

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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JEWISH ★ SOCIALIST

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THE FIRST WAR AGAINST FASCISM

Bedouins in Israel ■ East Europe's Jews ■ Slavery today
Yemeni workers ■ Burial rights ■ Jewish comedy

As we mark the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, we recall that left-wing parties in Britain were very uncertain about their attitude towards it. Was it in essence an anti-fascist war or inter-imperialist rivalry? And in either case, what should socialists actually be calling for? The Communist Party characterised it as an anti-fascist war at first, but the line changed and it was a long time before that perspective prevailed again. In their early enthusiasm to combat Hitlerism, many CP members enlisted to fight. Several of them had already seen military action against fascism. They found themselves being given the most menial roles in the army, considered suspect for being 'premature anti-fascists'. The battleground they already knew was Spain, where the anti-fascist forces were supported through a remarkable display of workers' solidarity. Some 35,000 volunteers for liberty (including a disproportionately high number of Jews), from 50 countries, were willing to sacrifice their lives to defend democracy and social progress against fascist barbarism. On page 22 Judith Lesser Cravitz recalls the heroism of members of her own family and the lasting political impact it has had across generations.

Under the current economic recession, workers' sense of international solidarity has been severely tested as unscrupulous employers have deliberately used vulnerable migrant labour to undercut wages; we have seen how easily the simple desire to defend livelihoods can slide dangerously into 'British Jobs for British Workers'. This slogan may have slipped off the tongue of a Labour Prime Minister but it is today's fascists who embrace it most strongly. And David Landau on page 4 demonstrates how they are benefiting from this atmosphere. But, as Mike Gerber recalls on page 16, an earlier struggle among Yemeni workers in

British towns shows how a principled defence of workers rights which simultaneously fights racism is possible.

Longstanding, deeply-rooted social and political values can be overturned so quickly under recession, where hardship induces bitterness, resentment and a search for scapegoats. Charlie Pottins unpicks the process that unfurled over four short and tumultuous years in Germany following the 1929 economic crash, and shows who helped the Nazis on the road to power.

Questions of solidarity, and the imperative of helping those lacking power and resources have raised themselves sharply in the Jewish world since 1989, when the Jewish communities of the Eastern bloc, stepped tentatively out of the Stalinist shadows into an uncertain future. Under repressive governments, their cause had been cynically championed by Zionists who wanted to whisk these communities to freedom in the 'promised land'. But at the point of freedom, these communities were determined to rebuild their lives where they were. They called for solidarity and support from their cousins in the West. On page 10 Tony Lerman describes and analyses the responses they received.

International solidarity, often under difficult circumstances, is a proud feature of the history of socialist movements across the world. Sometimes, though, people requiring our solidarity may be hidden from view. Rahila Gupta's descriptions of trafficked human beings, victimised by and fighting against slavery in Britain today, alongside Michael Ellman's description of the current challenge to slavery in Mali (page 8), are shocking exposés of the brutality we must all fight against.

On the Jewish New Year 5770, we look forward to a year where solidarity unites us, enhances our collective strength, and brings real freedom from oppression.

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Cover: 'The claw of the Italian invader tries to enslave us'. Anti-fascist poster by Amado Oliver Mauprivez, Madrid, 1937

Challenging Israel on all fronts



A gay, Mizrahi, Israeli peace and human rights activist is awaiting sentence for an anti-occupation action. Ezra Nawi was arrested trying to stop a military bulldozer from destroying the homes of Palestinians in the South Hebron region. His attorney, Leah Tzemel, submitted a letter of support signed by more than 20,000 people from all over the world. The prosecution, on the other hand, asked the court to give Ezra a lengthy sentence.

Before his hearing, Ezra Nawi made this statement: 'I have been harassed and targeted throughout the years, because I embody three elements which provoke bigotry in the Israeli society: I am a homosexual, I am a Mizrahi [oriental] Jew, and I devote all my time to fighting for the human rights of Arab Palestinians... I did what my heart told me to do. Looking back, I know that what my friends and I have done is changing the harsh reality of the occupation in the whole area of South Hebron. I feel that now the Israeli authorities are punishing me on a personal level. I would like to believe that my personal adversity will inspire and motivate individuals to actively oppose the occupation.'

Further details at: www.FreeEzra.org

Dawn raid

A small protest vigil was planned for the night of 29th August in front of the tents of two families evicted from their homes in East Jerusalem after many years residence. Instead of the expected few dozen, hundreds of Israelis, Palestinians and international activists arrived.

Nasser Gawi, one of those evicted, recounted how 400 police officers appeared at 4 o'clock in the morning, and masked special anti-terror police blew the doors open with explosives. The 53 members of the extended family were thrown on to the street. Since then, they have been living with their possessions and mattresses under an awning, opposite their home.

The family are refugees from West Jerusalem, who were settled in the east of the city by the Jordanian authorities in 1956. The judicial reason provided for the eviction was that 100 years ago, Jews acquired some of these plots. Yet in West Jerusalem there are hundreds of houses which belonged to Arabs, who were driven out during the 1948 war. No Jews living in them now have been evicted, and not a single house has been restored to its Arab owners. Israeli peace activists from Gush Shalom have condemned the evictions as 'part of a plan to "Judaize" East Jerusalem', through a campaign 'of ethnic cleansing'.

Still on the fiddle

Whitechapel, Mayn Vaytshepl - Yiddish songs of London, is a new CD just released by Vivi Lachs and Klezmer Klub. The title refers to one of the Yiddish songs of London, full of places, people, politics, history and a good dose of humour. The CD comes with full lyrics, translations and historical context. You can hear samples at www.myspace.com/klezmerklub

The CD is available at £10 + £2 postage direct from Vivi Lachs, email: vivilachs@gmail.com

Against the stream

While Italy's national government has adopted more draconian measures towards 'illegal immigrants', Tuscany's regional council has moved in the opposite direction. On 1st June Tuscany passed a new immigration law which was strongly opposed by centre-right politicians. It grants free access to health care and other forms of assistance, such as meals at municipal cafeterias and beds in municipally run shelters.

Although the new measure does make a distinction between legal and illegal immigrants, it seeks to give added support to those who have permits to live and work in the region.

Centre-right politicians of the People of Freedom Party say they will collect signatures calling for a referendum to counter the new law. The national government has

threatened to test the law's constitutionality which, its opponents say, will make Tuscany a haven for illegal migrants.

President of the Tuscan region, Claudio Martini, denies that Tuscany will become 'a haven for illegal immigrants'. He said: 'We will, instead, stop a war against the poorer people in our region, a war that has already begun thanks to the budget cuts in the welfare sector by the national government.'

Meanwhile, in Israel in July, 1,000 people protested in Tel Aviv against ongoing plans for the mass expulsion of migrant workers and refugees by Israel's immigration authorities. This follows the formation of a new immigration police force, the Oz unit, which began operations on 1st July, detaining 220 people in its first two weeks of existence.

Points of contention



Appeal judges have ruled that a London Jewish school's admissions regulations are unlawful because their test of Jewishness amounts to racial discrimination. The state-funded Jews Free School (JFS) rejected a boy whose father was Jewish because it did not recognise his mother's conversion to Judaism. She had converted in Israel. JFS gives preference to applicants whose 'Jewish status' is confirmed by the United Synagogue - which requires that the mother is Jewish. The school has pupils from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds but whose mothers are, in its terms, Jewish.

Faith schools are allowed to discriminate on religious grounds, but the Court of Appeal said this case involved a test of ethnicity - which was unlawful.

In response to this case, the school has published new rules with a points system by which they will offer priority places. Children

will need a minimum of three points to be considered for priority. Points are awarded for attendance in synagogue on high holy days, with an extra point available for attendance on more minor festivals. The new rules make no distinction between attendance at orthodox and non-orthodox synagogues. Attendance at a Jewish primary school or voluntary work for Jewish communal, charitable or welfare organisation can also add to your tally.

Parents will need a certificate signed by a rabbi confirming the child's level of religious practice. It has not been clarified whether children will lose points for going to football matches on shabbos or having an anti-Zionist cousin.

The Jewish Socialists' Group is holding a public meeting about minorities and faith schools in the wake of the JFS case at the Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1 at 7.30pm on Sunday 4th October. All welcome.

MORE THAN A PROTEST VOTE

The far right made their breakthrough at the recent European elections, and not just in Britain. **DAVID LANDAU** assesses the implications for anti-fascists

There is a spectre haunting Europe. And it certainly isn't communism! The right wing parties of either mainstream, nationalist and fascist varieties have been the victors. Racism has prevailed. Social Democracy is likely to be more craven, adapting even further to the right wing agendas, and genuine socialist and working class movements are as divided as ever.

Some will try to talk down the significance of the results achieved by the British National Party but we should recognise that gaining an MEP or two has been the prize that the BNP have been working towards for the last few years. Missing that goal would have hit them hard. Gaining it is a big success. Apart from the boost to their morale and their coffers, it raises their profile considerably as a serious political party.

Their leader Nick Griffin has worked hard at sanitising the BNP's image, but many will be familiar with Griffin's Holocaust denial, his racism, his talk of white power and his wielding of boots and fists. The pedigree of the other successful BNP candidate – Andrew Brons – may be less well known. He was a leading member of the National Front in the 1970s and, before that, the National Socialist Movement. As an activist in an organisation of that name, he can hardly deny his Nazi past.

The BNP received high votes in particular areas which, if generalised, would have given them far more MEPs in other EU constituencies. In Barking & Dagenham 19.4%, Stoke-on-Trent 17.6%, Thurrock 17.5% and so on. They increased their vote from 7.9% to 16.7% in Barnsley, for example, and from 6.8% to 13% in South Tyneside. They also gained county councillors for the first time and came second in many more county wards across the country.

So why were they successful? In the first instance they benefited from the fact that many people did not vote at all. The BNP increased their share of the vote everywhere but in most places they actually gained fewer votes when compared with the last EU elections. But so did all the other parties. There was a mass abstention which reflects the current level of contempt that people have for politicians and the UK political system.

Secondly though, there is both a hard core of racism and a hostility to migrants that has been heightened by the recession. This is reflected in a recent YouGov poll in which a sample of voters for all parties were asked their opinions on specific matters, and also through the ideas circulating around 'British Jobs for British Workers'.

Thirdly, the BNP have worked local communities more consistently than the mainstream parties, playing on local fears.

Some commentators have characterised votes for the BNP as protest votes but this does not stand up. The ballot paper was a mile long, with loads of candidates you could vote for to protest. Indeed, this is reflected in the relative success of the Green Party who generally increased their actual vote and not just their share of the vote. But the biggest form of protest was abstention. Those who voted for the BNP

generally knew what their themes were – anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, racist, protect our Christian British way of life, and so on. Their 'literature' did not attempt to hide this. This does not mean that the majority of BNP voters were actually fascists but, for them, fear and loathing of 'the other' makes them more than disgruntled protest voters.

Neither should we ignore UKIP, the party that pushed Labour into third place. When I described them in an earlier article as a busted flush, I was clearly wrong. We have to recognise how racist UKIP is. In an interview in The Guardian on 6th June, UKIP leader Nigel Farage talked about his political hero – Enoch Powell – and his admiration for Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, saying: 'Enoch Powell was an extraordinary fellow. I admire him for having the guts to talk about immigration, society and how we want to live.' Anti-immigration scaremongering featured significantly in UKIP's election propaganda, with huge advertising hoardings declaring 'Stop Unlimited Immigration – Take Control of Our Borders'.

The situation for the fascists across the rest of Europe was very patchy. In certain countries they made frightening gains. In Holland the extreme right populist Freedom Party (PVV) gained 17% of the vote winning 4 out of 25 seats. In Hungary the fascist party Jobbik – Movement for a Better Hungary, whose big targets are the Roma and who include antisemitism in their repertoire, gained nearly 15% of the vote and 3 out of 22 seats. Other significant gains were in Austria and Bulgaria.

