climate change or other ecological ills. Green politics is about putting in the structures that enable us to live well with less energy consumption. By going organic we can use fewer fossil fuels, take oil out of agriculture, and have affordable, efficient, public transport. By localising economies, insulating homes, and building low-energy usage structures, we can massively reduce energy demand. The 'fifth fuel' of energy conservation is the most important.

We will always need to produce electricity. Privatisation has discouraged proper planning and adequate investment – Britain's energy shortfall in power production is a product of Thatcherite policies continued by Blair and Brown. Public investment in a mixture of renewables, including solar, wind, waves, geothermal and hydro-electric can meet our needs in a sustainable fashion. Venezuela, with an oil-based economy, produces most of its domestic energy from renewable sources such as hydro-electric. Chavez's government is using oil revenues to create a post-fossil fuel economy by installing solar energy structures in public places throughout the country, in order to save oil (see Venezuela Analysis below).

London may get a lot less sunshine than Caracas, but Germany, which is far from tropical, is the world leader in solar energy. Successive British governments have shown little or no interest in renewables and have failed to use our North Sea oil, which is now declining in production, to fund alternatives. While such past investment would have been better, a renewable future is still both possible and essential. The biggest threat to the government's plans for nuclear are practical and economic but the practical problems did not prevent New Labour from going to war in Iraq. So we need to dust off our old 'Nuclear power – No thanks!' badges and banners and challenge this madness!

Further information

Greenpeace report on The impacts of climate change on nuclear power station sites

www.greenpeace.org.uk/media/reports/the-impacts-of-climate-change-on-nuclear-power-station-sites

BBC report: Nuclear clean-up cost 'to rise'

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7498774.stm

Venezuela Analysis report: Venezuela Takes Steps Towards Solar Energy

EAST END ROCKER

German anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker died 50 years ago, on 19th September 1958. Although he was born in Mainz in 1873 and became an important figure after 1918 in both the Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands and the International Working Men's Association, the anarcho-syndicalist international, he is perhaps best known as an organiser among Jewish workers in the East End of London. As editor of the Yiddish anarchist paper the Arbeter Fraynd, he played a crucial role in the 1912 tailors' strike against the 'sweating' system.

In the words of William Fishman, the 'Arbeter Fraynd was reborn under the editorship of ... Rocker' in October 1898. Morris Winchevsky had founded the Arbeter Fraynt in July 1885 as a Yiddish paper 'open to all radicals'. In June 1886 the International Workers' Educational Club, based at 40 Berner Street, took over control of the Arbeter Fraynd. The influence of anarchism among Jewish workers was growing, as were trade unions in the tailoring, shoemaking, cigarette, cabinet and stick-making industries.

In July 1889, the 'new unionism' among 'unskilled' workers led to gas workers winning the eight-hour day and a pay increase of a shilling per hour without having to take strike action. This was immediately followed by the great dock strike. At the end of August, tailors struck for the maximum 12-hour day, including an hour and a half's meal breaks to be taken off the premises, which won agreement in October.

This was the first successful immigrant strike, but by December the agreement had already been widely broken by the masters. Efforts to end 'sweated outwork' continued in 1890, with a successful strike in the boot trade in April and May. The tailors also struck between 4th and 18th May, but their victory was not sustained.

Meanwhile, the Arbeter Fraynd moved closer to anarchism under the editorship of S Yanovsky, author of What do the Anarchists Want? – described as 'the most fully comprehensive exposition of Anarcho-Communism in Yiddish...'. The growth of anarchism can be seen in the fact that 800 Jewish workers marched from the East End to Hyde Park to celebrate May Day in 1893. However, the International Working Men's Club had left Berner Street the previous year and after that met at the Sugar Loaf public house in Hanbury Street. During the editorship of Abraham Frumkin who succeeded

Yanovsky in 1896, the Arbeter Fraynd became marginal to the Jewish community and ceased publication after he left for Paris in June 1898.

Rocker had gone into exile in 1893, first in Paris where he encountered Jewish anarchists and began to work with them, then in 1895 in London. As well as meeting well known anarchists Louise Michel and Errico Malatesta, he also encountered Yanovsky, began to visit the Arbeter Fraynt group at the Sugar Loaf, and was invited to speak at meetings. Eventually he moved to the East End and began a relationship with group member Millie Witkop. In 1898 the couple tried to emigrate to New York but were deported as they were not married, and refused to marry, on the grounds that theirs was a free union.

Rocker then edited Dos Fraye Vort in Liverpool for eight issues before being invited back to edit the Arbeter Fraynd. However, publication was suspended in 1900 as a result of financial troubles and a hostile environment due to the Boer War and anti-Alien agitation. For the next three years Rocker published a theoretical journal, Germinal, with the aim of deepening the understanding of anarchist ideas among the group and the wider Jewish working class. Germinal provided a focus for the group, which was trying to revive the Arbeter Fraynd and find a new club to provide a forum for joint public meetings and activities with English trades unionists. In March 1903 Arbeter Fraynd returned, replacing Germinal.

Some 25,000 people attended a meeting in Hyde Park to protest at the Kishinev pogrom in June 1903. Speakers included Rudolf Rocker, Peter Kropotkin, and English anarchists and trade union officials John Turner and Ted Leggatt. There were also successful meetings in Leeds, Glasgow and Edinburgh. However, James MacDonald, Chairman of the London Trades Council, had refused to speak at the London meeting, claiming that Jewish tailors had blacklegged on a recent strike. Although impossible to prove, this allegation spurred efforts among Jewish workers to organise. In 1904, Malatesta and Charles Mowbray, together with Sam Mainwaring and Frank Kitz, English anarchists active in the trade unions, addressed 5,000 workers on the General Strike at the Wonderland.

Throughout Rocker's time, the group only had a couple of dozen members and was beset by financial difficulties. Potential members among the mass of Jewish workers, were alienated by the

An anarchist from a Catholic German family helped to organise Jewish workers. **NEIL ROBERTS** tells the story of Rudolf Rocker.

In the words of Rudolf Rocker

'One day as I was walking along a narrow Whitechapel street, an old Jew with a long white beard stopped me outside his house, and said: "May God bless you! You helped my children in their need. You are not a Jew, but you are a man!" This old man lived in a world completely different from mine. But the memory of the gratitude that shone in those eyes has remained with me all these years.

Freedom is never attained; it must always be striven for... Each generation must face its own problems which cannot be forestalled or provided for in advance. The worst tyranny is that of ideas which have been handed down to us, allowing no development in ourselves'.

Derek Wall is a green activist, writer and economist. He is the Principal Male Speaker of the Green Party of England and Wales and is active in Green Left.



Rocker (centre back) and the 'gentle' anarchists.

group's advocacy of free love and opposition to religion. But members interviewed by Fishman testify that Rocker himself inspired them to be influential beyond their numbers. They raised money by holding frequent socials and costume balls. *Germinal* was revived in January 1905 and in February 1906 Kropotkin, Turner and Leggatt spoke at the opening of a new club in Jubilee Street.

On 8th June 1906, mass pickets brought Jewish tailors out on strike for day work instead of piece work, employment of union members in all shops, and for the 12-hour day (as in 1889). Rocker addressed strike meetings daily and the unions honoured credit slips worth up to £5,000, which were accepted by local shops. The Amalgamated Society of Tailors paid £1,000, which brought into the fold the hitherto independent Tailor and

Garment Workers' Union. By the end of the month the strike had been broken, though; but lessons were learned by the small caucus of the Arbeter Fraynd group around Rocker who were involved in union organising.

The tailors finally achieved their goal during the wider 'syndicalist revolt' of 1910 - 1914, in which anarchists were prominent. At the end of April 1912, the West End tailors struck and on 8th May Rocker addressed a meeting of 8,000 workers at the Wonderland, in Yiddish, and carried a vote for a general strike to prevent strike-breaking in the East End. Within two days 13,000 Jewish tailors were on strike, and the Arbeter Fraynd was being published daily in support of the demands for a nine-hour day, day work, the abolition of overtime, higher wages and the closed union shop. Rocker also worked tirelessly to raise funds in support of the strikers.

After three weeks the West Enders had won their demands and the East Enders had won everything but the closed shop. On 24th May Rocker persuaded the East End workers to stick out for this crucial demand, which was conceded by the masters the following day. While this didn't entirely end the sweating system, it struck it a heavy blow. Perhaps more importantly, it ended the association of Jewish workers with strike-breaking. After the end of the strike Jewish workers also took in over 300 children of dockers whose strike had overlapped with theirs. This solidarity with the dockers of Wapping and St George's paid off in the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s, when Oswald Mosley failed to win the support he had wanted in docklands, and dockers joined Jewish workers on the barricades at Cable Street.

Rocker was interned as an enemy alien in 1914 and repatriated to Germany via Holland in 1918. The Arbeter Fraynd and the Jubilee Street club were shut down by the authorities in 1915.

Italian pogroms condemned

The wave of vicious attacks recently on Roma communities in Italy during including the arson attack in Naples, were condemned by the Jewish Socialists' Group in an emergency resolution passed at its annual policy conference in June.

The resolution noted that following Silvio Berlusconi's election as Premier, with members of Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord in his government, and the election of a far right Mayor, Alemanno, in Rome, there have been provocations against migrants in general and Roma in particular and 'a wave of vicious attacks' which 'could legitimately be described as pogroms'.

The resolution affirmed that Roma were not the only target. It stated that 'gang violence of the weeks since the election, generally led by far right groups such as Forza Nuova, has also targeted, amongst others, Bengali shopkeepers, gay activists and left wing university students putting up

anti-fascist posters... in Verona a young man was brutally murdered by a gang of "Nazi skins" for no more than wearing a ponytail and refusing to share a cigarette, a killing which the fascist Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Gianfranco Fini, claimed was insignificant by comparison with the burning of an Israeli flag by some autonomists in Turin. These attacks have frequently been excused or trivialised by ministers in a government which is engaged in drastically tightening Italy's immigration laws, creating a new imprisonable offence of illegal immigration.'

Right wing leaders of Rome's Jewish community welcomed Alemanno's election, but their enthusiasm was curbed when he proposed to rename a Roman street in honour of Almirante, editor of the violently antisemitic journal *La Difesa della Razza* (1938-43) and Under Secretary in

Mussolini's puppet republic of 1943-45 which colluded in sending so many Italian Jews to Auschwitz. Almirante subsequently led the neo-fascist MSI until his death in 1988.

In this atmosphere of ongoing violence directed at vulnerable immigrant and migrant communities in Italy, especially the Roma, the Jewish Socialists' Group resolved to support the demands of Progressive Roma on the European Parliament and European Union (PRAG) to politically censure the current Italian government and to create a Crisis and Monitoring Committee under the auspices of the European Parliament.

The JSG further called for an international grassroots solidarity campaign involving anti-fascists, anti-racists, migrant organisations, and trades unions to link with progressive forces in Italy against the attacks.

WHITER THAN WHITE?

'Of course we must teach the truth to the hardcore ... when it comes to influencing the public, forget about racial differences, genetics, Zionism, historical revisionism and so on ... we must at all times present them with an image of moderate reasonableness.'

Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party, The Patriot, Spring 1999.

There is a rumour going around that the British National Party (BNP) has suddenly decided that it loves Israel and perhaps Jews. This is all part of the campaign to create the impression that it has become just another respectable political party. The fact that leader Nick Griffin used to be an outspoken Holocaust denier, who made a comparison between believing that six million Jews were murdered and believing the earth is flat, can be put aside as a youthful indiscretion. The BNP has apparently changed its ways. It even has a Jewish councillor, Pat Richardson, in Epping Forest.