The situation in Italy was more confused though. The Northern League made gains but Nick Griffin's friend and mentor, Roberto Fiore, lost his seat, as did another fascist MEP. And in Denmark, Germany and France the fascists were knocked back, losing a substantial number of seats they had gained in the past. Strange formations also emerged, like the 'Anti-Zionist List' in France, which could have been called more accurately the Antisemitic List. Garnering support from the far right, some Islamic fundamentalists, some Holocaust deniers, Catholic fundamentalists and the odd misguided lefty, they won 1.3% of the vote in France.

However, even where the fascists may have retreated, right wing politics remains in the ascendancy. Who needs a fascist party in Italy when all the fascists have joined up in power with Berlusconi, who made gains in this election? In Italy they are prosecuting the captain and crew of a ship for rescuing drowning migrants. We have rightly condemned Griffin for saying 'sink migrant boats' but in Italy it seems it is pretty much government policy!

The results in Britain are undoubtedly demoralising. We cannot overcome this by denying the magnitude of the problem. We need to review the practices over previous periods, and encourage serious debate about the way forward, rather than the sectarian carping that is currently the discourse between the two main umbrella groups – Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and Hope not Hate (or Together). We must fight for a new unity between

Together and UAF groupings locally and lots of other groups and networks, building anti-fascism from the grassroots up. A united movement will not be built from above with a central command structure.

Within minutes of Andrew Brons being elected in Yorkshire, government minister Andy Burnham was on the radio. He started out by saying how awful it was that a fascist had been elected but then went on to say, 'we must listen to what the electorate are telling us about immigration'. In other words respond to the fascists by attacking migrants even more. This kind of response must be opposed. We need to challenge racist ideas and in particular take up the challenge thrown down by the BNP and UKIP on the question of immigration. We must challenge immigration controls at all levels and make the argument in the community and in the labour movement. The dangers have been made very clear with the emergence of slogans such as 'British Jobs for British Workers'. In a recession it is easy to suggest that migrants are the cause of the problem rather than seeing it as a global recession, which is forcing workers to move all over the world in search of work.

Currently the two anti-fascist umbrella groups in Britain share many of the same faults. Mainstream politics is so discredited, yet both campaigns still rely too much on a relationship with mainstream politicians rather than community and working class

organisations. Anti-fascists should keep a distance and openly support campaigns against cuts, for example, even if that means upsetting local politicians some of them would like to see on-board.

Racists and bigots throughout the country will gain confidence from the election results to assert their racism, and abuse and attack people. Anti-racists and anti-fascists need to think about community self-defence, and how to involve the unions in this too. Some people are predicting that the BNP will start marching again. I think that this is unlikely as it will be easier to organise against them and associate them with provocations and street battles. That is not what they want right now. But if they do take the streets again we certainly have to organise against them, and local campaigns must oppose their probable increased efforts on paper sales. The fascists plan to focus on young people. Nick Griffin said some time ago that the BNP would be turning up outside secondary schools and colleges. We must make sure they are chased off, but we must also try and reach young people ourselves.

A united, intelligent anti-fascist movement is necessary but not sufficient. What is absolutely vital is a socialist movement or party to offer an alternative to the discredited bourgeois parties, making it worthwhile for people to vote, but more importantly, giving them something to engage with in building and fighting for a new world.

YOU TAKE THE LOW ROAD

President Obama has made it clear that he expects Israel to cease all settlement construction. However, in the guise of 'aid to Palestinians', the United States continues to fund other facts on the ground that support the settlements. The growth of the segregated road network connecting the settlements to Israel is partially funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and is a major obstacle in establishing a Palestinian state.

Since 2003 the Israelis have been building 'Israeli-only' and 'Palestinian-only' roads in the West Bank. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon described these roads as 'transportational contiguity', now called 'fabric of life' roads by the Israeli government.

The Israeli-only roads facilitate high-speed transit from the settlements into Israel proper, enhancing the Israeli economy with the speedy passage of commercial products to market, and commuters to their jobs. Most settlers work inside Israel, and many 'made in Israel' export products are either manufactured or have value added in settlement industrial zones and agricultural areas.

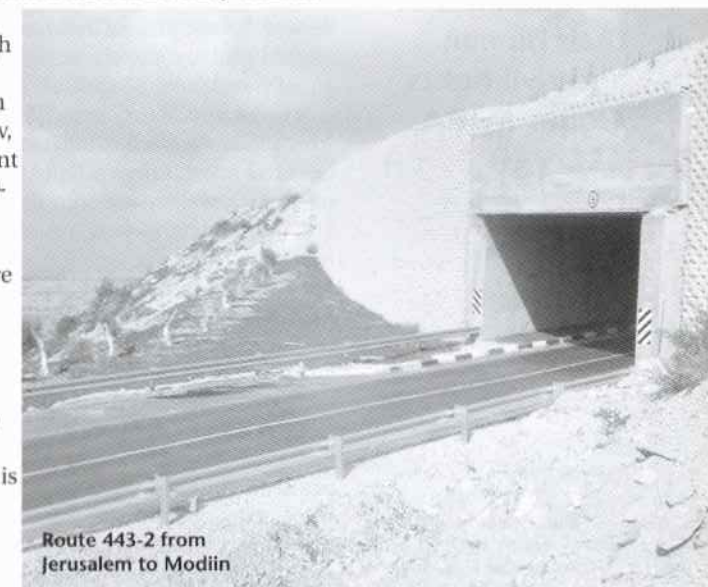
Israeli government policies are aimed at segregating Arab and Jewish traffic throughout most of the Occupied Territories and at creating four Israeli-only highways cutting east/west and north/south corridors through the West Bank. The east/west annexed strips were on the Camp David 2000 maps that President Arafat rejected. Route 1 from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea is already complete. It will become segregated when the adjacent Arab

road is completed through the E1 Zone between Jerusalem and the luxurious Central West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Adumim (population 35,000).

Route 5 from Tel Aviv was completed in 2008 as a segregated road to the settlement of Ariel (population 25,000) in the Central West Bank, and construction is continuing on the next phase to the Jordan Valley. Route 90, running the length of the Jordan Valley, and Route 60, running north and south from Jerusalem, are also rapidly becoming restricted roads.

The Arab roads are lined with walls and barbed wire when they transit a settler zone. They connect Palestinian towns and villages through tunnels under the settler roads and, in one case, Gvat Ze'ev, under the settlement itself through a 400-metre (1,200-ft) tunnel. The segregated roads are even inside Jerusalem, connecting Palestinian ghetto neighbourhoods to Ramallah. A notorious example is the walled-in community of Bir Naballa, a largely

FRED SCHLOMKA challenges the United States' support for segregated roads in the West Bank



Route 443-2 from Jerusalem to Modiin



The segregated road from Jerusalem to Anata

Bedouin Jerusalem suburb of about 7,000 people that was a major commercial centre until the Israelis enclosed it and restricted access.

The Israeli government, and apparently the Obama administration, justify these roads since they enable Palestinians to travel between the enclaves without encountering checkpoints or settlers. This allows Israel to remove a few checkpoints, gaining

political points, while containing the Palestinian population in essentially large open-air prisons while the settlements and their connecting roads continue to expand.

A USAID official in Israel recently argued that since the roads facilitate more efficient transport between the Palestinian areas, the West Bank economy will improve and the Palestinian Authority will be strengthened. However this line of reasoning ignores the rationale for the roads in the first place, and supports the permanent institutionalisation of the Israel's Occupation infrastructure into an improved version of Apartheid, or 'Hafrada' as the Israeli government calls it. 'Hafrada' means separation in Hebrew, as 'Apartheid' means separation in Afrikaans.

Israel has established the 'Geder Hafrada' (Separation Wall), and 'Kvishei Hafrada' (Separation Roads). The roads separate Palestinians and Israelis in a manner that never existed in South Africa even at the height of Apartheid. All South Africans mingled on the roads, in the cities and the workplaces, despite the constitutional discrimination, travel restrictions and violence.

The relationship between USAID and the Palestinian contractors who build the roads is also questionable. By providing millions of dollars per year to West Bank contractors, the Obama administration is continuing relationships with companies affiliated with Palestinian Authority officials, awarding many contracts to their relatives and friends.

On 22nd April, according to a Reuters report, over \$2 million in USAID contracts have been awarded to companies owned by Tarek Abbas and Yasser Mahmoud Abbas, sons of the Palestinian president. Colorado-based engineering giant CH2M HILL is also the prime contractor for many USAID projects in the West Bank and subcontracts to these local companies. USAID officials have stated that the contracts were awarded through competitive tendering.

Thus while President Obama supports the Arab League peace initiative and has called for a cessation of all settlement construction, there remains this hidden and insidious aspect of the Occupation that USAID continues to support. The president should make public his reasons for financially supporting the roads, which, in addition to the settlements, are rapidly foreclosing any possibility of a viable and fully sovereign Palestinian state.

political and economic rights of tens of thousands of Israeli citizens.

The 1950 Law of Return states that 'Israel (is) a home not only for all its inhabitants but also for all members of the Jewish people everywhere', and, '1. Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an oleh [immigrant]'. While the term 'home ... for all its inhabitants' may create the impression that this is not discriminatory, various documents and legal rulings suggest otherwise. In a letter sent to his son, David Ben-Gurion wrote in 1937: 'Negev land is reserved for Jewish citizens ... We must expel Arabs and take their places.' And in 1948 '... We have to remove the Arabic names for political reasons; as much as we do not recognise the political ownership of the Arabs over the land we also do not recognise their spiritual ownership [of the land] and their name' Further legislation concerning the state's right to the ownership of land and its implementation – though open to interpretation – confirms Ben-Gurion's intentions.

It is important to understand this legislation in the context of Israeli policies and actions, such as the treatment of Jewish claims to land ownership. For example, the Abandoned Areas Ordinance No 12 of 5708 - 1948 defines abandoned areas as: '1. ... any area or place conquered by or surrendered to armed forces or deserted by all or part of its inhabitants, and which has been declared by order to be an abandoned area. 2. The Government may, by order, declare any (such) area (as described above) ... abandoned area for the purposes of this Ordinance and any regulation made thereunder.'

Having declared itself a Jewish state, and being the 'conqueror', it is difficult to interpret this law as applying equally to non-Jews, which is confirmed by a mass of successive relevant legislation.

Of particular importance are the following: The Absentees' Property Law (1950); The Land Acquisition (Validation of Acts and Compensation) Law (1953); Absentees' Property (Eviction) Law (1958); Absentees' Property (Amendment No 3); (Release and Use of Endowment Property) Law (1965); and Absentees' Property (Compensation) Law (1973). The consequences of the implementation of these laws are all too evident and tell a story of inequality before the law, discrimination and an outrageous denial of human and civil rights.

Prior to 1948 some 80 - 90,000 Bedouins lived in the Negev. After the war only 10 - 11,000 remained; the rest either fled or were expelled. In time, many returned to the Negev from Gaza and the West Bank. Between 1948 and 1955, under military rule and backed by the 1948, 1950 and 1953 laws, Israel proceeded to expropriate Bedouin land, forcibly removing the inhabitants to an area which became known as Siyag (fence).

Since the 1960s Israel have built seven government-planned towns to which it plans to transfer most of the Negev Bedouins (now numbering some 160,000) either by 'carrot' – compensation and welfare services in the towns – or by 'stick' – forced evacuations, demolition of 'illegal' property, destruction of crops and livestock. Although many have taken up the offer, some 80,000 remain in unrecognised villages, primarily inside Siyag, though some are also scattered outside Siyag's boundaries. While 28% of

the Negev population are Bedouin, they only own 3% of the land. Unrecognised villages (currently 34) lack basic infrastructure such as running water, electricity, sewage, healthcare and kindergartens.

A report published in the Negev Coexistence Forum Newsletter (April 2008) recorded the demolition of buildings and destruction of crops between July and December 2007. These included 44 demolition orders to the village of Alsera; the village of Twayil-Abu Jarwal was demolished for the 9th, 10th and 11th time.