What is the truth? To understand this we need to recognise that antisemitism plays a different role from other forms of racism in fascist thinking. Antisemitism has been an organising principle of most fascists. Jews are the bankers and Bolsheviks who conspire together to control the world in which the rest of us are pawns and victims of their evil plans. These ideas borrow heavily from medieval Christian notions about Jews as Christ killers and usurers.

But this conspiracy theory has been upset by the rise of Islamophobia. For many fascists - Griffin and other leaders of the BNP are part of this wing - the central organising tenet is now Islamophobia. It is the oil sheikhs and terrorists who call the shots, dividing the world against itself and threatening 'our' Christian way of life. The BNP's leaflets and papers show bombed buses and Muslims praying outside a church on the village green. In the recent London elections their main leaflet contrasted a picture of an all-white street Coronation party with protesting Muslim women in veils.

Griffin himself wrote a 15-page document explaining to his supporters why Islam has become the main enemy. It would be a mistake to see Islamic fundamentalism as an ally, like some fascist organisations, he said. To him, my enemy's enemy is not necessarily my friend. But this is a big giveaway. Jews remain one of the enemies. How these two adversaries are related is something on which I think the BNP lacks a theory.

The second factor is that, whereas Islamophobia is now respectable and falls from the lips of politicians and newspapers' front pages, antisemitism, in the public arena at least, is taboo, though much still exists.

The third issue is Zionism and the state of Israel. Ruth Smeed, of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, told *The Guardian* in April: 'The BNP website is now one of the most Zionist on the web - it goes further than any of the mainstream parties in its support for Israel.'

In the same month, the BNP's newspaper, *The*

Voice of Freedom, said: 'We support the right of Israel to exist and defend itself against the relentless terrorist attacks of Islamic fanatics. Loyal British Jews are our natural allies in the fight against the Islamic fundamentalists who want to destroy the Western civilisation so many of whose core values we hold in common.'

In what passes for fascist thought, Zionism, Jews and Judaism are usually all rolled together as one entity. It is this wrong equation, seeing Jews and Muslims as intrinsic enemies, which of course we are not. For some fascists, Israel lies at the heart of the evil Jewish conspiracy. But, on the other hand, Israel is fiercely nationalistic, and its government is underpinned by an ideology which wants an exclusive Jewish state if this were possible - one 'controlled on behalf of its Jewish population. So the current BNP leaders, most prominently legal

director Lee Barnes, present Israel as a model to aspire towards, an example which British nationalists should follow.

It would, however, be a huge mistake to assume this means that the BNP leadership or rank and file love the Jews. Just look at the rise and rise of Arthur Kemp in the party, a leading ideologist who runs its internet operations. This former South African intelligence man was arrested, but never charged, for the murder of Chris Hani, a principal figure in the African National Congress. Kemp wrote the antisemitic book, *March of the Titans*, used in BNP 'educational' sessions. So, Ruth Smeed, beware.

Others whose anti-Zionism merges with antisemitism are horrified with the BNP's turn. Israel Shamir, the writer who claims once to have been Jewish and whose work is greatly admired by musician Gilad Atzmon, polemicised against Barnes: 'I do not feel at ease accusing you and your comrades of betraying the Britons and joining with the Jews, but if I'd keep mum, stones wouldn't'. Again there are lessons about friends and enemies which the left needs to learn.

The BNP remains a fascist organisation, racist to the core. Islamophobia plays a central role, along with attacks on migrants. Antisemitism lies hidden, but rumbles away at the heart of the beast. Jews, Muslims, people of all faiths and none, migrants and settled communities have a common cause. It is to ensure the party's upward path is halted and that the BNP is thrown down and dashed on the rocks.

DAVE LANDAU
analyses the
British National
Party's flirtation
with Zionism



Photo: Simon Lynn

POST-WAR

BBC Radio 4's Archive Hour recently featured 'Rage in Dalston', which described the battles of the late 1940s fought mainly on London's streets between fascists and the militant 43 Group. **DAVID ROSENBERG** describes the events and talks to the programme makers.

The Second World War was barely over. Survivors of the Nazi genocide languished in Displaced Person's camps scattered across Europe. Young soldiers from the anti-Nazi war were being demobbed, and as they returned to Civvy Street they were shocked to see fascist propagandists standing on soapboxes on street corners to spread their poisonous messages – blaming the Jews for all the ills in the world, and urging people to adopt the ideas they had been waging a bitter war against for the last six years.

Several of the fascists' leading speakers of the 1930s had been imprisoned under Rule 18b during the war but, on achieving their freedom, many of them showed that the period of introspection offered at Her Majesty's Pleasure had only strengthened their core beliefs. Careful at first to avoid declaring themselves fascists, and meeting under umbrellas such as the 'British League of Ex-servicemen and Women', they articulated the classic and incendiary fascist arguments that Mosley had spouted before the war.

For returning young Jewish ex-servicemen and women, it was a provocation too far. In February 1946 four Jewish ex-servicemen were having a drink in North London when they became aware of a fascist street meeting nearby. Quickly improvising a plan of action they attacked the stewards and turned over the platform. The fascist meeting collapsed in disarray. Triumphant, the four returned to Maccabi House – where young Jews socialised – and regaled their friends there with what they had achieved. Within a few weeks a meeting had been convened attended by 43 people – 38 ex-servicemen and 5 women – most,

but not all, of them Jews. They resolved to form an organisation, not to defend the Jews but to go on the attack against their defamers. The 43 Group was born, and for four years it waged a guerrilla campaign to stop the fascists in their tracks.

Operating in military style, they used physical force to drive wedges of 'commandos' through stewards who were protecting fascist platforms. The aim was to disrupt and, if possible, close down their meetings and prevent them from popularising their message. They developed a considerable intelligence network, which included placing spies – women and men – in the fascist camp. The fascists were also becoming more organised, and dozens of confrontations took place every week.

Hundreds of young people, mainly Jews, offered their services to the 43 Group in different capacities. The 'shtarkeray' took part in direct physical attacks, the most explosive confrontations occurring near Ridley Road market in Hackney. Taxi drivers ferried them around for special operations, such as one where they broke into empty fascist premises at night after a delivery of several chests of propaganda literature, which was duly stolen by the 43 Group and burned. Doctors and lawyers offered their services when needed; office workers maintained an elaborate administration and communication network.

Group members knew that they would have to operate illegally and find themselves in confrontations with the authorities. They were prepared to be arrested to achieve their objectives. The police were unprepared for the ferocity of the campaign, and were split over their responses.

HEROES

Many of them had seen active service against fascism and sympathised with the 43 Group. Others had served in the British forces in Palestine, where a three-cornered confrontation between Zionist, Palestinians and the British mandate authorities was approaching its peak. Many of them returned with fiercely anti-Jewish views. For the 43 Group 'Palestine was Palestine and Hackney was Hackney' – they focused on the conflict in the here and now.

They were also prepared to confront the established political 'leaders' of the Jewish community, who disowned their methods. The Board of Deputies Defence Committee demanded that the 43 Group succumb to their authority and fall in with the softly, softly, carefully diplomatic approach to antisemitism and fascism. The 43 Group, with backing from the grassroots of the community, refused to comply, and continued their activities.

Newly formed fascist organisations and publications were springing up, and, in the background, the pre-war fascist leader, Oswald Mosley, was preparing his public return to political campaigning. By the time he emerged, though, with the launch of his 'Union' movement in 1948, his acolytes were in retreat from the onslaught by the 43 Group and others who had been roused to expose and fight fascism. His re-emergence was a damp squib, and while he was attempting to recruit and rebuild, many fascists were leaving him behind. Some started to appear on the platforms and in the publications of the anti-fascists to recant and pour scorn on Mosley.

By 1950 the battle was over. The fascists were



The pro-fascist British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women set up platforms in Jewish areas

defeated and it would take several years and a new set of antagonisms built against newer immigrant groups from the Caribbean, for the fascists to get a hearing again. As the 43 Group disbanded, with its job done, many of its members changed their names to help rebuild their lives, and returned to more mundane pursuits. Some continued to be active mainly through more mainstream channels; others put their anti-fascist activism in the locker and got on with the rest of their lives. They all, though, felt immense pride in what they had achieved and what they had prevented during those chaotic and convulsive four years.

Alan Dein and Mark Burman discuss the making of the documentary

What motivated you to make this programme?

MB It was a bit of unfinished history with unresolved questions for us. The project started when we worked together at the London Museum of Jewish life – now the Jewish Museum.

AD At that point it was still the Museum of the Jewish East End. A lot of our work was focused on uncovering the memories of the Jewish East End particularly the inter-war years. Sometime around 1988-89 a man called Stanley Marks turned up and said: 'I've got an interesting bit of Jewish history. Would you like to see it?' Out came ephemera relating to the 43 Group, from back issues of On Guard to a knuckle-duster that had been retrieved from a punch-up in Ridley Road, as well as fascist publications and British League of ex-Servicemen publications. I thought we knew quite a bit about the Jewish East End but we didn't know anything about this. Nobody really talked about it.

This was 40 years after the events and it was

something that happened and then slipped through the cracks of history. For four decades these people's working lives had taken centre stage, but now they had retired and got to a point when it was time to reflect, sneak around the attic, bring all that stuff out, realise the immense value of it. They came to us because we were really the only people then who were genuinely interested in Jewish social history. Stanley Marks kicked it off.

MB They were the generation that had just come back from the war and now 40 years on it was the right time to talk. Alan inspired Morris Beckman to write his book. There was a reunion, and I wrote a piece for The Independent about it. We gathered in archives and recorded oral histories. When Morris's book came out it inspired other people and a couple of documentaries were made, so it had a half-life after that. I had tried three or four times to get this broadcast – there was a series called Coming Home, about the end of the war. Rage in

Dalston is a great story about a special moment in Britain just after the war.

What did you want to convey about that story?

MB When it happened and why it happened, and to raise questions. Was it strictly time contained? What are the possibilities of resistance? Does violence solve anything? The Jewish community has its own version of history that it tells to itself. Its moment of opposition and resistance was Cable Street – the 43 Group seemed to belong somewhere else.

AD It was a story of heroism. Around that time we had also been doing quite a lot of research on Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe and around the history of the Communist Party. We grew up immersed in the histories of Cable Street. We knew about about communism versus fascism. The inter-war years are full of those histories.

It raised that great question – could this have happened after the war? To me the post-war period was about building a new Jerusalem in Golders Green and Hendon, it wasn't about fighting against

fascists. And then I realised there were people who I knew but didn't really know, like Alec Carson, one of the interviewees. His nephew was a good mate of mine but I knew nothing about this. We had only seen one version of these people – the working men, the family men. They had gone back to these normal lives. The fascination for both of us is the impact of the Second World War. The biggest politicisation was the war itself.

And that's what made it so explosive?

MB What do you do with a generation that has gone to war, when you've got a war state and the youth has been trained to kill? They have been broken down into their military identities – they know what to do with their bodies. They are fighting machines. What do you do when they come home from the war? You've got this generation for whom everything is unresolved.

AD And they don't have responsibilities yet. They've come back from situations where you don't know whether you will be alive or dead tomorrow, so now

they are back on the streets of London.

MB And the Jewish communities in Europe have gone up the chimney – we are the only Jewish community left untouched, so there is all that guilt. We couldn't put ourselves there but there was a feeling that we went like sheep to the slaughter. Plus the whole issue of Palestine, which was corrosive and explosive. And then the fascists reappear who seem like people out of time.