According to Physicians for Human Rights, only 10 clinics exist, none of which can store medicine due to lack of electricity for refrigerators. This, plus the lack of a permanent 'mother and child' service and non-existent public transport may account for inequalities in health. A recent Health Ministry report revealed infant mortality rates three times higher than the national average and a 56% anaemia rate in infants.

The issues of relocation and compensation have become more significant since the 1980 Negev Land Acquisition (Peace Treaty with Egypt) Law. While this facilitated large scale confiscation orders of Bedouin land for 'military use' without appeal, it also provided grounds for dealing with the question of compensation. The evacuation of Bedouins could now be compared with evacuation of

Jews from the Gaza Strip. However, in a report written for Adva (Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel) Shlomo Swirski and Yael Hasson argued that, while NIS1.5 billion were offered to 3,000 Bedouin claimants, NIS4.1 billion were offered to 1,700 evacuees from Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip.

It's more difficult to make such a comparison for forced evacuation. According to International Law, settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, live there temporarily and illegally. As Dr Alan Baker, (the Foreign Ministry's legal adviser, and himself a settler, said in Ha'aretz (14 July 2009) '... my home is not registered with the Israel Lands Administration which is the case for all settlements. Instead, I have a long-term rental agreement that is contingent on any future peace agreement. This is the condition by which all settlers must abide.' Arguably, since Israel is not a signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, it is not bound by its Article 8 which considers the 'transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population' to be a war crime. However, while Oslo (right or wrong) may be terminally ill, Israel has not yet officially denounced it and hence, in accordance with its Articles, all occupied territories are only temporarily administered by Israel, pending a future peace agreement.

All human rights conventions, organisations and associations are united in their condemnation of Israel's denial of human, social, political and economic rights to a large sector of Israeli citizens. It has used legal wizardry to circumvent policies which are at best discriminatory and at worst racist, breaking both its own laws and international laws and conventions to which it has signed up.



Bedouin children from the unrecognised villages of the Negev.

Photo: The Advocacy Project

LEGALISED THEFT

A profound contradiction in Israeli law deprives Bedouin communities of their human and civil rights, argues MIRA GLOVER

The state of Israel's refusal to award legal recognition to the Bedouin communities, not only has humanitarian consequences in the form of the denial of basic human and civil rights, it brings into question the compliance of the state with the rule of law, which is a prerequisite of democratic rule. Due legal process is the basis for the provision of human and civil rights. The lack of due process denies these rights, as in the case of the 'invisible' people who live in unrecognised (or, as the state of Israel views them 'illegal') villages.

Two contradictory principles remain irreconcilable. On the one hand, the state's Declaration of Independence holds that 'the state of Israel ... will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race, or sex'. On the other hand, as Supreme Court Chief Justice Shimon Agranat argued in 1965 (It) is a 'constitutional given ... Not only is Israel a ... country, characterized by a government of the people, it was also established as "a Jewish state in the land of Israel".'

So is Israel a state of all its citizens or is it, first and foremost, a Jewish state? This is not a purely academic question. It is at the heart of state legislation, policies and court rulings. Indeed, since 1948 this conundrum has encouraged consecutive Israeli governments to engage in legal wizardry

allowing them to circumvent the first principle in favour of the second.

One such example of imaginative legislation concerns the ownership, administration and use of land. Over 90% of Israel's land is owned either directly or indirectly by the state. Two major bodies have been entrusted with the administration of state lands and their uses. The Israel Land Administration (ILA) is a government authority responsible for the administration and use of some 71% of land belonging directly to the state. In addition, 13% – 2.2 million dunams – of the land is owned and administered by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose charter contains a prohibition on the sale of any portion of its lands to non-Jews.

Following test cases and petitions brought to the courts by (the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Adalah (Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel) and the Arab Centre of Alternative Planning on behalf of Arab Israelis wishing to purchase land, the Supreme Court is currently considering the legality of this prohibition, though this might only apply to JNF land administered by the ILA.

The implication of imaginative legislation on appropriation and expropriation of land belonging to absentee owners has even more far reaching consequences. In practice, such legislation has undermined the livelihoods and civil, social,

There is more information at the website of the Regional Council of the Inrecognized Villages in the negev, at www.rcuv.net

THE UNBROKEN

FREEDOM ROAD

Slavery in one of west Africa's largest countries persists – but the drive is on to tackle the shackles.

MICHAEL ELLMAN reports

Mali is one of the largest countries in west Africa, with the River Niger snaking through it and providing a fertile plain around its inland delta. It has an ancient history dating from the Ghana Empire in the 10th-11th centuries and the Mali Empire in the 12th-13th centuries, and a remarkable code of ethics, the Mandé Code, from this time.

The population is only around 12 million, of whom up to half a million are slaves, mainly by descent (if your mother is a slave, you are a slave), many from the Tuareg (or Tamasheq, as they prefer to be known) tribe, but also Peuls, Moors, Songhay and others. The masters are usually from the same tribe, but of lighter skin colour, known as 'white Tuaregs', or 'Arabs', as they are often of Arab origin.

Slaves are forced to live with their masters, work for them without pay, to marry or have sex with the master or whoever the master appoints. They have no property or inheritance rights, and are generally treated as chattels. Their children are the property of the master, and he disposes of them as he thinks fit. Many masters impregnate their female slaves to produce more slaves in the next generation. They are mainly among the nomadic groups and, apart from domestic duties, they look after animals or do other agricultural work.

The constitution provides that all Malians are born free and equal, and there are laws against forced labour, kidnapping, forced marriage and so on, but no general law against slavery. Mali is party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Slavery Convention, but these are not directly enforceable in the domestic courts.

Under French colonisation, slavery was forbidden and a good number of slaves were freed in the early years, but numbers built up again. On independence, the first President, Modibo Keita, successfully

campaigns against slavery, and a further large number were freed. Gradually, though, the numbers increased again, and there is still no law. Until recently the authorities insisted that there was no slavery in Mali, but now they have to admit that it persists, mainly in the north and east of the country.

A number of slaves have been freed or have escaped in recent times, but there is considerable discrimination against ex-slaves – known derogatively as Bella. Some of them have set up an anti-slavery campaign, Temedt, with some 30,000 members, which is having some success. With increased communication, and following the successful outcome of the case of Hadijatou Mani against Niger in the ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) court last year, where an ex-slave sued her government for wrongful imprisonment and failure to protect her, the authorities are beginning to realise that something has to be done.

Temedt is working with a number of other NGOs in Mali, including the National Commission for Human Rights, to prepare a new bill to outlaw slavery. A large number of members of parliament, ministers and activists, have shown support, and it is clear that they are at last beginning to recognise that there is a problem. Lawyers and judges and prosecutors are particularly supportive, and would like to see a draft bill as soon as possible.

However there is still a great deal of prejudice, and a lot of training and preparation has to be done. Many slaves remain with their masters because they are provided with food and lodging, or because they believe that slavery is the lot which God intended for them. Indeed, some masters have been forced to emancipate their slaves because they could not afford to keep them. If slavery is to be eradicated, it will be necessary to provide means of subsistence for former slaves.

I toured the country with members of Temedt, and we were able to arrange the release of one slave. This resulted in her master begging us to settle the claim she had brought against him in the courts, and agreeing to pay damages for the years she had worked for him without pay. Many slave-masters in the area became very concerned lest their slaves are all freed. In Timbuktu we met another escaped slave who had been beaten by his master, and we prepared a claim for him for assault, forced labour, and the recovery of his children.

Cases are beginning to be brought under the existing laws, but magistrates tend to give damages for assault, without looking at the underlying causes. There is a great need for publicity, training of activists, lawyers and judges, and to change the public culture.

Niger and Mauritania have passed laws outlawing slavery in recent years, and there is reason to hope that one will be adopted in Mali that will help to bring about the necessary change of culture.

CHAIN

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

A new report by the US Census Bureau, *An Ageing World: 2008*, forecasts that in 10 years time older people will outnumber children for the first time. However, Britain of all the European nations will have the lowest 'total dependency ratio' which includes both children and pensioners. The reason? One of the major reasons is that relatively high levels of immigration have contributed to a bigger labour force.

There are many other positive aspects of immigration, even in a recession, when there are still half a million job vacancies – part of the uneven development and illogic of capitalism. Despite that, public debate on immigration tends to be hysterical, a hysteria which is matched by current government attempts to shore up Fortress Britain. Even if there were no economic and social advantages to immigration, there is a huge negative impact of immigration laws – it is giving rise to modern slavery.

My last book, *Enslaved: The New British Slavery* (Portobello Books, 2008), found an undeniable link between the lack of an immigration status and the vulnerability to exploitation, an issue which I talked about and which was robustly debated at a recent Jewish Socialists' Group meeting. Conservative estimates for the number of people enslaved here range from 5,000 to 25,000. Many are starved, imprisoned, beaten, sexually violated, physically abused and made to work 18 hours a day, seven days per week. The scenarios are many and varied: a massage parlour on your local high street where a trafficked woman sells her body; a beach where cocklepickers work in the middle of the night; the kitchen of a middle-class family where the 'servant' sleeps; or the bedroom in which a man imprisons his 'foreign' wife.

The book tells the personal stories of five such individuals: Farhia Nur, a devout Somali woman caught up in the civil war, raped and forcibly married to her rapist. She escaped to Britain, lost her application for asylum, went underground, had no money and was forced into prostitution; Natasha, a Russian girl was trafficked to Britain at the age of 17, raped and assaulted by her pimps, and prostituted; Amber, an Asian woman was forced into a marriage, imprisoned, starved and sexually assaulted by her husband and in-laws; Naomi, an illiterate street child from Sierra Leone was brought to London at the age of 15 to work as a domestic slave, ran away, was picked up by a man who prostituted her, ran away again and discovered that she was pregnant; and finally, Liu Bao Ren, a Chinese man who was smuggled in by the snakeheads, whose brother died in the Dover 58 tragedy and who worked long hours for little or no pay in the construction industry under terrible health and safety conditions.

They all had one thing in common: their immigration status was uncertain. An individual is powerless while her passport is in the hands of

somebody else whether it is an 'employer', a 'spouse', an 'agent', a 'trafficker', or indeed the government, as in the case of failed asylum seekers. The defining feature of modern slavery is entrapment – physical, psychological and financial – often sustained through violence. While no human being legally owns another human being today, men, women and children continue to be bought and sold.

Most mainstream debate on immigration concentrates on the needs of the British economy, whether the migrants coming into the country match the needs of the economy and whether the walls that have been put up to keep out 'undesirables' are solid enough. It is a widely held belief that Britain will be inundated. However, this is not borne out by the trends. In general, migration follows jobs. With the recession, many Poles for example who represented the last great influx (nearly half a million) are going home or not coming here at all.

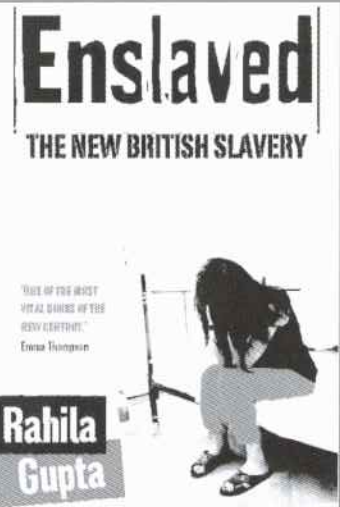
Broader questions which impact on immigration have not really been raised: British multinationals, for example, displace communities in developing countries in the process of building dams or mining for minerals, and generate refugees and economic migrants, some of whom may turn up on our doorstep. As far as I am aware, no one has attempted to draw up a balance sheet which measures the number of jobs generated and taxes paid by these companies to the treasury against the immigrants who arrive here. Ditto with the defence industry, which is worth billions of pounds, and where sales of arms are often made to countries in conflict. We see the direct consequences of that policy in the number of refugees claiming asylum.

We need the equivalent of a Stern review on climate change to explore these broader questions and to examine the benefits and drawbacks of immigration, because the movement of peoples is an irresistible fact of globalisation.