So who were the typical 43 group members?

MB They were a cross section of the community. You had the middle class – educated, active service, no longer of the East End but with memories, and who wanted to do something. And then you've got the East End lads who were handy. They had a closer relationship to violence and to street life. They were much closer to the fascists' world themselves: if you want a fight, we'll give you a fight! The East End kids had experienced the sharp end.

AD Most of the people we interviewed were too young to be active in the inter-war years but they had experience of antisemitism on an institutional level, as part of British society. A lot of the 43 Group were teenagers.

MB And the world they belonged to had positive values – we're Jews, we're fighting the enemy, the war's not over, this is something we can achieve on our doorstep, we are not going to be like our parents any more. It's great to be young and do something about it.

Were they religious?

AD Our first interviews were about their life stories. Like a lot of Jewish people in that time, they had grown up in a reasonably frum community – traditional. Their parents or grandparents came from that world. I can't remember any of them saying they went to shul every Saturday. They met at Maccabi, at the Jewish youth club, not at the synagogue.

Was it dominated by men?

AD The 43 people who founded the group included five women. This was not just a ragged organisation



Mosley's Union Movement meeting in Ridley Road

of street fighters; this was a well-oiled machine. They had an office in central London and needed staff to run it. Women who had to be trusted with a lot of information provided the administrative skills.

MB There were women spies, too, working among the fascists.

What about the fascists?

AD A lot of the fascist speakers were older, from the 1930s. They were people who had been detained during the war under Regulation 18b. They were part of that cadre and they were waiting for their messiah – Mosley – to make his move.

To make this programme you had to find 43ers, police, Mosleyites – how willing were they to participate?

AD We tried to speak to the fascists through 'The Friends of Oswald Mosley'. They were likely to have people of that generation amongst their community. But they said 'no', as they were currently recording their own history so it would be up to them when they decided to release it.

MB The key fascist players were dead, so the best way of getting at the fascist memories were the National Archives, where Special Branch were meticulous at recording in shorthand for them all the speeches they made. You also realise how infiltrated the fascists were by the state. They were everywhere. Presumably they were in the 43 Group too – you can't get to those archives yet.

AD Finding police officers wasn't that difficult. I had interviewed a policeman for a different programme some years ago who told me he was a young policeman in Ridley Road at that time. You could also find them through their police pensioners magazine. They are intrigued by their own history.

The East End Jews of the 1930s had a torrid time with the police. Antisemitism seemed rife within the force. Was it different in the confrontations at the end of the 1940s?

AD Palestine was a significant fact. A lot of members of the police force had come through the military and, without a doubt, police officers who were coming back from Palestine were likely to instil a level of anti-Jewish feeling. One of our interviewees, Hasler, had done his policing in the East End and a lot of people he knew were Jewish and he had built up a relationship with them, so whatever antisemitism had been instilled at Hendon Police College, some of that dissipated by the time you were local and were mixing with the people.

Many police look back on their role as effectively apolitical: 'We just policed the thing.' They saw it primarily as public order and a loss of their relaxing Sundays. If you arrested someone, that was the rest of your day gone. They spent half the day writing up their reports, which they didn't really want to do.

MB The sympathy for Mosley in the establishment wasn't there any more. Mosley had opposed the war, so it was case of: 'Your time's up; we're not

interested in you any more.' So I don't think they were upset about the fact that they were getting a good kicking, except in terms of public order – which is where the local police came in. They were the ones in the front line asking: 'Why am I at Ridley Road on a Sunday, having to get involved in a punch-up when I should be somewhere else?'

The 43 group were prepared to take risks with the law?

AD If you were policing Ridley Road, the first punch was likely to be thrown by a member of the 43 Group because their job was to break up the meeting.

MB They evolved their street fighting tactics – the wedge, to break up their meeting and seize the pitch – with military precision. And they wanted the publicity. They had top Jewish lawyers who would defend them to the hilt. They could rely on a cross section of heavy hitters.

What did the creation of the 43 Group reveal about tensions within the Jewish community about how to fight against fascism and antisemitism?

AD Everyone who joined says they turned to the 43 Group because the Jewish community at the time were not giving the answers. And the answer they wanted was to combat fascism, to remove it from the streets. Like a lot of young people, they felt that the voice of the establishment was not telling it as it was. The 43 Group was not founded by older thinkers but by younger people at the Macabbi Club

MB They were young, with all that energy waiting to go off. They were not interested in listening to some 60-year-old.

Where were the 43 Group located politically?

MB Morris Beckman will say they were an 'apolitical' organisation, and you say, hang on – you are fighting fascism on the streets. By any definition that is a political act. By his definition it means they were neither left nor right. It was a single issue. They were against fascism.

AD When you look at the 1930s, Jews joined the Communist Party not only to fight antisemitism but also to fight against their social conditions. By the 1940s a lot of people were not part of that social condition any more. They weren't all children of the ghetto. But their journal *On Guard*, which was about vigilance and also about education – informing people about what fascism is and how you could combat fascism through education – was ghost-written by people at the *Daily Worker*, and a lot of the vision came from members connected with the Left. If you look at the Jewish members of the CP in the 1940s, some of them were members of the 43 Group.

How different is the fight against fascism in Britain today?

AD In the 1940s politics was waged on the street, which it isn't any more. Stanley Marks kept a list of all the fascists' meeting places, where they would congregate two or three times a week. That kind of world has gone. But not just the street fighting. There were also people who were possessed by

antisemitism in such an open way. When you looked at the the language in the speeches – the bile – they were virtually insane. The 43 Group were of their time. It was a very peculiar, very specific, post-war period. It is chaotic, it is mad. When you are up against that level of extremity, the first thing you're going to think about is using force. And that is why the 43 Group came into being. They heard this. There could be no debate.

MB No one died. Today you can get killed for your mobile phone. But it wasn't Marquis of Queensbury rules either. They had knuckledusters. What does violence solve? They go away for a bit but it doesn't stop them. It took the fascists until the Isle of Dogs election in 1993 to decide that street fighting was no longer productive for them, which is a very long-time before they changed tactics.

AD All the ex-servicemen we interviewed said the one thing always used by the fascists were lies. Their battle was for truth to win out and it had to be done with an iron fist. The one thing they had to do was to break up the meeting, break the pitch. It wasn't just to mash everyone to pulp but to stop them talking. That was the first job because if they don't say it, it stops. If someone is saying something so distinctly untrue, just as the BNP is saying things about Muslims today that are untrue, then how do you respond to that? Obviously education. But in their world it is education plus you have to remove them and stop them saying it.

What responses did you get to the programme?

AD The response from Jewish people has been that they found the programme fascinating and enjoyable. A lot of non-Jewish people came up to me and said: 'I never knew anything about it.' There was a certain level of embarrassment – 'I didn't realise'. It was a shock to many people. We're very familiar with the story now but you forget how little is known about this. A lot of people were genuinely shocked that the language of antisemitism could be so extreme.

What is lovely about oral history is when you hear people's voices articulating their experiences. There is something about radio that can do that. A lot of the recordings were made in the late 1980s – it is the Archive Hour – but there were some new recordings too. It says a lot about the media that they just jumped on the Vidal Sassoon bandwagon.

And the BBC managed to broadcast it on the first Seder night...

MB We went to a trendy North London Seder and got through it so quickly we could hear the programme!

AD I hear that a lot of 43 group members secretly tuned in...



43 Group member Gerry Flamberg in action

KLEZMER RESPONSES

MIKE HEISER
continues the
debate about
the political
meaning of the
klezmer revival

Jacob Bard-Rosenberg's article opens up a valuable debate on klezmer music (JS55, Spring 2008). I wish to take up this debate with reference to recent books and to my experiences in Klezfest, the klezmer festival which runs in London each summer.

Jacob argues that klezmer music is problematic because it is a revival of a musical style which is not contemporary, and which has become identified with the Holocaust. He says that reviving klezmer is reviving a dead musical tradition which died for non-musical reasons. The only reason for reviving it is to make a political statement about the Holocaust.

However this argument needs exploring carefully. He concedes that klezmer offers a form of Jewish identity which is neither religious nor Zionist. I would argue that this is important, and needs to be seen as part of the developments in Jewish life over the past 20 years, from a position where the only culture which was promoted within the Jewish community was that identified with Hebrew and with modern Israel to one where there is a much more plural exploration of Jewish culture. Increasingly over this period, many Jews have come to challenge this domination of Israeli Jewish culture and to assert other ways of being Jewish.

The Klezmer revival needs to be seen alongside a revival of secular Jewish culture and interest in Yiddish, with which klezmer is closely identified. Yiddish was the language which was spoken by the mass of Jews wiped out during the Holocaust, but it was also the language spoken by the mass of Jewish immigrants to the United States and Western Europe around the turn of the 20th century. The decline of klezmer in the period from the 1920s and '30s until the revival got going in the 1970s, was not solely due to the Holocaust; it was due to Jews assimilating to what was seen as the dominant culture in the countries to which they immigrated, and to the challenge of the Zionist movement and later to the new Hebrew culture identified with modern Israel. It therefore follows that any revival in klezmer and in Yiddish culture is a challenge to these forces, and not merely a reaction to the Holocaust.

Jonathan Freedman's recent book, *Klezmer America*, looks at this from a cultural perspective. He argues that the Jewish 20th century experience in America has been reduced to an assimilation to typically 'American' values. To this he counterposes an alternative tradition, which he identifies with klezmer. He shows how the music we now call klezmer originated in a marginal, almost subversive way to the Eastern European Jewish world of which it was an element. They were part of a world which overlapped with other musicians, such as Christian or Rom. He says: 'Klezmer music mingled traditional Jewish melodies and harmonies with those of the Balkans, Greece, Ukraine, Russia, the Rom peoples and even those of the Arab and Muslim world, all finding their way into the musical experience of klezmer in Romania and the Balkans.'

He gives as an example Sholem Aleykhem's Yiddish novella, *Stempenyu*, where a klezmer violinist stands as an insider/outsider, offering the women of a shtetl an escape from bourgeois respectability. According to

Freedman, that tradition was kept up by the great klezmer musicians of the 20th century who were active in America, notably Naftule Brandwein. A notorious drunk and womaniser, with mob connections, he had a prodigious clarinet technique which marked him as one of the masters of the 20th century American klezmer tradition. His work, says Freedman, remained eclectic, looking to Middle Eastern melodies such as 'Araber Tants', identifying klezmer as rooted in a world of multiple cultures rather than than just Yiddish Eastern European.

Freedman contrasts him with his contemporary Dave Tarras, who concentrated on the klezmer form known as Bulgar.

Freedman argues that contemporary klezmer bands such as the Klezmatics, are connecting with the subversive, culturally mixing tradition of Brandwein.

In another recent book devoted to klezmer, Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin compare the treatment of the same tune (Bajm Rebbens Sude) by different klezmer musicians with that of the Macedonian musician Kostas Gadinis, known as the 'Greek Naftule Brandwein'.

Ottens and Rubin argue that the decline of klezmer in America from the 1940s to the 1970s was associated with the decline of Yiddish culture.

Klezmer musicians were used to playing year after year for 'landsmanshaftn', associated with particular towns in Eastern Europe where people had lived before they immigrated to America. The younger generation of American Jews had other interests; they looked on the klezmer musicians with nostalgia and humour because by the 1960s they had been reduced to playing Hava Nagila in klezmer style at weddings and barmitzvahs.

The klezmer revival took the older generation of klezmer musicians by surprise, and some of them were not that complimentary about the new generation of musicians. However the klezmer revival which started in the 1970s and '80s is still going strong. Klezmer has thus reappropriated for itself a cultural space.

The revival of klezmer is closely linked with the revival of Yiddish. Many klezmer tunes are associated with Yiddish songs, and groups like Brave Old World and the Klezmatics have developed a tradition of vocal numbers. Israeli singer Chava Alberstein recorded a landmark album, *The Well*, with the Klezmatics, setting her own melodies to Yiddish poems.

Klezfest in London, which the Jewish Music Institute has been running since 2001, has come to be associated with Frank London of the Klezmatics. Participants have the chance to learn and perform klezmer technique from experts, both instrumental and vocal. Participants come from all over Europe and farther afield, including a significant number from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In 2006 the Russian group Naekhovichi starred in JMI's Simcha on the Square, rocking Trafalgar Square with their upbeat rendition of the Soviet Yiddish song Hey Zhankoye. The song relates to the short lived settlements of Jews in agricultural collective settlements in the Crimea in the late 1920s. But you did not have to know the history of the song or the fate of the collective settlements it celebrates to marvel at the upfront presence of Yiddish culture at

the heart of London in a way that would not have seemed possible 25 years ago.

Although the Song School contains both Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish elements, Yiddish is at its core. As an enthusiast for Yiddish song, I have participated in the (mainly Yiddish-based) Jewish Song School, which is part of Klezfest. I have greatly benefited from teachers such as Shura Lipovsky, Karsten Troike, Lorin Sklamberg (the vocalist from the Klezmatics) and Joanne Borts, who comes from a Yiddish theatre tradition. Klezfest provides an atmosphere where musicians and vocalists can mix in a way that proves that the musical tradition of klezmer, like the Yiddish culture it comes from, is very far from dead. Of course there are challenges. Just as Yiddish, at least outside the ultra-orthodox milieu, is spoken as a first language by fewer and fewer people, it is enjoying a revival as a cultural language. Many people who have been drawn to Yiddish through klezmer. Indeed, JMI runs a Yiddish course, Ot Azoy, in the week before or after Klezfest.

It would be too schematic to claim that everyone in Klezfest is promoting secular, Yiddish-based culture. One thing I find problematic is the uncritical attitude towards religion and towards Hassidism in particular. Of course much klezmer and Yiddish music comes

I feel that Jacob Bard-Rosenberg's critique of the Klezmer revival (JS55, Spring 2008) misses the point. This is music. It's entertainment. Audiences enjoy it. If they didn't, it wouldn't be played. Musical fashions change, some forms revive, some fade away.

I don't pretend to understand many of the complex sentences or arguments in Jacob's article, no doubt much academic research is behind it. But let's take the concluding sentence: 'While there is room to criticise our own society and these breaks in a narrative history that brought it about, klezmer is a hugely inappropriate response, not least when it proclaims itself to be a defining feature of the Jewish response to the modern condition.'

I couldn't count the klezmer-influenced bands I've heard. Not one of them has ever proclaimed it to be a defining feature of anything. Perhaps I'm not reading the right sources. The article seems to contain many such 'Aunt Sallys', false premises which can then be destroyed.

I don't know if Jacob likes music or what genre he listens to. I enjoy many forms of traditional and contemporary music, including folk and world music and forms derived from these traditions. Klezmer is part of that. As a Jew, perhaps my enjoyment is enhanced because it embodies tunes and styles that

from the Hassidic tradition, but there was a complex interaction which did not just go in one direction. For example, there is a tradition of Yiddish songs which make fun of so called wonder-working Hassidic rabbis, sometimes using the same Hassidic nigunim (tunes).

Many klezmer musicians have celebrated radical Jewish culture. Freedman gives the example of the Klezmatics recording the Bundist song Barikadn (Barricades) on their album Shteyt Oyf (Rise Up). Some younger klezmer musicians, such as So-Called in Canada and Daniel Gouly in England, have even started mixing klezmer with sampling and hip-hop.

In short, far from Klezmer being a dead tradition which has been artificially revived, it has the potential to engage with the multifaceted reality of diaspora Jewishness.

Klezfest 2009 takes place from 9th - 14th August 2009 in London. For details contact www.jmi.org.uk

Further reading

Klezmer America: Jewishness, Ethnicity, Modernity by Jonathan Freedman, Columbia University Press, 2008.

Klezmer-Musik by Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin, Bärenreiter, 2003.

YOU WRITE



I've heard throughout my life, at celebrations, services, youth camps or wherever. I don't listen and contemplate the Holocaust, or the destruction of the culture that produced it, although I am aware of these things. Just like when I'm enjoying a blues or jazz band, I don't constantly contemplate the movement of slaves from Africa to the New World plantations, although I know about the music's origins.

The argument that 'the musical tradition that was destroyed was not worth saving and has no space in a contemporary musical space' seems to imply that Jacob would oppose any preservation of former cultural elements – so let's close the museums, ban folk and classical music and campaign against native peoples continuing to practise their traditions...

Jacob believes that an album of singers imitating Bessie Smith would be obviously inappropriate. But musicians compose and play music influenced by earlier performers and writers all the time. Hot jazz can still be heard 70 years after it was at its peak. We could, perhaps, debate whether this is imitation or tribute, stultifying or inspirational. It could be interesting to analyse the different directions klezmer-influenced music has taken. However, let's respect people's artistic choices.

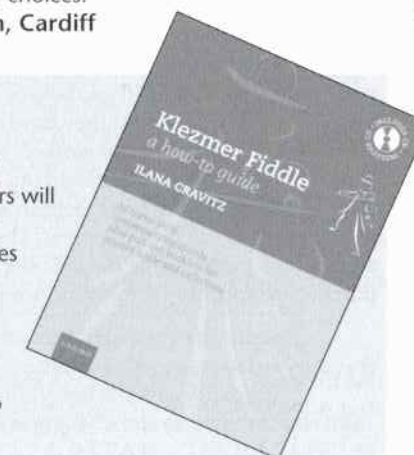
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CHARLIE POTTINS traces the story of a Russian revolutionary, whose life was moulded by the 20th century's most cataclysmic events

THE MAN WHO

He was born on January 1882, in Wilkomir, a small town in the Pale of Settlement. His father and two elder brothers were carpenters, but young Osip Aaronovich Tarshis was apprenticed in a tailor's shop to learn ladies' dressmaking. At 14, he listened to the workers talking about socialists who had been deported back to their home town.

He wrote: 'From casual talk I learned that these socialists used to meet the local intellectuals and workers, teach the latter how to read and write, give them books to read, etc. Also they often talked in my shop about secret meetings that were held in the capitals of the different provinces – in Vilna, Kovno and Warsaw – and about arrests which were made there.'

More exciting, when his brothers came home at the end of the year, young Osip found out they were involved. By the end of 1897 Osip had a job in Kovno, where he lodged with his brothers. He sat in on the carpenters' illicit meetings, held in members' homes, and liable to be raided by the police at any time.

Soon Osip had a new job, besides his paid work in the tailoring shop. He was to carry political literature between Kovno and Vilna. This illegal traffic was to become his speciality. Meantime, trade unionism was growing. The garment workers went on strike for a reduction of hours – to a 12-hour day. But the employers had got young Osip's measure, and he was blacklisted in the Kovno area.

Leaving for Vilna, at the end of 1898, he entrusted the Rabochnaya Znaya (Workers Banner) printing press, which he had looked after, to a trusted comrade, a member of the Jewish Worker's Bund. A few years later when Osip returned to Kovno on a mission for Iskra (The Spark) the Bund asked his help in organising workers at a firm that shipped timber to Germany on the River Nieman.

The day he left for Vilna, Osip glimpsed the wider world of struggle. Weeping parents were at the station seeing off soldiers, sent to crush the Boxer Rebellion in China. Why should we fight the Chinese people, with whom we have no quarrel, Osip mused, when the same army is used to suppress us here?

Even the Czar's army had its uses, however. In Vilna, where Osip was recruited to the Iskra group, he discovered it had an Iskra Military Organisation, headed by an army doctor, which sent revolutionary literature through the army's own mail to contacts across the Czar's sprawling empire.

There were unions in several trades in Vilna, but none recruited workers regardless of nationality, according to Osip, nor did they have a central body. However the Bund brought workers together for May Day and other events, often held out in the woods. Osip and friends went to a celebration of Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press. The girls stayed in a one-room cabin, while the lads slept out on the porch. Next morning they found someone had

stolen their clothes and shoes. They had to signal frantically to passers-by, who scoured the neighbourhood for cast-offs, so they could get home.

It wasn't always funny. A friend from Osip's home town, not a party member, Solomon Rogut, caught carrying illegal literature, was beaten unconscious and left for dead. The Bund in Wilkomir produced a pamphlet about Rogut. But Osip felt responsible for having involved his friend.

Workers found rough and ready ways to deal with scabs and informers, and battle the authorities. They had set up unofficial 'labour exchanges' where they could drop in, drink tea, hear news of any work, and discuss affairs of state. Hearing that three women had been arrested for distributing leaflets, workers from Osip's 'exchange' stormed the police station. After cutting its telephone wires, they fought sabre-wielding police to reach the top floor and free the women held there. Many of these workers were injured or arrested later, but all were proud of what they had done.

Osip himself was taken off a Kovno train and questioned by police in March 1902. They knew about his links with the Iskra group. He was held in Vilna for a week, then sent to Kiev. There was student unrest there, and the jail filled up with students. Moved to the political wing, Osip was able to do some reading, and had tutors. He acknowledges that a compositor, Joseph Blumenfeld, with whom he later had differences, helped him. He also mentions Nicolai Bauman, a Bolshevik whose murder by Black Hundreds in Moscow aroused huge anger there in 1905.

Future Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov was with Osip in the Kiev prisoners' escape committee. They practised human pyramids to the height of the wall, and celebrated birthdays to get the guards accustomed to drinking with them. They smuggled in sleeping powders for the guards and, through Osip's contacts, they obtained false passports and papers for themselves. They assembled a grapple and ladder, and tied sheets into a rope.

Getting over the wall one August night, Osip went from town to town posing as a student. At Zhitomir he was sheltered in the Bund's secret committee room. For a time he returned to his old trade, taking digs with a fellow worker. But the authorities were after him, and someone from the prison saw him at the market. A friend had his papers. They met in the woods and, accompanied by two Bundist women, went to Kamenets Podolsk. From there, wading across rivers, they crossed into Austria at night. Then it was on to Berlin, where Osip began the next stage of his career.

In Berlin, the small-town boy was dazzled by the traffic and the bright lights. He rode on trams and gazed in shop windows. At a meeting place, he 'saw

WAS FRIDAY

these well-dressed gentlemen sitting around small tables drinking their beer, and thought it was a bourgeois gathering, for I had never seen such workers in Russia. It proved to be a Party meeting.'

He was impressed by the German unions, the party bookstores and printing presses. In Berlin he acquired a new name. Perhaps it was the day he arrived. The lady of the house, not wanting visitors to know who was staying, called him Mikhail Davidovich Freitag. The Russian for Friday is Piatnitsa. Somehow it stuck, so comrade Tarshis became better known in the movement as Osip Aaronovich Piatnitsky.

Piatnitsky also came to London, where the Social Democratic Labour Party of Russia was to reconvene its Second Congress. He stayed with Martov, Vera Zasulich and others, and had meals with Lenin and Krupskaya. The winter fogs and grime of the city depressed him. He was surprised to meet people from the old country who had turned from socialism to 'individualist anarchism'. Osip put this down to their exile from home and exclusion from British society and its labour movement.