Open borders should be our long-term goal because each time controls are liberalised (and that's not often) they create further nooks and crannies in which injustice and slavery flourish. However, we should consider a number of intermediate steps which will lift large numbers of people out of slavery without compromising the end goal: an unconditional amnesty/regularisation for all undocumented migrants; the right to work for asylum seekers; an end to the British government's practice of making reservations to international human rights legislation in order to maintain a robust immigration system.

It may seem like an impossible task but I cannot imagine it is more difficult than abolishing the transatlantic slave trade, which was critical to the prosperity of the British economy and its elite. Human progress must be measured by the extent to which we are prepared to go to end slavery.

RAHILA GUPTA describes slavery that's thriving in Britain today, with the help of draconian immigration laws



Michael Ellman with members of the Temedt committee



EAST EUROPE'S JEWS:

ANTONY LERMAN analyses the response of West European Jewish communities to the Jewish revival in the former Soviet Bloc

Without freedom, the ability of the individual Jew to choose to live any kind of Jewish life – or no kind of Jewish life – is severely, sometimes fatally, curtailed. Which is why the Jewish struggle to attain that freedom must be ranked as the most significant preoccupation of Jews in the modern era, since the possibility of emancipation first emerged. Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel, whether you approve or disapprove, was one path chosen to attain that freedom, and the one that had the most impact on Jews in the 20th century. But at the beginning of the 20th century, Zionism was very much a minority interest; other political and social movements attracted far more adherents. And even though Zionism eclipsed all of those other movements for a time, the freedom it offered was only taken up by a small proportion of the world Jewish population, and a very significant part of that, the Jews living in the Soviet bloc, were unable to avail themselves of the offer. So the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1989, which gave to a good few million

Jews the freedom to choose to be Jews or not, was arguably the most significant moment in post-Second World War Jewish history – perhaps since the hope of Jewish emancipation first became a reality. And this is not only because this large Jewish population was no longer suppressed, but also because it was the first time in 2,000 years that the vast majority of Jews in the world were free.

In terms of the broad sweep of Jewish history, 1989 was also significant for other reasons. Israel's isolation in the international community was dramatically reduced as most of the former communist countries opened relations with the state, along with other countries in the 'non-aligned' world, which had previously aligned their foreign policies with the Soviet Union. In addition, a number of Arab states, behind the scenes, began opening up channels of communication with Israel. These developments contributed greatly to creating the atmosphere in which the Oslo accords were signed.

Finally, although Jewish organisations, in Europe and internationally, always spoke about European Jewry as if it were one entity, this was really a fiction. Contact between Jews in communist countries and Jews in Western Europe was severely limited. When meetings were attended by Jews from the East, only people approved by the communist authorities were allowed to participate. Within months, that had radically changed. Many of the old leaders were replaced by a younger generation who did not have the same ties to the authorities. They were generally very keen to link up with fellow Jews from the West and begin a new, open and co-operative relationship. For the first time since 1917 it became possible to talk about 'European Jewry' as a living reality.

This change was first and foremost of great significance to the Central and East European Jews themselves, who could now begin to express their Jewishness as openly as they wished. Since the post-communist countries were changing at different speeds, the process of change in Jewish communities varied from place to place, but it was all in one direction. In an essay in *Survey of Jewish Affairs* 1990, Maria Balinska wrote: 'The changed political map of post-1989 Central and

East Central Europe did indeed give its Jewish communities the chance to revive what was left of the rich Jewish cultures that once existed there.'

Jewish organisations, particularly international and Israeli organisations and funding bodies, started to consider what the future held for the Jews of the former Soviet Bloc. Many of the communities were very small and it was thought that they would have difficulty in surviving. It was assumed that a significant proportion of people would want to emigrate to Israel or the United States, and that those who stayed were more likely to be old and living in impoverished conditions, which were not improving as the social safety net of communist period was removed. Would Jewish humanitarian organisations be able to fill the gap?

Broadly, two schools of thought developed. One effectively said that Jewish life could not survive in these countries and whilst it was incumbent upon Jews elsewhere to help the communities in whatever way they could, the aim should be to encourage as many as possible to leave. They were often seen as the 'remnants' of the Holocaust, the last custodians of dying communities.

But the other view was that if Jews wished to stay, they should be assisted in rebuilding their communities, no matter how many Jews were living in any particular place. In some of the places that would clearly qualify as 'remnants', Jewish kindergartens were already springing up. Ed Serotta, a photojournalist living in Central Europe who was setting up a new organisation, Centropa, devoted to treating Jewish life in Central Europe as a reality with a future, said: 'Jewish children at Jewish schools: some "remnants"'. In fact, it never came down to a choice between one and the other. Israeli *aliya* (emigration) organisations became very active and had some success in getting Jews to go to Israel.

Other Jews who wanted to leave voted with their feet in the direction of the United States or Western Europe. There were significant movements of population, especially from the European states of the former Soviet Union. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the most significant story was the number of Jews who wanted to stay in their countries and rebuild Jewish life. This development

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

was boosted by considerable numbers of Jews who only discovered their Jewishness once their parents felt that communist control was well and truly over and they could tell their children the truth about their origins, or who had simply hidden their Jewishness under communism and now wished to rediscover it. It soon became clear that a Jewish revival was underway, although in those early years the extent of it was not clear.

The fact that Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe was not about to disappear – and indeed started to surprise many people with its vibrancy and inventiveness – began to give rise to discussions about the possibility of a united European Jewry working co-operatively to strengthen the Jewish revival in the former communist countries. This could constitute a significant force in the Jewish world, which was dominated by the two major blocs of Jewish population in the United States and Israel. The new leaderships in the former communist countries began clearly to articulate requests to the communities in Western Europe for a major, imaginative programme of support to help them rebuild or create communal institutions and frameworks. Some spoke about this in terms of a kind of 'Jewish Marshall Plan', whereby Western European Jewish communities would come together with American and international bodies to put together a sustained aid package aimed at making these communities self-sufficient.

At first it looked as if the scenario of international co-operation in the revival of Jewish life would materialise, but from very early on, a pall was cast over the entire project in the form of antisemitism bubbling to the surface and entering political life in most of the countries concerned. For a few years, this antisemitism, which was largely confined to the realm of political propaganda and ideology and expressed in the form of a revival of pre-communist far right or fascist groups, caused very considerable consternation. Its possible impact was often spoken about in apocalyptic terms. Seasoned observers of Jewish life under

communist rule even went so far as to lament the collapse of the civil and social order the communist authorities had maintained since at least it kept any antisemitism in check in these countries for many years.

This issue was so high on the international Jewish agenda that the World Jewish Congress (WJC) succeeded in persuading a host of presidents, prime ministers, intellectuals, writers and academics to attend a 1,500-strong world conference on antisemitism in Brussels in 1992. Few now know about or remember this huge jamboree, yet it was the first major international Jewish gathering of the post-communist world – reflecting fears about the future, not the hopes for a revival of European Jewry.

Within a year or two it was clear that antisemitism was much less significant than at first thought. In fact, while this tendency never went away (see the results of the June 2009 European elections in Hungary for example), it can now be seen as part of a complicated process of recovering these countries' pasts from Nazi, fascist and communist manipulation. Although this was partly expressed in the form of nostalgia for extreme nationalist movements and parties, of far greater significance was a deeper desire to find out the truth about what happened during those years. In quite a few countries, finding out about what happened to the Jews and about their culture, was an integral part of this process.

It was this honest, if flawed and uneven, reckoning with the past which made it possible for 'hidden' Jews and their children to take on Jewishness voluntarily. For those, mostly outside Europe, who insisted on seeing Europe as a hotbed of antisemitism, a place that hadn't really changed since before the Holocaust, antisemitism in Central and Eastern Europe remained their first priority.

But for most people involved in Jewish life in Europe directly, attention turned more fully to the Jewish revival that was taking place, the parameters of which were becoming clearer month by month.

Some Jews were emigrating, but this did not seem to have any serious impact on the overall process of Jewish revival. Memory of the Jewish past proved remarkably strong among the older generation of Jews who were being helped by Jewish humanitarian organisations like the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (the Joint), which found itself going into the business of providing Jewish cultural activities and children's facilities for its clients. Social services were much needed but there proved to be a considerable hunger for art, music, reading, drama, crafts, celebrating Jewish festivals in a cultural rather than a religious fashion and Jewish education. The Joint, which had been quietly active in communist Europe since the end of the Second World War, proved adept at gearing up their activities, training local people, and satisfying the demand for Jewish self-expression.

This revival was uneven. In Hungary, for example, which had a relatively more benign regime and a large Jewish population based mostly in Budapest, the Jewish revival began a good few years before 1989. The same happened in Poland for reasons associated with the establishment of Solidarity and the recovery of the past that began in the early 1980s.

Against this background, the new, younger leaders in Central and Eastern Europe began to articulate clearer requests for help from the two pan-European Jewish organisations, the European Council of Jewish Communities (ECJC) and the European Jewish Congress (EJC). While they knew that US Jewry and Israel had more clout, resources and funding, they turned, effectively, to the UK and France, for some very clear reasons.

Geography aside, leaders in the East felt a cultural, historical and intellectual proximity with Western Europe that they did not feel with the US and Israel. They desired a united Jewish Europe within a larger EU. They felt that the UK and French experience of managing Jewish diversity was more useful to them than the American experience. They also believed that the UK



Jewish cultural event in Warsaw

THE NEW LEADERSHIPS IN THE FORMER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES BEGAN CLEARLY TO ARTICULATE REQUESTS TO THE COMMUNITIES IN WESTERN EUROPE FOR A MAJOR, IMAGINATIVE PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT TO HELP THEM REBUILD OR CREATE COMMUNAL INSTITUTIONS AND FRAMEWORKS.

THE IRON CURTAIN WAS NO MORE. EUROPE WAS UNITING TO SECURE THE BENEFITS OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY FOR ALL OF ITS CITIZENS, WITH THE STRONG HELPING THE WEAK. GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO THE SAME FOR JEWISH EUROPE, THE STRONG TURNED THEIR BACKS.

and French communities would more sensitively ease the startling return to Jewishness of many thousands of Jews.

At the level of grassroots activists, among most academics and intellectuals and in Jewish social, educational and welfare circles, there was a very positive reception to the wishes of the Central and Eastern European leaders.

This was evident from the 'Planning for the Future of European Jewry' conference organised by the Institute of Jewish Affairs (IJA), the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the ECJC and the Joint in Prague in July 1995. This was the first pan-European Jewish conference of its kind since the immediate post-war period. Dr Diana Pinto, the Paris-based historian, spoke of the potential for European Jewry to become the 'third pillar' of world Jewry, saying subsequently, 'Europe is not Australia. It is a place where Jewish history, culture and creativity have been rooted for more than two thousand years. That history cannot be reduced to a mere episode of colonization in an Israeli rewriting of history; nor should it become a latter-day version of post-1492 Spain in which Jews exist primarily as a symbolic memory.'

Prague was followed by an even larger conference in Strasbourg in 1997, entitled 'Strengthening Jewish Life in Europe'. As in 1995, despite the general desire to manage the Jewish revival using European resources, two American Jewish organisations were partners in sponsoring the conference. The Joint was already a key player in Europe and its European operations had been extensively Europeanised.

Cross-European activity, including cultural events, academic interchange, educational seminars and religious-based gatherings, had already increased. Especially encouraging was the approach taken by the ECJC which, under a new leadership, had become the preferred pan-European organisation of activists across Europe.

By the mid-1990s, antisemitism looked less serious. The Oslo Accords had resulted in an improved climate generally for Jews and Israel, there was growing public awareness of the Holocaust and widespread approval for the campaign being mounted to secure the restitution of Jewish property in Central and Eastern Europe. All the conditions seemed right for the UK and French Jewish leaderships to mount the concerted effort being asked of them, especially as there were willing partners. It was not a matter of passive receipt of aid: the communities wanted to achieve self-sufficiency.

Did it happen? No. The Iron Curtain

was no more. The Berlin Wall had fallen. Europe was uniting to secure the benefits of freedom and democracy for all of its citizens, with the strong helping the weak. Given the opportunity to do the same for Jewish Europe, the strong turned their backs. By declining or avoiding doing what was asked of them, the leaders of UK and French Jewry were responsible for a monumental failure of imagination and empathy.

There were some other players ready to step in and help. These were mostly American Jewish groups, some Israeli and Zionist organisations as well as a few European groups, some of which were very localised, with interests in single communities or projects. With the Joint already so active and drawing most of its funds from American Jewry, there was a reasonably high level of awareness of what was happening in Central and East European communities among more enlightened Jewish circles in the States.

Particularly significant were a growing number of philanthropic foundations, mostly family based, which became strategically engaged in funding the Jewish revival. First among these was the Lauder Foundation, headed by Ronald, one of the sons of Estee Lauder. The Foundation concentrated almost exclusively on funding Jewish schools, rather than synagogues, and at one time was spending approximately \$50 million a year across Central and Eastern Europe.

One New York-based organisation renovated the last synagogue left standing in Oswiecim (the Polish name for the town of Auschwitz) as a Jewish centre where groups visiting the death camp could come to learn about the vibrant Jewish life that existed before the Holocaust and the revival of Jewish life post-1989.

Although most such groups active in Europe used past, present and imagined antisemitism on the Continent as a propaganda tool to satisfy and increase the support of their domestic constituencies – and the American Jewish Committee was no different – the AJC's perceived influence in Washington was seen as useful both for the Jewish communities and for the new governments. Their very vocal support for Poland joining NATO made them appear very Poland-friendly too.

Although the World Jewish Congress (WJC) is formally an international political organisation, in the 1990s, with its head office in New York, it was widely perceived as an American Jewish project. The WJC took up the issue of restitution of Jewish property expropriated from Jews in Central and Eastern Europe both by the

Nazis and the Communists – an issue that had effectively been closed since the Iron Curtain came down – with the idea that this promised a source of funding for sustaining communal life.

Finally, various Israeli and international Zionist organisations were active all over the post-communist region. This was seen by many as a mixed blessing. It was obvious that the primary aim of a body like the Jewish Agency for Israel was to encourage emigration to Israel, but they did not go about doing this in the crude manner often employed in the past. They supplied very skilled educators who taught Hebrew, with Israeli imagery integral to their teaching methods.

But the involvement of American Jewish groups diminished. Some thought that after a number of years, Europe's Jews should be able to look after themselves with European Jewish funding. There was some logic in this and indeed, the Central and East European communities wanted to be financially self-sufficient. But withdrawal by American groups was not co-ordinated with Jewish representative bodies in Europe, nor with the communities concerned, and no serious assessment was made of how far local funding might plug the gaps. Even the Lauder Foundation, whose sustained approach won many admirers in the region, had to make cutbacks. Promises that the WJC made on funds from restitution never materialized, though this was partly because of wrangling between Israeli officials and Diaspora groups represented on the World Jewish Restitution Organization. The Israelis tended to believe that the small communities in the former communist countries were not legitimate heirs to communal properties being returned and insisted that funds should come to Israel, where survivors of those communities lived.

The role of American Jewish political bodies in Europe came to be seen as less and less benign as the years went by. This was especially so after 2000 when bodies like AJC, the Anti-Defamation League and the Wiesenthal Centre exaggerated and exploited the increase in antisemitism in Europe as part of their domestic agendas, without much thought to how this would affect Jewish communities in Europe. Other American groups, like the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, came through Europe spreading doubt about the viability of Jewish life in a region that many of them saw as little more than a Jewish graveyard.

So, by the mid-2000s, while the Jewish revival in Europe continued, external

support for the communities in former communist countries had become a very piecemeal affair. Even the Joint, which had tried to operate on the basis of a strategic approach to building communities, was having to reconsider the scope of its work because of both shrinking income and a lack of clarity about its exit strategy.

What was especially disappointing was the failure of the ECJC to play the significant role in the revival that had been expected in the mid-1990s. Under new professional and lay direction, it had skilfully positioned itself to begin answering this need. The organisation grew in stature and began to challenge the EJC for the informal title of principal representative body of European Jewry.

However, the ECJC, funded almost entirely by the Joint, failed to develop a robust and self-sustaining organisational structure capable of delivering meaningful services to its affiliated organisations and communities. In part it was held back by the Joint, which was ambivalent about its territory being encroached upon. The ECJC's difficulties were also aggravated by the leadership's refusal to abandon a longstanding agreement with the EJC that the ECJC would not get involved in political issues.

In the early 2000s an initiative was begun to reform the organisation and establish a clear strategy. A new president, Jonathan Joseph, former Chair of the UK-based World Jewish Relief, was elected in Budapest in 2004. In an atmosphere of considerable optimism. But the organisation then became mired in a struggle to become financially independent from the Joint, lost its executive director and then deviated from the strategic plan despite being, for a while, the only pan-European body with grassroots legitimacy.

There were fundamental ideological reasons why the UK and French leaderships failed to act. They thought encouraging Jewish life in these countries was treasonous for the Zionist project, distasteful because of perceived endemic, genocidal antisemitism and wasteful of precious resources needed at home. Although we tend to associate disdain for the possibility of continued Jewish life in Europe, and especially former communist Europe, with the attitudes of much of organised American Jewry and of Israel, the views of many French and UK Jewish leaders were not much better.

Energy was wasted on political battles over control of who speaks for Europe's Jews on antisemitism and restitution. The established institutions of UK and French Jewry did have a record of helping Jewish communities beyond their borders. The French Alliance Israélite Universelle had been very active among the French

speaking North African Jewish communities. The Board of Deputies of British Jews had a long tradition, stemming from the work of Sir Moses Montefiore, who was president from 1835 to 1874, of helping Jewish communities in distress. This continued into the post-Second World War period. So the behaviour of the leaderships in the 1990s and 2000s was a shameful betrayal of the traditions of both communities.



The UK and French leaderships also retreated from the Jewish universalism which characterised much of the 1990s; they were never entirely comfortable with the multiculturalism of this period. A defensive particularism was already developing towards the end of the decade and took firm hold after the turn of the century, when it became common for certain groups of Jews to be demonised and regarded as cut off from the community.

Dr Diana Pinto has called the 1990s the 'Jewish decade'. The changing nature of the European mainstream that became open to the Jewish narrative, produced a remarkably propitious moment for Jews in Europe. In effect, Europe said 'yes' to the Jews, and many Jews took advantage of the new multicultural openness by engaging culturally, religiously and politically in Jewish life within the context of increasing comfort in their status as citizens of the countries. Our notions of what constituted sustainable Jewish communities changed radically as growing use of the internet and other communications technology made it possible to live a Jewish life of choice wherever you wished, without having to declare or decline allegiance to Zionism and Israel.

But the chance to use this time to give a massive boost to the reviving communities of the former communist countries was wasted. The Jewish revival continues but the opportunity to participate in a concerted, altruistic, historic effort to transform Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe and thereby transform the prospects for the future of Jewish life in Europe as a whole, was not

taken. Kostek Gebert, one of the leaders of Polish Jewry who has been at the heart of the Eastern European Jewish revival, says, with deep disappointment, 'any hopes for a common European Jewish identity and Europe-wide presence were dashed by the failure of the UK and France'.

By the mid-2000s the atmosphere in Europe that had facilitated the Jewish revival had changed dramatically. The beginning of the Second Intifada, the

deeply troubling Durban UN anti-racism conference, 9/11, the resurgence of antisemitism, fears about the so-called 'new antisemitism', the final breakdown of the Oslo Accords – all of these developments led Jewish leaderships to become even more insular than before. Given growing general scepticism about Europe as an idea and the EU as a liberal democratic project, European Jewry as a positive reference became increasingly less attractive. And the door was left wide open to organisations like Chabad (the Lubavitch hassidim, and Aish Hatorah – two fundamentalist, right-wing Jewish outreach organizations – to prey on vulnerable Jews and increasingly present a version of Judaism that was incompatible with the open, pluralistic expression of Jewishness that emerged during the 1990s.

It is shameful that UK and French Jewish leaders failed this key test of Jewish solidarity, especially since they seem to have no qualms about continuing to call for Jewish solidarity over the defence of Israel. They and other pan-European Jewish leaders effectively betrayed their communities but will never be called to account.

Nevertheless, this failure to act did not spell the end of the Jewish revival. It continues, though at a much slower and less well-resourced pace, especially given the financial crisis. But Kostek Gebert in Poland is philosophical. 'In Poland, we'll achieve sustainability, only much later than we could have done.' A measured yet powerful rebuke, but evidence of a quiet determination which suggests that there might still be a better European Jewish future.

GROUNDNS FOR

RUTH LUKOM
looks back in
anger at the
behaviour of the
rabbi at her
mother's funeral

Parents. You are supposed to bury them. God forbid a thousand times they should have to bury you.

So it happened. They are now both dead and buried. One died suddenly and we reeled in shock and berated ourselves for leaving things unsaid, and the other died slowly and in pain. Now that shouldn't have happened.

I'm ok now. I went a bit bonkers afterwards. I was rude to people who asked, 'How are you?' Fine if you know me but empty and meaningless otherwise. People say it all the time. It still annoys me. These days I answer 'I've got a rare blood disease. What do you want?'

I'm ok but still angry. Not about the deaths. I loved them and they loved me. People get old and ill then die. I'm still angry because I remember how I needed those funerals and how they were stolen from me.

I knew what they wanted and was happy to bury them that way, with all the strange contorted rituals that they themselves were privately contemptuous of. I put on a skirt – a new black one. I wanted to look smart. That is what they wanted. I even put on a hat and I really don't like hats.

We arrived in good time at the grounds. This is where they wanted to be buried with family and old friends. They both planned it years ago. They even chose the stone and its setting – 'The green stones, not the blue ones...'. Bizarre. So many mealtimes

devoted to the subject. I thought I was different until I found myself listing 'my funeral music'. 'And I'd like this one as the coffin disappears...'

As I entered the grounds, I yielded to this monolithic, decayed, cruel institution I thought I had successfully escaped from. 'This is for you,' I thought. I recall stiffening in anticipation of that awful segregation. Suddenly I was a sub-class of bereaved. A woman. My non-Jewish friends arrived and blithely contaminated the male or female sections, momentarily relieving some tension. I was prepared for awkwardness, embarrassment and the deference that I would have to show to the rabbi.

That rabbi. Christ. Where do they get these people? I met another one just like him a couple of weeks ago. I think there is a Lubavitch factory where they are assembled – just like Dell computers. Our old rabbi was about as forward-thinking and progressive as Peregrine Worsthorne in my father's Sunday Telegraph, and yet he was urbane. He'd banter and make eye contact, and those eyes would twinkle. These new young rabbis have been installed with yiddishkeit basic, and come with a hard disk unsullied by life outside the yeshiva. Programmed to sound and move like central casting's template of a rabbi, they have nodded and shrugged and 'oyed' their way into unsuspecting Jewish communities all over the world.

JULIA BARD
follows the
wavering moral
compass which
directs the
rituals
surrounding
death

I'm a secular Jew but, on the whole, the Jewish religious laws concerning death, seem respectful of both the person who has died and of the living who are left behind to mourn. Funerals are not decorated with flowers; no one celebrates the ascent to an afterlife in heaven; bodies are wrapped in a simple shroud and not prettified or left to be viewed in an open coffin. But religious authorities, by their nature, seem to create ever more detailed and incomprehensible rules, that ordinary people feel compelled to abide by – or face an intolerable argument when they are at their most vulnerable.

One thing my father hated about Jewish mourning rituals was kria – the practice of tearing the clothes as a sign of grief – which he thought was both primitive and ostentatious. Despite his orthodox background and his attachment to many Jewish religious and cultural traditions, he was scathing about a lot of the practices that people less knowledgeable than himself try to pass off as essential expressions of Jewishness.