Iskra was being printed on the presses of the Social Democratic Federation in Clerkenwell. It was Piatnitsky's job to find ways of despatching the paper back to those waiting back home. The Bund's network delivered the first issues of Lenin's Iskra into Russia (later in 1905 the Bolsheviks in St Petersburg were surprised to receive a consignment of Bund publications. A German worker despatching the parcels had just assumed the more the merrier, and sent whatever he had). In Tilsit, Piatnitsky found a group of Lithuanians sending large quantities of religious literature home; this was banned by the Czarist regime because it was in the Lithuanian language. Religious dissenters and Marxists were able to collaborate in adversity, so Marxist pamphlets were smuggled in the same crates as devotional works.

The revolutionaries used suitcases with false bottoms, and devised garments – waistcoats for men, and bodices or skirts for women – into which newspapers were sewn. People swore in the summer heat, but were all right in winter. Some even regretted parting with their garments, asserts Piatnitsky, the ladies' tailor, proudly: 'The women got used to them – they made them look impressive, dignified, with good round figures.'

The 1903 congress saw the Bund's delegates walk out when its status was not recognised as 'representative of the Jewish proletariat'. It ended with the split between the 'Bolshevik' and 'Menshevik' factions over what constituted party membership. Lenin lost control of Iskra. Piatnitsky was bewildered when the older theoretician Plekhanov turned against Lenin, and was upset to part with comrades he had admired; but he chose to go with the Bolsheviks.

In 1905 theoretical debate was jostled aside by real revolution. Arriving in Odessa that summer, Piatnitsky found party organisation was built from the top, on the principle of co-option. There were committees of Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, the Bund,

the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Dashnaks (an Armenian party), each working separately. But at the end of August someone began moves for a joint meeting.

'I think it was the Bund ... organisationally they stood closer to the Mensheviks, but on many tactical questions of the period the Odessa Bund sided with us.'

Not content with having massacred demonstrators on the Odessa steps, the Czarist regime wanted its revenge for the strikes, the Potemkin battleship mutiny, and the revolutionary ferment in Odessa. In October, along with the Czar's manifesto promising reform and national unity, came armed gangs harassing people in Odessa, and an organised pogrom against the Jews.

There was a meeting in the university to organise resistance and defence. 'Besides us, the Bund group and the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs), representatives of the Dashnaks, the Poale Zion and Serpovists attended the meetings of the committee' (Serpovists were members of the Chaim Zhitlovsky's Jewish Socialist Labour Party, and close to the SRs). Piatnitsky was worried that not enough non-Jewish workers showed up.

The Black Hundred pogromists, officers leading peasants, lumpen and criminals alongside plain-clothes police, were backed by Cossacks and well-armed troops. The workers' defence squads were heavily outgunned. On 19th October a detachment of railway workers routed a right-wing gang in the Dalmitsy district, but had to retreat, with heavy losses, when the army intervened.

In some places people broke into gun shops for weapons to defend themselves. The battleship Potemkin and its revolutionary sailors had left Odessa, but a detachment of naval cadets fought bravely against the reactionaries, Piatnitsky records. Still, after three days – the usual time allotted for pogroms by the Czarist authorities – some 800 Jews had been killed in Odessa, hundreds were injured or raped, and thousands were burned out of their homes.

The strikes resumed on a bigger scale in December. Under pressure from the rank and file for unity, an Odessa soviet was formed with elected delegates, like that in St Petersburg. The executive met in tearooms run by the Bund and other organisations, but had to keep on the move. In January 1906, Piatnitsky and others were arrested. Released after a hunger strike, but still depressed over the pogrom, and feeling that the movement in Odessa was ebbing, he accepted a call from Moscow to come and help the party press.

On his way, he made a diversion to his home town to visit family and friends. Wilkomir, awakened by the great events elsewhere, was not



Young Bundist women from Minsk, Belarus, around 1910

Photo: Moissey Nappelbaum

RELIGIOUS DISSENTERS AND MARXISTS WERE ABLE TO COLLABORATE IN ADVERSITY, SO MARXIST PAMPHLETS WERE SMUGGLED IN THE SAME CRATES AS DEVOTIONAL WORKS.

yet touched by the tide of repression. There were public meetings in the park. The Bund had a children's section – the Little Bund. There was a branch of the Social Democratic Labour Party with Russian, Lithuanian, Polish and Jewish members.

In Moscow, the workers still seemed to be in fighting mood. The party was working with students and producing a paper for soldiers. At holiday times, Moscow workers returning to their villages took political literature for the peasants. Piatnitsky organised printing, obtained paper and arranged distribution. But when police raided the printing works and people's flats he realised they had full details of who they were looking for, including his real name, which he had almost forgotten himself.

Leaving Moscow to shake off spies before going abroad, Osip returned to Wilkomir in May 1908. His home town was now an occupied country. Mounted police were dragging in Lithuanian peasants for interrogation. Even the Bund was lying low. He had been home 10 days when he was arrested. His mother arrived and he feared she would blurt out his name, but she kept quiet as he was taken away.

The prison was crowded with Lithuanians, Poles and Jews. Police officers boasted about flogging and torturing peasants, and showed him a blood-stained cell. Piatnitsky, using another pseudonym, 'Pokenansky', was anxious that they should not find out who he really was or where he had been, and trace his contacts. They hauled him in front of some old Lithuanians and asked if this fellow was really Pokenansky. The old men swore he was, they would recognise him anywhere, he looked just like his father who had gone to America. Osip had never met them before in his life, but their testimony saved him.

Abroad again, Piatnitsky went to Liepzig, where the German Social Democrats' presses printed the Russians' literature. Once again it was his job to organise the smuggling. In 1912 he helped organise the Bolsheviks' conference in Prague. Lenin and Krupskaya visited him in Liepzig. The following summer he was invited to stay with them near Zakopane, and went hiking with Lenin in the Tatra mountains. The friends had their disagreements. Lenin ribbed Piatnitsky over his respect for the German Social Democrats, Piatnitsky warned Lenin not to trust Malinowski (who was later proven to be a police agent).

In 1914, having trained as an electrical engineer, Piatnitsky returned to Russia and took a job with the Siemens company in Moscow. They sent him to work in Samara, on a tramway project. The socialists there, Menshevik and Bolshevik, had a recreational society as a cover for political lectures. But once again the authorities were on Piatnitsky's trail, armed with a photograph which he guessed an informer called Zhitomirsky had supplied.

Osip was arrested and sent to a fortress prison, and then away to a remote valley in Siberia. He was out in the wilds on March 1917 when he heard that Czar Nicholas II had been overthrown. Somehow he reached Moscow, reported for party duty, and found work with the railway union.

A few years after the revolution, party members were asked to write up their stories. Piatnitsky's account was published in 1925 and translated into German and French before it was published in English by Martin Lawrence as *Memoirs of a Bolshevik*, and in the United States by International

Publishers (1933).

The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow enthused in a preface: 'These Memoirs should serve as an excellent material for training our younger generation of workers who are joining the Communist Party. In this respect Comrade Piatnitsky's book might serve as a sort of textbook, and an excellent text book at that, which would help our comrades abroad, who are carrying on their revolutionary work in capitalist countries, to learn the methods of organising underground work and help them to become model Bolshevik party members.'

With its tales of true adventure, and the author's frankness and humour, *Memoirs of a Bolshevik* is also an enjoyable read. Yet for three quarters of a century it has been kept out of print.

The Bund crops up repeatedly in the book, and not just in Osip's native Lithuania where it was particularly strong. Another thing that strikes the reader is how, despite differences and polemics, factions could work together against the autocratic regime, whether planning prison breaks, smuggling papers, or fighting off attacks. On the eve of the First World War, Piatnitsky found that Zhitomirsky, whom he suspected was a police agent, had been investigated by a three-person committee, comprising one Bolshevik, one Menshevik and one Bundist. Such procedure might sound like common sense, but those of us who have experienced the 57 varieties of the British Left will know that sense is rarely common, and co-operation less so.

What is remarkable about Piatnitsky's book is its timing and its provenance. In the late 1920s, along with brutal forced collectivisation in the Soviet Union, came a period when revolutionary willpower could supposedly conquer everything – environmental, economic, or political. Soviet railway engineers who warned of limits on how much freight their system could carry were condemned as saboteurs. The 1929 crash was seen as the final crisis of capitalism. Failure to carry out revolution was the result of bad leadership. Any element of truth in this was distorted by Stalin, to imply not theoretical critique, but denunciations of left-wing opponents, even potential allies, as the worst-possible enemy.

'Fascism is the military organisation of the bourgeoisie, which leans upon Social Democracy...', proclaimed Stalin, but 'Social Democracy, objectively speaking is the moderate wing of Fascism!' If anyone thought this crude, over the top, or even contradictory, they knew better than to risk voicing their doubts and being branded a 'Trotskyist'. Social democrats and the unions they still led were dubbed 'social fascist', and left-wingers like the British Independent Labour Party (ILP), were 'left social fascists', a more insidious variety.

In Britain, the Communist Party had been growing since the 1926 General Strike and Ramsay MacDonald's abandonment of Labour. It had limited success with breakaway 'red' unions, and repelled valuable friends by its attack on the Left. In Poland, Communist Party members attacked the Bund and its institutions, as 'social fascist', thereby antagonising the very workers with whom they needed to unite in the fight against fascism.

In Germany, the Communist Party was bigger. Its hostility to the Social Democrats, seen as betraying the November 1918 revolution, was

understandable. But in the face of Hitler's rise to power, it was suicidal. The Depression made workers who were still in the factories cling tightly to their jobs and their Social Democratic unions, while the Communists were outside competing with the Nazis for support from the unemployed.

At elections in May 1928 the Social Democrats gained 29% of the vote and the Communist Party 10.6%. The Nazis that year had a mere 2.6%. Two years and a slump later, the Social Democrat vote in September 1930 was down to 24.5%, while the Communists got 13.1%. But the Nazi vote had risen alarmingly to 18.3%. Had the two workers' parties combined their strengths, they could have gained wider support and blocked the Nazis on the streets as well as in the polling booths. The gap between them became the gateway through which Hitler marched, to destroy both.

All this time Osip Piatnitsky, promoted into the secretariat of the Communist International, had loyally transmitted the line to the German party and others. As treasurer, and head of the inner OMS, with a trusted person in each party, he could see they complied.

In 1928 he authored a paper snappily entitled 'The Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties of the Capitalist Countries by Eradication of the Social Democratic Tradition'. It was meant to turn them into efficient disciplined revolutionary organisations with militant workplace cells, modelled on an idealised Bolshevik Party, which Piatnitsky's memoirs show, never existed. In reality, 'Bolshevisation' was about moulding the Comintern and its parties into tools of the Russian state. Stalin came to despise them as ineffective tools, to be disposed of when he could.

Even after Hitler took power in 1933, Piatnitsky's pamphlet 'The Current Situation in Germany', assured readers that the fascists would not last, that workers were resisting, and the Communist Party growing. Had the Nazis attacked social democracy too? They just wanted to give their own supporters good jobs. Of course the Party line had been right.

When workers experiencing the difference between fascism and democracy said there should be a united front, the Communist Party had offered one 'from below'. If the Social Democrat workers did not accept, that was because the leaders in whom they still had illusions held them back. Piatnitsky did admit mistakes. The party should have made more of the national burden which workers bore. If they just repeated that Social Democrats were 'social fascists', the Social Democrat workers felt affronted and concluded the CP was not serious about unity.