We had spent the last weeks of his life by his side. We were grappling with his irreplaceable loss; my mother was facing the void of a future without him; we neither wanted nor needed such outward demonstrations of grief. And so, at Dad's funeral, my sister and I refused to have our clothes cut, and we shielded our mother from the women with the scissors.

With no immediate male relative, a cousin had taken upon himself the duty of saying – or rather, gabbling through – the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. Three members of the Jewish Women's Network, at that time an active force, stood behind us and cradled us in their voices, slowing down the Kaddish, reciting it along with us. Dad would have thought that was good. He would have been less than

pleased at the said male relative's regular reports over the following year on his early morning attendance at synagogue to say Kaddish for Dad – on our behalf.

At the Shiva (the seven days of mourning) at my mother's flat, yet another male cousin herded the men and women into separate parts of the room. Dad had been scathing about this recent innovation, introduced by an influx of fundamentalist rabbis into the middle-of-the-road United Synagogue. My friend, Karen, in her elegant trouser suit and perfect make-up, quietly infiltrated the male section, while we made our objections to both the segregation and the hierarchy – men at the front, women at the back. The rabbi – who had more charisma and more sense than most of his colleagues – stood by one of the long walls of the room, confidently announced that this was east, and asked us to turn and face him. This left the women and men, if not together, at least side by side.

My mother looked perplexed and, despite her grief, after everyone had left, she found a compass and announced triumphantly that east was in quite a different direction – just as she had thought!

She was just as perplexed when, ordering the gravestone some months later, the stonemason (from the authorised list, available from the United Synagogue) advised us to keep the headstone below a certain height. After a long lifetime of paying substantial membership fees, it seems the United Synagogue charge extra for the air space taken up by headstones that are higher than the prescribed maximum.

Over the next few years, I discovered a welter of inexplicable rules and regulations that seemed to have no other purpose than to mark out the jurisdiction of the rabbinical authorities. Indeed, some

COMPLAINT

What British-born fourth or fifth generation Jewish man talks like that unless he is auditioning for Fiddler on the Roof? And how many of these communities, (I can name two), are now bitterly regretting their decision as elderly, infirm congregants are told not to drive on Shabbat? Beware of viruses.

I could have tolerated all of this if they had allowed me to speak. We come to funerals and wait for the words that reach over the pews and past the altars and into our hearts. We wait for the rabbi/vicar/imam to get past the 'Almighty-God-who knows-us-and-loves-us' to the reason why we are there. We look up at the pale, tear-stained face, and wait for them to answer the question, 'Who was this person and why did you love them.'

And so I asked to speak. The beard shook his head furiously. 'No... no... no. It isn't allowed.'

'Since when?' I replied. 'I was here a year ago when a friend said some words for his father.'

'I don't know anything about that,' he said. 'It is the rabbi who makes the tribute, and if you want to say something you can at the graveside when the service is over.'

'Is it because I'm a woman? My uncle can say them if that's the case.'

The beard was backing off, nodding and smiling at a point past my shoulder. 'It won't be possible,' he

said to no one in particular.

I admit my grief was making the red mist descend. I waited for my mother to tell me to behave myself but she wasn't there. Others were gently taking my arm and leading me away.

You want to know what the rabbi said? You don't need me to tell you that. You've heard the same garbage at every Jewish woman's funeral you've ever been to: 'Eshet chayil mi yimtsa ... her value is far above rubies.'

What greater insult is there, as some snivelling pea brain reduces the one you love to a set of tired clichés that would disgrace a cheap greetings card?

• It wasn't Judaism the religion that let me down. It wasn't the prayers or the Kaddish. I want a Kaddish. It was corporate Judaism. With arbitrary rules and badly-paid bureaucrats, they processed this event in my life into a package of their own specifications. The check-out at Tesco had more humanity.

I think I am angry at my own naivety and expectations. I wanted to say goodbye and instead I was treated like a hijacker. I didn't want possession. I just wanted to feel it belonged to me.

of them were so peculiar that they seemed to have been made up as they went along.

We were forbidden, for example, to put the initials 'LRAM' on the headstone of my aunt, even though the greatest pride of her life had been achieving this high qualification in recognition of her talent as a pianist.

BBC journalist, Mark Burman, fought and won a hard battle over the wording on his grandfather's grave. The words 'Gentleman, Thinker, Socialist' were rejected. Mark Burman wrote to the Beth Din: 'When my mother pressed [the supervisor of the cemetery] further it became clear that it was the word 'Socialist' was the source of the trouble. [He] claimed that this word was a political statement, would cause offence to other visitors at the cemetery and was inappropriate.'

Renee Bravo has described on the Jewish Chronicle website her struggle to be allowed to put a Shakespearean quote on her husband's grave. After much research and more correspondence, the United Synagogue eventually gave permission, with the proviso that the quote was not attributed to Shakespeare!

The latest row in the community has been over whether relatives are allowed to give a eulogy at the funeral, stone-setting or shiva (see Ruth Lukom's article above). Until last year, the United Synagogue (unlike other authorities) only allowed the rabbi to speak about the life and qualities of the person who has died. At a recent family stonesetting, where the son of the deceased had successfully argued that he should be allowed to give the eulogy, the rabbi disgracefully left the prayer hall as he started to speak, for fear of being associated with this terrifying breach of the rules. After much furious discussion within the community, the authorities have caved in – up to a point. Now, a member of the deceased's family may give the eulogy,

but this is at the discretion of the officiating rabbi, who has the right to veto what will be said.

Jewish funerals are simple and unadorned; they do not glorify death but present it in its simple, stark inevitability. According to Jewish law, there should be no distinction in death between rich and poor. Most Jewish cemeteries, though, make a mockery of this decent and thoroughly moral rule. The rich and powerful lie in their grand family plots under huge gravestones, a few steps from the prayer hall, while the ordinary folk, with their regulation-height headstones, are buried a hike away past acres of graves.

According to the fundamentalist Chabad movement, which supplies increasing numbers of rabbis to the mainstream United Synagogue, 'Mourning laws are primarily ... therapy for the living, devoted to the mitigating of intense grief, the slow disentanglement from the web of guilt, anger, fear, hatred, and rebellion that enshrouds the mind of the mourner after his relative has been taken from life.' Fine words that are not enacted in reality.

When my father knew he was dying, he refused to let a rabbi near him. He did agree, though, to participate in a television feature from his hospice bed, to promote the incredible care he was being given – as it happens, by a Christian institution. He told my sister he was not worried by death, as he'd had a good life. He left his affairs in simple good order. His values were intact to the end: without the fetters of self-serving religious institutions that had been part of his long and eventful life, he really did focus on the needs of the living, making his death easier for all of us to



The Jewish cemetery at
Rosenwiller in Alsace, France
Photo: Julia Bard

TURNING

MIKE GERBER looks back at the struggles of Yemeni seafarers in South Shields, which have echoes today

It is now nearly 80 years since a clash between Yemeni and white seafarers in South Shields that has been portrayed – somewhat erroneously – as ‘Britain’s first race riot’. Peter Mortimer, whose play *Riot*, recently published by Five Leaves Publications in a single English- and Arabic-language edition, is a fictionalised account of that event, comments in his foreword: ‘...this painful and at times shameful history had taught the town ... a lesson which I think it hasn’t forgotten. South Shields is probably now among the most racially harmonious towns in the UK, and I submit that the incidents of August 2, 1930 have their part to play in this state of affairs.’ Mortimer, who lives in North Shields, has also written the book *Cool for Qat – A Yemeni Journey*, which grew out of the commission to write the play.

In *Riot*, the issues of the time are played out against a fictional love story between a Yemeni man and a South Shields woman. The play quotes from letters to the *Shields Gazette*, ratings’ union journal *The Seaman*, speeches by members of the Seamen’s Minority Movement (SMM) – a group of ethnic minority and left wing white seafarers – an appeal letter by Yemeni seamen for financial aid, and official replies. There is also a boiler stoking passage cited from *The Men of Merchant Service*, a 1900 book by FT Bullen.

On the printed page, *Riot* comes across as fast-paced and witty. The staged version was directed by Darren Palmer, a third generation South Shields Yemeni, whose grandfather was involved in the SMM at the time of the confrontation. Palmer contests its depiction as a race riot: ‘It was a riot for economic problems,’ he tells the *Telegraph*. ‘The

press at the time played it up as a race riot. I’m against that.’

The riot took place during the 1930s economic depression, and in a letter to *South Shields Gazette*, quoted in the play, a seaman wrote: ‘...a very big reduction would be made in the number of unemployed if white men were given preference on British ships. At the present times there must be thousands of Arabs, Lascars and Chinamen doing the work on vessels that could be done by our own unemployed. There must be hundreds of Arabs sailing out from our town alone.’

The situation undoubtedly exacerbated racial tensions. Another letter in the *Gazette*, referring to the old National Union of Seamen, asserted: ‘The union was built up by white sailors and firemen and a going concern long before the Arabs came here to deprive white men of work and gain for South Shields... My advice to these gentlemen as they are too thick-skinned to see that they are not wanted is to get out while the going is good. I don’t merely dislike Arabs. I hate them.’

Yemenis, Britain’s oldest settled Muslim community, had been settling in South Shields since the 1890s. They were drawn by work on British merchant vessels, typically as engine room firemen and stokers, toiling in hellish conditions. Mortimer, in *Cool for Qat*, notes: ‘As in other centres, such as Southampton, Cardiff and Liverpool pre-First World War, the Yemenis and others were openly encouraged to come to Britain since the expansion of the Merchant Navy demanded ever-bigger supplies of labour. This was heightened during the war itself when the Royal Navy also required big labour pools.’

Those ‘others’ included ‘lascars’, seamen originating from the Indian Subcontinent, and also Anglo-Indian descendants of lascars who had laboured on British merchant ships since the 17th century. Many early lascars were left stranded in east London after their voyages, living and often dying, in the most appalling conditions and neglect, some after subsisting on the streets, but they are the forerunners of today’s dynamic East End Bengali community.

Racial discrimination against Yemenis in South Shields meant it was difficult to obtain accommodation, and in 1909, Ali Said opened the first Arab seamen’s boarding house. During World War I, many more Yemenis were recruited to serve on British ships out of Aden, which was then a British protectorate. Around a quarter of the Shields-based merchant seafarers who perished in the war were Yemeni, but by the end of the conflict the Yemeni community in the North East had expanded to well over 3,000, and disputes over jobs precipitated the so-called ‘Arab Riots’ of 1919. So the 1930 riot, however one understands it, was not in fact the first such set-to.

Mortimer writes: ‘As the economic situation changed after the war, demand for seamen shrank. Many indigenous seamen, who had been recruited

THE TIDE



The police anticipate trouble at the South Shields protests

into the RN (Royal Navy) to fight, returned to take up their position with the Merchant Navy, but found there were no longer as many jobs, and some of the jobs were held by Arabs.’

Although there were instances of racial integration, including intermarriage, the 1919 riot impelled the authorities to crack down on Muslim seafarers. Hassan Mahamdallie, in an essay about British Muslim working class struggles, published in the journal *International Socialism*, records: ‘In 1921 the Cardiff Town Clerk recommended that destitute seamen ‘be repatriated forthwith, or accommodated in a concentration camp’, and in 1922 hundreds of Adenese were repatriated out of the city. Seamen, including numbers of Somalis and Yemenis in South Shields who had lived in Britain for a long time, many with white wives and British-born children, were told that they had to prove their citizenship rights from scratch, and many had their British status removed for lack of documentation or financial resources to register it.’

Mahamdallie continues: ‘The National Union of Seamen (NUS) seized the opportunity to do a “British First” deal with the shipping owner. The Government and Home Office issued new restrictions in 1920 and then 1925 under the Aliens Act which had been targeted in the first place against poor Jewish immigrants.’

And Mortimer notes: ‘Havelock Wilson, who took the NUS to the right, colluded with the Shipping Federation to the detriment of the Arab

seamen and in many ways helped to bring about that fateful day of 2 August 1930.’ Four years earlier, Wilson had ingratiated himself with ship-owners by keeping the NUS out of the general strike.