This came close to what Trotsky had said, but Piatnitsky would not admit that Trotsky had been right. In his *Memoirs*, recalling Trotsky's past opposition to Lenin, he branded him a 'Liquidator'. As Comintern treasurer he could withhold funding from the Canadian CP whose leaders didn't take up the fight against 'Trotskyism'. His criticism of the German party leaders did not acknowledge that they had faithfully followed the Moscow line.

All the same, Piatnitsky remained too honest to be trusted in his Comintern job. There was worse to come. As the Soviet leadership lurched towards 'popular front' diplomacy, with its beautifully democratic 1936 constitution, it also launched the huge purges and show trials in which lifelong

communists 'confessed' to being in league with Hitler, the British or whoever, in plots to assassinate Stalin and destroy the Soviet Union.

Piatnitsky was no oppositionist, but he refused to accept the stories of ever widening conspiracies. He knew some of the accused, and had mentioned them in his *Memoirs*. At a party plenum he accused the NKVD secret police of fabricating evidence and using illegal methods to obtain confessions. Lazar Kaganovich and other Politburo members surrounded him afterwards, begging him to retract, but Piatnitsky replied that he had expressed his opinion and would not withdraw it.

Yezhov, the chief of the NKVD, alleged that Piatnitsky had been a provocateur in the pay of the Czarist secret police. But Piatnitsky was not arrested. He challenged Yezhov to confront him with evidence. Meanwhile the Gestapo and Russian White Guard officers abroad surreptitiously fed the Soviet authorities with material to be used against Piatnitsky. Piatnitsky underwent 220 hours of harsh interrogation but refused to confess anything, instead writing a letter to the Politburo protesting his innocence and loyalty as a communist.

At a night meeting in the Kremlin in May 1938, on Stalin's initiative, they produced a 'witness' from jail to testify that Piatnitsky had been plotting. 'He's lying! He is a fascist, he is a scoundrel!' exclaimed Lenin's widow Krupskaya. 'You know Piatnitsky well, he is after all the most honest man. Lenin loved and respected him very much.'

On 19th June 1938, Piatnitsky was accused of introducing 'Trotskyist formulations' into Marxist literature – not quite putting glass in the butter – and of infiltrating Trotskyists into the Comintern. But without his confession to these dastardly crimes the authorities were frustrated in their plans to follow up their trials and purges of Bolsheviks and Red Army commanders with a Comintern trial.

This did not stop them locking up many foreign militants like the Invergordon naval mutineer Len Wincott, or executing others, including British Communist Rose Cohen. But British CP leader Harry Pollitt, who made discreet inquiries in Moscow in 1938 about Rose Cohen's fate, may have been spared in the wake of it because Osip Piatnitsky, being tortured at the time, refused to 'confess'. Piatnitsky was finally executed on 30th October 1939. Yezhov, who had himself been purged in March that year was executed a few months later.

Piatnitsky was among those officially rehabilitated following Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in 1956. But *Memoirs of a Bolshevik* has still not been republished. I don't know why.



Striking weavers in Wislicki factory, Lodz, Poland, 1902

Under the influences

JULIA BARD talked to Daniel Jonas, founder of the Sephardi band, Los Desterrados about their music, their audiences and their new CD

Los Desterrados means 'the exiles', and the music played by this talented band reflects the diverse experiences of the generations of Sephardic Jews who established communities from Turkey to the Netherlands after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Their latest CD, *Miradores*, opens with *Mi suegra, la negra* (My mother-in-law, the evil one), a traditional song from Bulgaria. Direct, rhythmic and laden with feeling, it typifies – if anything can – the strand of Sephardic songs which women sang at home, describing their work, their families, their dreams and their nightmares.

There are secular songs in Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino), and religious songs in Hebrew. Although they are drawn from the historic and rich Sephardic cultural tradition – or more accurately, traditions – these performances are completely accessible to modern audiences. 'I'm not interested in engaging in dialogue about what's authentic and what's not, and we're not really educators. We do end up educating people, but that's by accident,' says Daniel Jonas, who plays guitar and oud. 'This is good music which most people don't know about, and although Ladino is on the UNESCO list of endangered languages, we're not running a museum.'

All the members of Los Desterrados are Londoners and all are Jewish, but they come from different parts of the community. 'I think we cover

everything now from completely secular to meshuggene frum – which is probably me!' says Jonas. 'We cover the complete spectrum of political views – but it's like any group of Jewish people, it's not so much a group as an argument.' Jonas describes himself as 'the only "Sephardi Sephardi" in the group'.

They are fine musicians who bring a range of influences to the band – classical, folk, jazz, rock, choral and, above all, flamenco, but they were not familiar with Sephardi music before they came together. Jonas says he grew up with 'stealth Sephardi music'. The influence of the Spanish tradition on Israeli music meant that he was familiar with the scales, and he looked for people who were interested and good enough to develop this genre.

When he was exploring the repertoire in the early days of the band – listening to CDs, researching the language – he was simultaneously studying flamenco. 'There's an old chestnut that flamenco was

influenced by Jewish and Arabic music. Whether it is or not, I don't know, but we were going this way as the Gypsies were going that way,' says Jonas, 'so there was bound to be some sort of encounter.'

The flamenco Gypsy sound is just one dimension of this marvellously varied music which is, at its heart, a synthesis. 'Music is osmotic,' says Jonas, 'that membrane is very porous and the musical influences filter in, and in the same way we find influences filtering in from where we're coming from, which is why the band has quite a strong rock 'n' roll, rhythm-driven sound.'

The new CD reflects these fusions of language, rhythm, harmony and melody. *Si veriyash a la rana* (If you see the frog) is a surreal Bulgarian song in which a frog fries chips, a rat peels walnuts and a camel makes filo pastry, but the chorus, sung in Turkish, simply means 'I love you very much!'

Love is a recurring theme. In the pleading *Buenas noches, Hanum Dudu* (Good evening Miss Dudu), adapted from a Greek folk tune, a young man prays for Miss Dudu to take him upstairs to the room behind the yellow curtain. *Ni Pudra yevo ni kolor* (I wear no powder or rouge), a flamenco-influenced duet, beautifully sung by bassist Jean-Marc Barsam and lead vocalist Hayley Blitz, vividly expresses the protagonists' passion. In the lyrical *Por la tu puerta yo pasi* (I passed by your door) a young man sings of his fantasies about the woman inside – the verses are in Judaeo-Spanish and the chorus is in Turkish.

'The Jewish community is our core audience,' says Daniel Jonas, 'and community organisations are useful for us to do our "test marketing".' The diverse musical influences, though, mean that the music attracts a much wider audience. When Los Desterrados performed recently at The Green Note in London's Camden Town, the venue was packed with a huge variety of people, a large proportion of whom were not Jewish. None of them seemed to have any problem understanding and engaging with the music, as they clapped along with the complex rhythms and joined in with the choruses. 'We did a great gig in a synagogue in Belfast,' says Jonas. 'We played to 350 people – there was someone at the back who looked like Ian Paisley, there were members of the Muslims of Northern Ireland Association, the Turkish Association, as well as the Jewish community – and the Mayor of Belfast!'

It's not easy to trace the history of Sephardic music. 'We think that most of the material we play is 18th or 19th century,' says Jonas. 'As this is an oral tradition, it's hard to know, but generally the liturgical stuff is older.' The songs deal with timeless subjects that are relevant to both the past and the present – love, marriage, motherhood, adultery, abandonment, friendship, laughter, bereavement, and prayer. But that universality is expressed in a way which, says Jonas, 'gives an image of a culturally diverse Jewish community.' The liturgical songs tend to be more cerebral but the secular music is, he says, people's music: 'a bit rough, tough, down and dirty'.



Los Desterrados' new CD, *Miradores*, is on sale from September 2008, featuring:

Jean-Marc Barsam (bass, saz, guitar, vocals)
Hayley Blitz (vocals)
Mark Greenfield (percussion; daf, dabouka, cajon, vocals)
Daniel Jonas (guitar, oud, vocals)
Andrew Salida (guitar, flute, vocals)
Ariane Todes (violin)

Beyond Balfour

This rigorously argued and meticulously researched history of the Balfour Declaration completely revises our understanding of that key moment in the history of the Zionist project. Conventional histories have tended to make one of two explanations for the Declaration. Most have seen the Declaration in terms of the British imperial project and territorial ambitions in the Middle East. Others have seen it in terms of the achievement of a handful of heroic Zionist leaders, notably Chaim Weizmann, who persuaded the British of the justice of their cause. Renton demolishes these arguments.

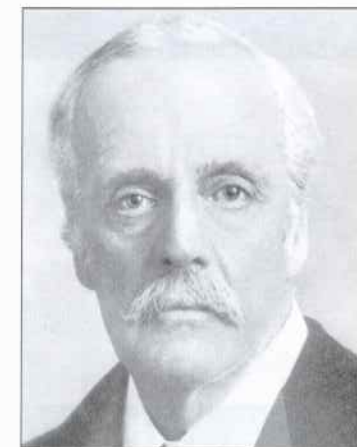
First, he shows how Balfour was framed less by the imperial project and more by an emerging racial nationalist framework that dominated British intellectual culture at the time. The Jews – and, crucially, the Arabs too – were seen as a homogenous racial nation, united by a common national striving. This worldview was completely compatible with either philo- or antisemitic attitudes, and with a positive evaluation of Arab nationalism. Secondly, in the context of the First World War, the Jews were seen as a transnational people whose support for the war effort (particularly in America, which remained neutral until 1917) could make or break British victory. While this view was coloured by an antisemitic conspiratorial understanding of world Jewry, it closely paralleled British attitudes towards other racial nations, such as the Irish and the Poles.

(The book shows how British propaganda efforts towards the Jewish 'nation' were similar to its PR exercises with these others.)

The 'Zionist masquerade' of the title is the complex game of deception by which the Zionist leadership persuaded the British state that world Jewry could be won to the British cause by a demonstration of support for Jewish nationalism. (In fact, as the book shows, a tiny minority of Jews were Zionists.) At the same time, the British state sought to persuade world Jewry that it backed their imagined national aspirations in order to get them onside in the war effort. This game of mutual deception, in which, as Renton shows, Weizmann played a rather minor role, was, of course, to have profound consequences for the history of the Middle East, and indeed the world.

The significance of this argument is two-fold. On one hand, it utterly disrupts the conventional Zionist myth whereby the Balfour Declaration was a crucial stage in fulfilling the age-old hopes of the Jewish people. On the other hand, it equally upsets the vulgar 'anti-imperialist' analysis which has become dominant in the anti-Zionist movement: the notion that Zionism was simply the projection of European imperialism into the Middle East. British imperialism in this period, as Renton shows, promoted both Jewish and Arab nationalism, and it imagined both through a fundamentally racist worldview.

Ben Gidley



Arthur Balfour

THE ZIONIST MASQUERADE: THE BIRTH OF THE ANGLO-ZIONIST ALLIANCE 1914-1918

James Renton
MacMillan, £45

Weaving red threads

Paul Mason grew up, like me, within a bus ride of the scene of the Peterloo massacre, in the part of England described by an immigrant called Fred Engels, its travails helping nurture the theories of Karl Marx.

Paul has travelled a long way in every sense, winning prizes with his journalism on Bolivia, and interviewing British business leaders authoritatively for the BBC. Along the way he has not lost his accent, nor forgotten where he is from. But this is no sodden hack sentimentalising about a past he has escaped. Rather he uses it to unflinchingly face the realities of today.