The NUS was granted an official sanction order specifying that: ‘A white card shall be issued ... to any Somali or Arab who satisfies the Port Consultants that he is a bona fide seaman and lawful in this country. The white card shall only be issued after being stamped by the National Union of Seamen and the Shipping Federation ... Officers engaging Somalis or Arab crews shall be informed that it is very undesirable to mix Somalis and Arabs of other races, and asked to specify which one they prefer.’ The consequence, says Mahamdallie, is that ‘Somalis, Arabs and their families were pushed into starvation and destitution.’

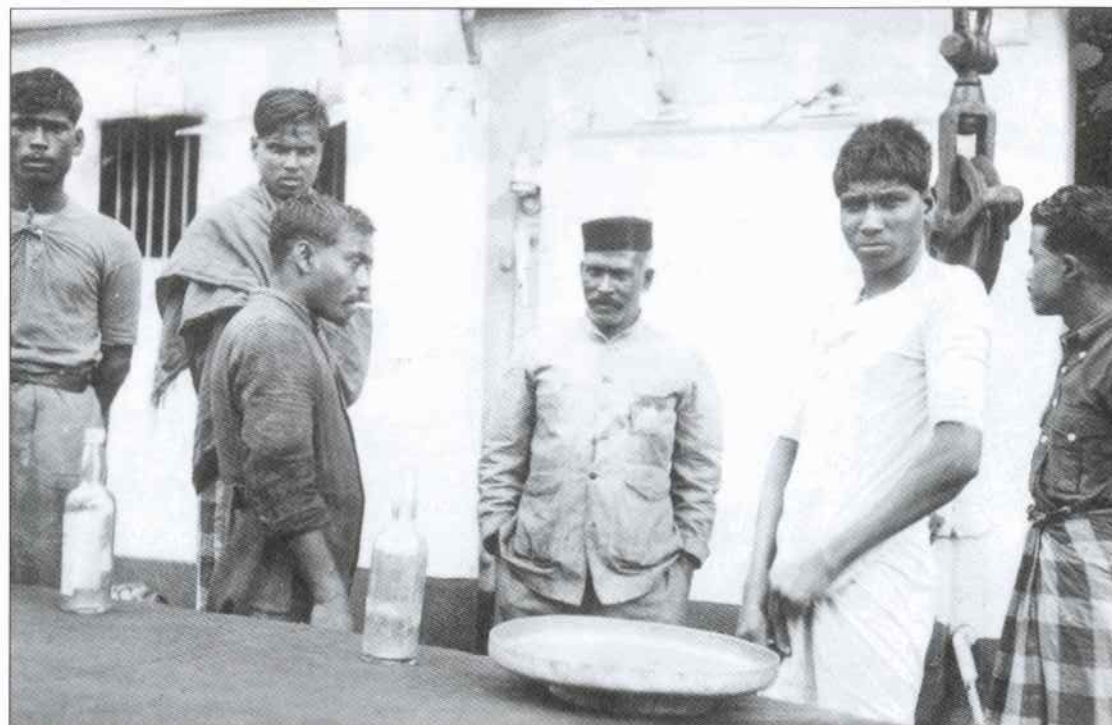
Violent protests erupted in South Shields and Cardiff. Mortimer’s play quotes a proclamation issued by the Tyneside district of the British Communist party: ‘The seamen are fighting this triple alliance of ship-owners, the Labour government and the fascist National Union of Seamen ... To smash this alliance and win through to victory the seamen must adopt the strong measures and break with the policy of passive resistance.’

A portent of what was to come was the ‘Mill Dam Riots’ in South Shields on 29th April 1930, when Somali seamen were severely beaten up when they attempted to sign on as firemen. This was followed by the events of 2nd August – the ‘Arab riot’. While a

The aftermath of the riot against racial discrimination in South Shields



'Lascars', Indian seamen, who worked on British merchant ships. Many were left stranded in east London after their voyages.



large mob of white seamen prowled the waterfront, Yemeni seafarers assembled outside the Shipping Foundation Offices at Mill Dam to hear rousing speeches by SMM leaders. When four whites were hired for the steamer *Etheralda*, a Yemeni, Ali Hamid, reportedly cried: 'They work, but there is no work for the black man.' Fighting broke out between white and Yemeni seamen. Yemenis drew knives and four policemen were stabbed. Six whites and 20 Yemenis were arrested. At Durham Assizes, the white SMM organisers each received eight month sentences, and all the Yemenis were sentenced to spells of hard labour, after which they were to be deported.

Many innocent Yemenis were also deported. This was acknowledged by the *Shields Gazette*: 'The men who went last night had not committed any crime. Just before 9.30 the thirty-eight men came from the cells at the Central Police Station ... They were driven to the goods entrance of the railway station and lined up at the end of the platform. At 9.50 the train steamed out of the station and bore the Arabs away from South Shields.'

A core Yemeni community remained, provoking the following editorial in *The Shieldsman*: 'Since it is seems impossible to send these people home, the next best thing is to segregate them.' The local council duly erected a segregated housing estate, rentable only to the Arabs.

As in the First World War, the South Shields Yemeni seafarers made major sacrifices during World War II, as BBC Tyne has chronicled on its website: '... many of the 3,000 plus Shields seamen killed were black, though there is little recognition of this on the town's war memorials.'

By Hassan Mahamdallie's account, in the post-war period Muslim seafarers continued to be harassed by the police and local authorities in Cardiff and South Shields. Referring to Cardiff, he writes: 'A sharp reminder came in 1952 when a Somali seaman, Hussein Mattan, was fitted up by the police for the murder of a local woman and hanged after a sham trial. It was not until 1998, 46 years later, that his widow Laura and sons Omar and Mervyn managed

to get this gross miscarriage of justice recognised as such and Mattan's name cleared.'

Nevertheless, the 1950s marked the start of important demographic, geographic and industrial changes. Richard Lawless, in his study *From Ta'izz to Tyneside: An Arab Community in the North East of England During the Early 20th Century*, takes up the story: 'In the 1950s and 1960s a new influx of Yemenis into Britain found employment not in shipping but in heavy industry, especially in the steel and metal-working plants in Sheffield and Birmingham ... Some Arab seafarers moved to the Midlands where new employment opportunities were opening up in industry.'

In South Shields, to quote the BBC again, 'attitudes became more relaxed towards the Yemeni. The Arabs started to generate some support amongst the white community, and the papers began to print more sympathetic articles'.

Is it really true, though, as Peter Mortimer suggests, that South Shields is today among the most racially harmonious towns in the UK, and that the 1930 riot played a part in that? *The Telegraph* asks him to expand on that.

He explains: 'South Shields came to feel quite guilty about the way it treated the Yemeni seamen in the 1930 riot, and I think this worked its way through the town so that later the racial mix grew much better and intermarriages became very common in South Shields, the evidence of which is obvious if you walk round the town. There are no Arab ghettos or anything now and the Arab population is accepted as a natural and important part of the town.'

Riot by Peter Mortimer, Five Leaves Publications, £6.99. Century Miracle Co Ltd

Cool for Qat - A Yemeni Journey by Peter Mortimer, Mainstream, £9.99.

From Ta'izz to Tyneside: Arab Community in the North-east of England in the Early Twentieth Century by Richard Lawless, University of Exeter Press, £27.50.

This article is an updated version of a feature originally published in *Nautilus Telegraph*, monthly journal of the maritime trade union Nautilus International.

1929-1933 FOUR FATAL YEARS

Eighty years ago the Roaring '20s, the decade of booming capitalism, mass-produced automobiles and confidence in lasting prosperity, came to a sudden end. On 24th October 1929, shares on Wall Street took a tumble, and the following week the fall continued. Real estate had already peaked and started to decline in prices some years before, but anyone in America with cash to spare had been able to buy shares, and borrow money to buy more. Before the Crash, the Dow Jones Index had reached an all-time height, and American loans and investment had shored up Europe too. Now America's crash marked the beginning of the worldwide slump.

For Germany, it was a rude awakening to catastrophe. Huge American loans and investment had helped the country out of the crazy 1923 inflation, easing the burden of war reparations, assisting industry to rebuild and compete, and the Social Democrats to plan welfare reforms. The middle class, which had faced ruin, now had money to spend on café life, cars, cabaret and concerts, and borrowed more money to buy shares, inflating their value. Companies like Mercedes Benz borrowed to produce more consumer goods. It was the age of modernism and the Bauhaus. Not everyone had jobs, or money, but for those who did, these were the Golden Years. The head of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht, grumbled about 'loans for luxury' in 1927, but few politicians wanted to hear his tidings of gloom.

On Black Tuesday, 29th October 1929, 16.4 million shares were sold on Wall Street and \$10 million were wiped off the value of US companies. Between September 1929 and July 1932 the New York Times Index fell from 452 points to 58 points. In the same three years, British industrial production fell by 11%, in Germany it fell 40%.

Like the proverbial man who asks for his umbrella back when it starts raining, the US creditors began recalling their loans. Then the United States raised its tariffs by 50%, while Britain delivered a double blow, raising imperial tariff barriers and taking the pound off the Gold Standard, which meant devaluation and cheaper exports.

In April 1931, Germany and Austria agreed a customs union, which should have provided a bigger market for German industry, keeping out Czech goods. France, which had insisted most firmly on full reparations, even occupying the Ruhr from 1923-24, declared any union a breach of the Versailles peace, and withdrew loans from Austria. The Rothschild-founded Credit Anstalt in Vienna, the biggest bank in Central and Eastern Europe, having taken over a smaller bank and its debts, collapsed in May 1931, and German banks began to follow.

By the winter of 1930-31 there were 5 million unemployed in Germany. By the following year, one in three Germans was unemployed, and the proportions in the Ruhr and Silesia were higher. The

number of unemployed in Berlin rose from 153,000 to 600,000. In Hamburg the numbers rose from 32,000 to 155,000. Many workers only held on to their jobs by accepting short-time working and pay cuts.

Unemployment benefit had only been meant to provide relief during short spells out of work. Now the local authorities which had responsibility for it were caught out between rising joblessness and falling tax revenues. Those which had taken short-term American loans were bankrupted. Unemployment benefit was cut or ran out.

In the harsh winter of 1931-32, millions of tons of unsold coal, lay piled around the pitheads of the Ruhr, while millions of Germans could not afford to heat their homes. It was a similar picture elsewhere in the capitalist world, with ill-fed, ill-shod and ragged people shuffling past idle factories and mills. But Germany was worst hit. A working-class housewife told how she and her husband tried to survive on bread and potatoes, with nothing at all at the end of the week, when they hoped for a bit of sausage. People took work on church- and charity-run schemes, labouring for subsistence. Men and women alike turned to begging, prostitution and crime.

It was not only the industrial workers who were suffering this crisis. Many professionals and public servants, who might have regarded themselves as middle class, had their career hopes dashed as banks and firms closed, and government projects were cancelled. Small shopkeepers, already losing out to the chain stores with their special offers, were left with customers who needed 'tick' and then could not pay up. Businesses went bankrupt.

The political posters of this time, from whatever party, show heroic, powerful, well-muscled figures, stepping out confidently to claim their future. These were the very opposite of the weakness and humiliation felt by hungry individuals. On each

CHARLIE POTTINS shows some underlying connections and sees nothing inevitable in Hitler's rise to power

Nazi election campaign propaganda



party's poster the big strong giant triumphs over enemies. A Nazi poster has him smashing 'the world-enemy, international high finance', whereas a cloth-capped Communist giant declares 'Out with this system!' – the system being represented by top-hatted capitalists seated around a huge table. On the Social Democrat poster the muscular giant elbows aside Nazis and Communists.