The past is still with us, not just in the memories and stories that have shaped us; but in the way the struggle between capital and its opposite, labour, continues to be reproduced and determine human relations. It doesn't matter how far firms go in pursuit of profit, or states in trying to export their problems, nor how much we are told society has changed.

Paul Mason takes us from the weavers assembled in St Peter's Fields, Manchester in August 1819, to workers trying to organise in China today, where neither 'People's Republic' nor official 'communism' can disguise the exploitation going on. He finds a thread between silk weavers in India nowadays and those who rose in revolt in 1830 in Lyons, France (their slogan provides the title of his book). He also suggests that more than the Jacquard loom links those 19th century craftsmen and people working

with new Information Technology today.

Paul says he is no historian. His book doesn't follow conventional chronological order, nor attempt to trace a pattern of economic history over time. Rather he works like a weaver himself, back and forward to create his pictorial tapestry.

He is also a good journalist, not one of those hacks whose contacts are limited to their cab driver and the bar waiter. He gets the real story, whether listening to Chinese trade unionists or visiting an African slum. But when he deals with history, whether the way Lancashire workers organised in the 19th century, or how the Knights of Labour gave way to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) in the United States; whether writing about the women of the Paris Commune, or how the Bund developed in Poland and fought in the Warsaw ghetto revolt, Paul Mason has done his homework. His sympathy with those he writes about has both helped and complemented his research, providing information and understanding that some professional historians lack.

Live Working or Die Fighting is not just about past history or present battles however. While thankfully not presenting 'lessons' in the schoolmasterly way expected by the followers of sects, Paul Mason shares with us his excitement over the hopes for a better future shown in women demanding 'Bread and Roses' in a New England textile strike; workers taking

LIVE WORKING OR DIE FIGHTING HOW THE WORKING CLASS WENT GLOBAL

Paul Mason
Vintage Books
£8.99

over factories in France in 1936 and in Argentina in 2006; and the way both German social democracy in its heyday and the Bund, under very different conditions in Poland, created their own institutions and cultural life.

Despite the dead ends and disappointments into which the movement has been led, he sees it re-

Full Marx



Henryk Grossman was a communist activist and academic, who was born in Kraków in 1881 and died in Leipzig in 1950. Grossman was one of the most original and important theorists of Marxism in the first half of the 20th century, yet he is barely remembered within either the left or academia, in sharp contrast to his contemporaries like Georgy Lukács or Antonio Gramsci.

Rick Kuhn's intellectual biography recovers Grossman for Marxism, powerfully making the case for his significance both historically and today. It is a great work of scholarship, drawing on primary sources dispersed in archives along the complex diasporic routes which Grossman traversed: from Habsburg Galicia to imperial Austria, back to Poland, to pre-war Germany, Paris, London, New York and back to East Germany. Kuhn's sources – reflecting both the transnational experience of Ashkenazi Jewry and the internationalism of the Marxist milieu – are in Polish, German, Yiddish and English.

This biography is also a great work of Marxist scholarship. Although its focus is on one man's life, it sees this life enmeshed in wider webs of social reality: in history as the ebb and flow of class struggle. We get relatively little sense of Henryk the man, the husband, the father; instead we get Grossman the organic intellectual.

For many Jewish Socialist readers, the most interesting part of the book will be the description of Grossman's involvement in the Yiddish workers movement in Galicia before the First World War. Born into the assimilated, Polish-speaking Jewish bourgeoisie, Grossman became a Social Democrat and immersed himself in the Jewish proletariat, learning Yiddish for this purpose. Kuhn describes Grossman becoming an 'organic intellectual' of the working class during this period – a term he takes from Gramsci, who contrasts the labour movement's organic intellectuals to the institutionalised 'traditional intellectuals', who he saw as the 'filing clerks of the ruling class'. The process of immersion in the Yiddish masses by intellectuals from more privileged classes was a feature of the historical Jewish workers movement, and is worth exploring more thoroughly than Kuhn does. I remain unconvinced that Grossman, bourgeois-born and academic by profession, remained an 'organic intellectual' of the proletariat beyond his brief periods of grassroots party activism.

The growing Jewish socialist movement before the First World War had a complex place in Austro-Hungarian Social Democracy. The Austro-Marxist leadership of the 'General' (empire-wide) party developed a sophisticated theory of national cultural autonomy that led to a federalised party. Jews, however, were not recognised as a 'nationality', and so were expected to assimilate to the dominant nationality. In Galicia, this meant that the party (the

emerging afresh among immigrant cleaners organising at Canary Wharf and kids coming new to march against capitalism and war. This fine book should be read as a source of inspiration and eye-opener for the young, and a reminder to us older socialists of what we're supposed to be about.

Charlie Pottins

Polish Social Democratic Party – the PPSD) was dominated by an orientation towards Polish nationalism and an increasing convergence with the right-wing drift of the Pilsudski's Polish Socialist Party across the border in Prussia and the Kingdom of Poland. Proletarian Galician Jews in the party, with Grossman emerging as their theorist and spokesperson, took up the Bundist idea of Jewry as a nationality, deserving of the same autonomy, and eventually broke with the PPSD to form the Jewish Social Democratic Party (JPSD), which was never recognised by the General party.

The case of the JPSD exposes the limits of the Austro-Marxist account of nationality. Their idea of national cultural autonomy was enormously influential on Jewish movements like the Bund, Dubnow's folkists and Chaim Zhitlovsky's Yiddishism – with the key difference that these, like the young Grossman, saw Jews as a *nation* rather than simply a faith group that could assimilate into other nations. The conceptual language of that period had no way of thinking about *ethnicity*, something less metaphysically grounded than a nation but bound by a sense of common destiny which was not purely religious.

Although Grossman left Galicia and moved away from this perspective, developing a more orthodox Marxist position similar to Rosa Luxemburg's SDKPiL, he 'never formally repudiated the Jewish religion ... [On leaving Kraków], Grossman continued his formal affiliation to the Jewish community. For official purposes, this remained the case for the next 40 years [i.e. until his death].' After the First World War, he worked in the Statistical Office in the new Poland, but broke with it when it sought to fudge the census results to obscure the size of the Jewish and other non-Polish peoples in the new state – a re-run, in some ways, of his conflict with the Austro-Marxists, who were similarly wilfully blind to Jewish peoplehood.

It was in the next phase of his life, affiliated to the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, that Grossman developed his unique contribution to Marxism: his recovery of Marx's theories of political economy. To get a full measure of his achievement, you need to read Kuhn's book but, in short, what Grossman did was show that Marx's method was always to start with the most simple, general features of capitalism, and then build a model that was increasingly able to account for the concrete complexity of its specific instances. Thus for Grossman the heart, the essence, of capitalism is the relationship of exploitation involved in the extraction of profit from workers. The limit, therefore, of the self-expansion of capital is the resistance of the workers; the inherent contradictions and antagonisms involved in this lead to the tendency of the capitalists' rate of profit to fall. Capital constantly innovates to stave off this eventuality – by globalising the capitalist

market, by shifting into finance capital – but these only displace the coming crisis. (Reading this book as the credit crunch bit was a salutary experience!)

Grossman was a committed Leninist who joined the Communist movement in Poland after the October Revolution – at great personal cost: spells in prison and the end of his marriage. Kuhn portrays Grossman's recovery of Marxist economics as comparable to Lenin's recovery of Marxist politics and Lukács and Karl Korsch's recovery of Marxist philosophy. For me, Kuhn is absolutely right to put Grossman's achievement on this level, but I also believe that Grossman's theory opens up the possibility of a more radical reclaiming of Marxism than Lenin's. Lenin's politics ultimately disenfranchise the working class, handing the task of their emancipation to a vanguard party of intellectuals who alone are able to develop a correct consciousness of capitalism (in contrast to the workers, who remain trapped in trade union consciousness). Grossman, in contrast, illustrates Marx's dictum that only the proletariat, with its 'radical chains', can break these chains. By focusing on capitalism's essence, the production process, rather than its surface appearance, market relations, Grossman demonstrated the class power of the proletariat.

The radicalism of Grossman's economics was at odds with his political practice after 1918. With a few blips, he remained loyal to (if not always active in) the Communist movement, even as it moved further from Leninism in the Stalin years; indeed, his decision

to move to totalitarian East Germany after the Second World War consummated this loyalty. Kuhn is very good on how Stalinism maintained its grip on such a creative intellectual. In some ways, cocooned in academia, it seems as if Grossman compartmentalised his worldview. In his area of expertise, economics, he defended his radical theory against Stalinist orthodoxies; in other areas, he deferred to the Party's wisdom. The portrayal of his almost childish enthusiasm for the new proletarian GDR, and then of its gradual purging of all his closest associates after his death, is heartbreaking.

In describing the final years of Grossman's life, as an exile from Hitlerism in New York and then in Stalinist Leipzig after the war, Kuhn's biography allows us to see a more personal side to Grossman. The importance of friendship (glimpsed mainly through the accounts of his close friend, the writer Christina Stead) emerges; as with other émigrés (such as Hannah Arendt), friendship clearly had a key role in sustaining him in exile. His profound grief at the death of his sons and wife in the Holocaust comes across as a powerful theme too: although his wife and sons are more or less absent from the biography, their haunting presence in death is striking. The politics of friendship and, above all, the shadow of the Shoah as a scar across the Jewish experience of modernity are two things that exceed a class analysis and demonstrate the limits of Marxism as a tool for understanding our time.

Ben Gidley

Behind closed doors

The story of Spain's Jews who sustained their ancient traditions in secret during the Inquisition, under threat of torture and death, is an extraordinary and compelling one. But partly because it fits so perfectly the dominant narrative of Jewish history as a continuous litany of persecution, broken only by supposedly exceptional periods of coexistence, few of us explore beneath the superficial image of cowering families, acting out half-remembered customs behind closed doors.

Secret Judaism and the Spanish Inquisition builds up a much more three-dimensional picture of both their lives and of the intentions, actions and moral compass of the Inquisitors. These secret Jews are best known as Marranos but in Spain under the Inquisition, they were often referred to as 'Conversos' and 'New Christians', or members of the 'Hebrew Nation in Portugal'. These terms continued to be used to describe families generations after their ancestors had converted, indicating a general suspicion that those who had been baptised rather than face expulsion or torture and possible death at the stake were still, really, Jews.

Michael Alpert's detailed research is unusual in focusing on these later generations – the Marranos of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, when those accused of 'Judaizing' continued to be investigated and tried under arcane legal procedures that had not changed for 300 years. He draws heavily on the often meticulous records kept by the Inquisition courts, many of which are still available. These describe both the practices of the secret Jews (the 'crimes', as the church saw it) and their punishments, which were

attempts to persuade Judaizers to repent and return to Christianity.

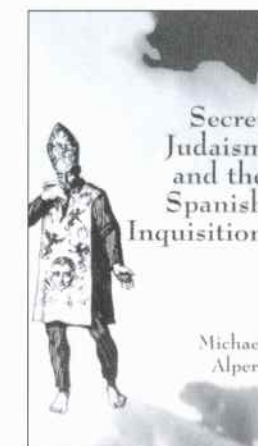
As well as confiscation of property, humiliation was the most common punishment – being forced to wear the sanbenito, the penitent's yellow robe, or being paraded around the town semi-naked on a donkey. The death penalty was reserved for the totally recalcitrant and even they were subjected in their final 24 hours to enormous pressure to 'confess', which could result in them being garroted – a quick and relatively painless death – rather than being burnt alive.

Torture was a means then, as now, to persuade people to name others, and expose to the Inquisitors whole families of Jews and the wider networks that supported them. One of the most enlightening aspects of this book is the picture it builds up of those networks and the persistent communication and support that came from ex-Marrano or Sephardi Jewish communities outside Spain and Portugal.

There were significant ex-Marrano communities in Leghorn in Italy, in Rouen and other towns in France, and in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, amongst others. The book would have benefited from a few well-drawn maps to show the locations of these communities and illustrate the vivid descriptions of the dangerous journeys undertaken by Marranos to escape the Inquisitors, as well as the trade routes between Conversos in the Iberian peninsula and their counterparts in Brazil, Antwerp, and London.

This is an important book, which tells a fascinating, thought-provoking and multi-faceted story.

Julia Bard

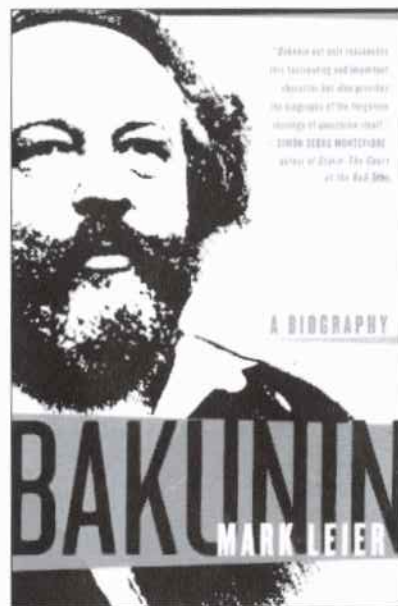


HENRYK GROSSMAN AND THE RECOVERY OF MARXISM
Rick Kuhn
University of Illinois Press,
£14.99

SECRET JUDAISM AND THE SPANISH INQUISITION
Michael Alpert
Five Leaves,
£14.99

ON THE SHELF

Brave
oppositionists
come under
RAF SALKIE's
spotlight this
time round



Three books, this time about political activists (all men, which is worrying, though regular readers will remember that I sang Emma Goldman's praises a few issues ago). Michael Bakunin was an anarchist like Goldman, and also like her, a larger than life character. He is mostly remembered nowadays for his dispute with Karl Marx. Mark Leier's *Bakunin: A biography* (Thomas Dunne books, 2006) is a highly intelligent and readable study of the man and 19th century revolutionary politics across Europe. The book gives brilliant sketches of the French revolution, the war that followed, and the uprisings

of 1848. Not only that, it explains convincingly why so many thoughtful socialists at that time were inspired by the philosophy of Hegel – something which has long puzzled me.

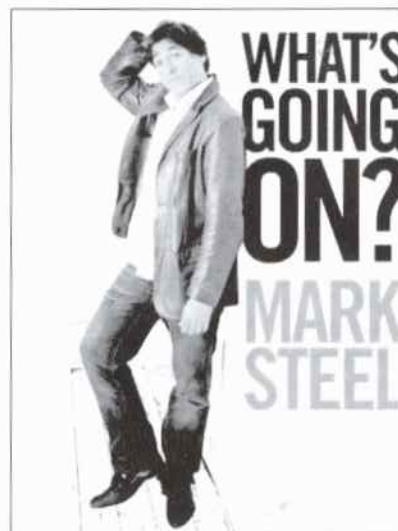
Bakunin is important because he was a committed revolutionary but saw the dangers of Marxism earlier than most and spoke out about them with great eloquence. He distrusted vanguard parties and argued strongly that seizing state power was not a step towards building a socialist society. Whether he had a coherent alternative is, of course, controversial: anarchists are very good at criticising authoritarianism in other socialists, but less successful at formulating a strategy for creating a world free of exploitation and oppression. On the other hand, anyone who expects an anarchist to come up with a convincing strategy is missing the

point: when the conditions are right, ordinary people are perfectly capable of doing it for themselves, as the Republican part of Spain showed in the 1930s.

Bakunin's writings include some nasty remarks about Jews, a feature of his work which Leier accepts is 'vile and disturbing' – though he adds that Bakunin's antisemitic statements were rare, and never turned into generalised attacks on Jews. He also notes that Marx was just as bad in his way, calling the German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle 'the Jewish nigger'. I'm not sure if Leier is too kind to Bakunin, but I strongly

recommend that you read this excellent book and decide for yourself.

Mark Steel is another force of nature, as anyone who saw him recently at the Jewish Socialists' Group's comedy evening can confirm (see report page 4). His latest book, *What's going on? The meanderings of a comic mind in confusion* (Simon & Schuster, £12.99), is clever, funny, sad and fascinating. The book asks so many urgent questions about politics, has so many comic stories, and is so bleak about the author's divorce, that I can't summarise it in a few words. One of the best sections describes how the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and



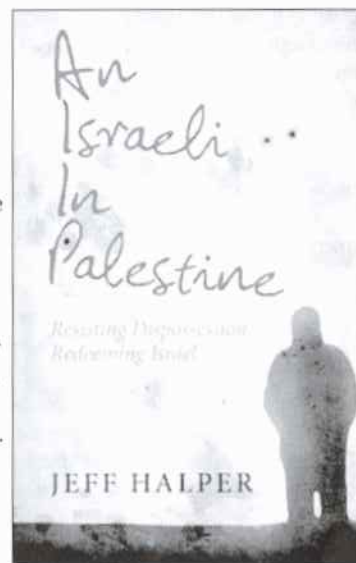
Respect imploded; another one asks why Labour politicians consistently sell out.

Among many breathtaking stories is one about Peter Hain, who Steel interviewed for a documentary about the Anti-Nazi League and Rock against Racism. The then Northern Ireland Minister declared that his involvement in those campaigns was one of the proudest achievements of his life, then spent 10 minutes on the phone trying to persuade an errant Labour backbencher to vote for the £30 billion upgrade for Trident missiles. Once off the phone, Hain sent his best wishes to his former SWP comrades from the good old days. That, says Steel, is what happens if you try to change the system from the inside.

And so to Israel, where our third activist, Jeff Halper, is

Professor of Anthropology and head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (see www.icahd.org where you can read Halper's recent account of his arrest after sailing into Gaza to expose the Israeli blockade). His book is called *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting dispossession, redeeming Israel* (Pluto, £16.99). Halper insists passionately that demolishing Palestinian homes is disgusting, something that every reader of Jewish Socialist would no doubt agree with. He reminds us that only a tiny fraction of the 18,000 demolitions were collective punishments as a response to acts of terrorism. He also argues that this is part of a deliberate policy of nishul (dispossession), pursued by all Israeli governments since 1948, which aims at displacing Arabs from Israel.

Halper delivers a scathing critique of the idea of a Jewish state, because 'ethnocracies' which privilege one section of their population will always meet resistance. His proposal for the way forward is not at all startling: end the occupation so that the Palestinians get more than the dispersed 'cantons' (as Ariel Sharon called them) of territory which the Oslo accords left them. Then move towards a regional confederation, like the European Union, so that Israel and Palestine can start to have normal political and economic ties with the other countries of the Middle East. Many in Israel would support this, I think, including much of the country's economic elite, who could make a lot of money trading with their neighbours. It isn't socialism, but I think that Mark Steel, and even Michael Bakunin, would give it a resounding cheer.



ARMAGEDDON OUTA HERE

Republican Senator John McCain dissociated himself from Pastor John Hagee back in May because of the hell-fire pastor's attitude to Catholics and preaching that the Almighty brought forth Hitler to punish the Jews for their sins and make them go to Israel. 'Obviously, I find these remarks and others deeply offensive and indefensible,' McCain said.

Pastor Hagee had apologised to Catholics, but not to Muslims he offended, nor to New Orleans folk for saying Hurricane Katrina was their punishment for condoning homosexuality. No need to apologise to Jews. Many have condemned Hagee's repugnant views, but some orthodox leaders seem comfortable with his Holocaust theology. The pastor blames America's economic ills on an international conspiracy involving the Rothschilds, but he raised funds to settle Russian Jews in Israel. San Antonio B'nai Brith gave him its Humanitarian of the Year Award. Founder of Christians United For Israel, Hagee has made 22 trips there without apparently finding time for Palestinians, Muslim or Christian. On a recent visit he said giving any part of Jerusalem back to Palestinians would be like 'turning it over to the Taliban'.

'Israel has no better friends in the world than Christian Zionists,' enthused Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu, greeting the guest preacher. Frightening, considering Hagee envisages a nuclear war with Iran as Armageddon, with two thirds of Israeli Jews wiped out and the rest converting to Christianity to speed the Second Coming. Maybe the Texas pastor's \$6 million cheque made this easier to overlook. Settler Rabbi Shlomo Riskin said the rapprochement with Christianity was a modern miracle.

For any parliamentarians and student union officials still confused between antisemites and anti-Zionists, we have a rough guide: those who get stopped at Ben Gurion airport are anti-Zionists

FASHION COP

When I was a Zionist youth no one came back from an Israel trip without a keffiyeh (Arab scarf). It might bear a different pattern to the Palestinian one, but no one doubted its origin, any more than that of the *tuv* (Arab drum) or even *finjan* (coffee pot) that people brought back as souvenirs.

Once a symbol of the 1936 Arab revolt, the keffiyeh has been romantic and practical wear for youth hiking, affectation for student protestors (swathing your face may not keep out tear gas, but aunts and uncles wouldn't recognise you on telly),

vacuous fashion icon, and back again. But now just wearing anything that looks like a keffiyeh could get you in trouble. In the Land of the Free, anyway.

America's Dunkin' Donuts chain stumbled into the war on terrorism when an ad featured glam celebrity chef Rachael Ray promoting its iced coffee wearing a chic black and white scarf. She was 'casually promoting the symbol of Palestinian terrorism and the intifada, the keffiyeh,' claimed a right-wing commentator. 'Jihadi chic!' said blogger and broadcaster Michelle Malkin, 'hate couture'.

Dunkin' Donuts insisted Rachael Ray had only been wearing a paisley scarf, but it pulled its advert to be on the safe side. Michelle Malkin, née Magalang, is a favourite of conservative media. The daughter of Filipino immigrants, she says America should stop granting citizenship to children of immigrants just because they are born there. She is the author of books: *How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals, and Other Foreign Menaces* (2002), was a best-seller, followed by *In Defense of Internment: The Case for 'Racial Profiling' in World War II and the War on Terror* (2004), and *Unhinged: Exposing Liberals Gone Wild* (2005). We all have our own opinions of who and what is unhinged, but I guess her version pays better.

AGGRO PROCESS

Troubled times for the Rubashkin family, owners of America's biggest supplier of kosher meat, Agriprocessor. First there was that video released by animal rights protesters, showing cattle with throats ripped by meat hooks, and cows struggling to rise and escape after shechita. Seems some religious leaders had already been to Washington asking regulators to go easy on the firm, but bad publicity must have put some people off meat or persuaded them to find another supplier.

Then in May, Agriprocessor's slaughterhouse at Pointsville, Iowa, was raided and some 400 'undocumented' immigrant workers were arrested. The Rubashkins complained they were getting a bad press, and insisted they had never knowingly employed undocumented workers. But now, continuing its opposition to unions, the company is going to the Supreme Court, arguing that a vote by workers at its Brooklyn warehouse to join the union does not count, because 17 or the 21 voting were undocumented 'illegals'. Reminds me of the boy who killed both parents, but asked a court for mercy on the grounds that he was an orphan. Not that firms which use workers' 'illegality' to deny them decent treatment don't exist in Britain – but here it is done more privately.