In elections for the Reichstag in May 1928 the Social Democrats won 29% of the votes cast, while the Communists won 10.6%. The Nazis gained only 2.6%, having retreated from some of their 'socialist' rhetoric in a turn to the countryside, and to reassure some of the business interests from whom Hitler was beginning to obtain funds. Though the Nazi vote fell by 100,000 nationally, they still took 12 seats. The effect of the 1929 slump as reflected in the September 1930 election was that the Social Democrats were down to 24.5%, the Communists had 13.1%, but the Nazi vote rose to 18.3%.

The Communists in Germany had good reason to oppose Social Democracy. Each time the Party commemorated the 1918-19 revolution it reminded

its people how the Social Democrat minister Noske had restored 'order' with the help of the military Free Corps, who murdered Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. For young workers now joining, the bitterness was underlined by

experience of Social Democrat union officials collaborating with bosses to lower pay and conditions, and 'fingering' Reds to be first for the sack. The Communist Party was becoming the party of the unemployed and the young. By 1932 less than one in 10 of the members in the north-west coast region, including Hamburg, had a job. Instead of the factory strongholds of communist textbooks, the party was being built in the neighbourhoods, with rent strikes, and in fights with the fascists on the streets.

On the propaganda side, the Communist Party could contrast the grim, demoralising daily experience of capitalist depression with glowing reports of Soviet progress implementing its Five Year Plan. The underside of Stalinist repression spoke less loudly to those impressed with Russia's absence of unemployment. But, adhering to Stalin's supposedly revolutionary 'Third Period' vision which characterised Social Democracy and Fascism as 'twins', and insisted potential allies were but 'left social fascists', the German Communists were unable to establish a United Front against fascism, or win the trust of Social Democrat workers. Party members who questioned the line were denounced as 'imperialist agents', expelled, and subjected to violence. Whether or not Stalin

secretly saw advantages in a Nazi victory, hoping it would disrupt the West, as some alleged, his policies objectively contributed to it. Having declared that fascism was already installed under the 1931-32 Brüning government, the Communist Party was ill-prepared to confront the real thing when Hitler became chancellor the following year.

Some Nazis had openly rejoiced that the worse things got for Germany, and the greater the fear of Bolshevism, the better it would be for their Party. They, too, appealed to the unemployed, and to some of the working class, but more especially to those in the civil service and middle class who, slipping down the ladder, became angry with the rich and powerful, but still resented the organised workers, to whom they considered themselves superior. The Nazis offered a theory which might have been rejected as crankish and out of place in a booming modern society but reappeared in a more attractive light now nothing seemed to make much sense. It was not something abstract like 'the system', but an outside foe conspiring to do down good Germans. The banker bleeding you for interest was the rich Jew, so was the chain-store owner. Meanwhile his brother the red Jew was agitating the workers, helping to put you out of business, by bringing them out on strike. To the shopkeeper, and to the student hoping to enter a profession, the Nazis could promise that good Aryans/Christians should not have to compete with Jews. For the lumpen criminal element there was also the prospect of sanctioned plunder and violence.

Although they called themselves the National Socialist German Workers Party, and some took the mixture seriously, Hitler and his crew knew which side their bread was buttered. In the autumn of 1928, Hitler decided he needed a new headquarters. Rudolf Hess approached a coal owner he knew, Emil Kirdorf, who said his own business was on hard times, but arranged a meeting with Fritz Thyssen, the steel magnate, who agreed a loan. With this the Nazis acquired a luxurious mansion, which became the Brown House. It was a bit different to the drab halls in which out-of-work Brownshirts might hang around, seeing if they could manage a beer to accompany their cheap meal, while awaiting news of a street fight to make their day.

A grand staircase led to the second floor where the offices of Hitler and his staff were located. The interior of these rooms were decorated with dark wood panelling and rich red leather armchairs. Everything had the air of richness which comes only from expensive materials, said a visitor. (*Who Financed Hitler: The secret funding of Hitler's rise to power, 1919-1933*, by James Pool, 1999).

Nazi 'anti-capitalism' was not just there to delude the less well-off or vent the intellectuals' spleen, but nor were they waging a class struggle to overthrow the system. National Socialism aimed at a disciplined capitalism, where each knew their place, marching in step to make Germany the world power that racism said it ought to be. As political power appeared nearer, Hitler took steps to prove he was worthy of patronage.

In the autumn of 1931, Otto Dietrich, a former business editor with links to heavy industry and Rhineland mining interests was appointed chief of the Nazi Party press office. Hitler went on tour with Dietrich in a big black Mercedes, meeting wealthy potential supporters and business leaders. On 27th

IN THE HARSH WINTER OF 1931-32, MILLIONS OF TONS OF UNSOLD COAL, LAY PILED AROUND THE PITHEADS OF THE RUHR, WHILE MILLIONS OF GERMANS COULD NOT AFFORD TO HEAT THEIR HOMES.

January 1932, Hitler addressed 650 members of the Industry Club in Düsseldorf's Park Hotel. The meeting had been arranged with the help of Fritz Thyssen, and Alfred Krupp sent a representative, who reported back very favourably. The Nazi leader had not lectured them on the evils of capitalism, nor even wasted their time with invective against the Jews. His themes were hard work, private property, and the danger of Bolshevism.

Becoming 'respectable' in the eyes of business did not bring any diminution of Nazi violence on the streets. It probably assured pro-Nazi police officers that they could let the Nazi stormtroopers do as they please. A Social Democrat councillor who had been hounded and attacked tried to defend himself in his home. The police arrested the councillor for possessing a revolver. In Altona, a working class district of Hamburg where the Communists were strong, something like the battle of Cable Street ensued, except it ended with police opening fire, killing 18 people and wounding hundreds, so the Nazis could proceed with their march.

In December 1930, the president of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht had been invited by one of the bank's board members to join him for dinner at the home of Herman Goering, Hitler's number two, in a pleasant Berlin suburb. There followed a further invitation to Schacht and his wife, on 5th January 1931. Fritz Thyssen and Dr Goebbels were also present. After dinner the special guest arrived, in uniform: Adolf Hitler. Dr Schacht subsequently lobbied for Hitler to be found a place in government. Asked by an American journalist whether he could run Germany's economy under the Nazis, Schacht said that he could. In the end it was Hitler's government that found a place for Dr Schacht.

Schacht was important not just for his financial expertise but for his connections. He had met Montague Norman, governor of the Bank of England, during 1924 talks, and they became good friends. In October 1931, Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg came to Britain to meet Norman, and also met with Geoffrey Dawson editor of The Times, Lord Hailsham, and Lord Rothermere, owner of the Daily Mail, who had been enthusiastic over Nazi gains in the elections the previous year. 'If we examine this transfer of political influence in Germany to the National Socialists we shall find that it has many advantages for the rest of Europe. It sets up an additional rampart against Bolshevism.'

When Hitler stood in the 1932 presidential election, the money showed. He was piloted around Germany in a hired plane, speaking at 48 meetings, and for anywhere he did not reach, the Nazis recorded speeches and broadcast them through loudspeakers, even radio. For new and younger voters particularly, the appeal was that Germany needed a young man of action. Hitler still came second to Hindenburg, but the following year the Field Marshall would appoint him Chancellor.

On 25th February 1933, as Germany faced new Reichstag elections, Goering called top industrialists to a meeting at the Presidential

Palace. After Goering and Schacht greeted them, Gustav Krupp pledged his support for Hitler. Goering left the room. 'All right gentlemen. Now to the cash register!', chirped Schacht. Very soon 3 million marks were pledged for Hitler.

Schacht came over for talks with Montague Norman in May and June 1934. Shortly afterwards he became Nazi Minister of Economics. The following year, leading British companies like Unilever, Dunlop, Shell and ICI came together with City banks in the Anglo-German Fellowship. The Bank of England's helpfulness continued in 1939 when the Czech gold reserve, which had been placed in London for safe keeping, was obligingly handed over, through the Bank for International Settlements, to the Nazis who had invaded Czechoslovakia.

The Nazis had long enjoyed support from others besides German capitalists. Sir Henri Deterding of Shell had seen his oil interests in the Caucasus taken over by the Soviets, and thought the Nazis might help him get his own back. Henry Ford, whom Hitler admired for union-busting and antisemitism, was decorated with the Order of the German Eagle in 1937, as had been Thomas Watson of IBM. Hitler believed that the spread of international companies and competition between them could be harnessed for use by an organised German capitalism. The Reich needed raw materials, more particularly war materials, like oil and rubber. IG Farben, which had agreements with Standard Oil and ICI, became especially important, once it had rid itself of Jews; this was the company to set up a Buna (synthetic rubber) plant at a Polish village called Oswiecim.

But all that lay ahead. When the Nazis took power, their opponents had little fight left. The Social Democrats, despite all the beatings and thuggery they had suffered at Nazi hands, had remained law-abiding, telling themselves that Germany was not Italy and could not really go fascist. They took pride in not being 'provoked'. The Communists, too, were quiet, reassuring themselves that the Nazis could not last. 'After Hitler it will be our turn'. Some demoralised Red Front fighters went over to the stormtroopers, whether hoping to subvert them or conceding to the winning side. On May Day 1933 the trade unions accepted that they should march behind the stormtroopers playing the Horst Wessel song. The following day, as planned, the Nazis took over every union hall or office in Germany, beating up trade unionists and sending leading members off to Dachau. Social Democrats continued sitting in parliament, even voting for government measures, till they and the Communists and other left-wingers were taking their turns on lorries and trains heading for the camps.

There was nothing automatic about the sequence of events between 1929 and 1933. Just because the big money swung behind Hitler, this did not guarantee that he would win, though it must have helped. But, hopefully, looking at some of the underlying connections should dissuade us from complacency and help us towards seeing what is necessary to say 'Never again'.



Unemployed Germans, Berlin 1932

FIGHTING FRANCO — A FAMILY AFFAIR

JUDITH LESSER CRAVITZ shares memories of her family's deep involvement in the Spanish Civil War

This has been the year of the International Brigades Memorial Trust (IBMT). Seventy years after Franco's bloody victory over the legally elected Spanish Republican Government, the few remaining Brigadistas have been granted Spanish citizenship. Spain has fully acknowledged the justice of the Republican cause and the part played by the International Brigades. At a ceremony presided over by the Spanish Ambassador, the seven remaining British Brigaders were formally presented with their Spanish passports.

Sam Lesser, chair of the IBMT, has had a high profile, speaking about 'the cause' at meetings and in the media, but it's difficult to describe a family so deeply involved in the Spanish Civil War, with no

holidays to the Costa Brava, I was protesting the imminent execution of Julian Grimau. Spanish holidays were not an option for us. We were only too aware of the terror taking place there, and had no wish to be tourists in such a place.

One of the things all the volunteers describe is the warm welcome they received from the Spaniards they met during the war, and how they were encouraged and helped to learn at least some of the language. With Franco safely underground, Frank at last decided to go to Spain in 1976, taking with him Mira (my mother) and me and my family – two young daughters and my husband.

The first thing we noticed as we at last set foot on previously forbidden Spanish soil, were the heavily armed police. The children had never seen such a thing before, and Frank was visibly depressed. Later on, as we settled into our rented villa, he went about practising his Spanish. But the locals, while happy to engage in commercial transactions with us in Spanish, were not prepared to answer personal questions of the kind Frank had been used to asking 40 years before, when he had been treated as a comrade.

He was also very shocked that the state of agriculture appeared very much as he remembered it, and the peasants not much better off. (I myself, travelling in Catalunya in the early 1990s, was shocked to see memorial plaques to the Fascists still in place in small villages – which thankfully have now all been removed.)

So, the following year he returned with Mira and went to the village near Albacete where he had been billeted with a local family. Sitting in the local bar, he inquired after the family, explaining his previous stay with them. The bar owner sent for the son of the family, who arrived and greeted Frank familiarly; although he had been a child when Frank was there, he remembered him well. At this, the locals changed, becoming welcoming and talking, though guardedly, about their life. It was clear to Frank that Franco's ghost was still very present, and freedom of speech was not yet a credible option.

Since this is *Jewish Socialist* magazine, I will briefly address the question: who were the volunteers? There is a fairly reliable statistic that around 35,000 people volunteered, of whom some 5,000 were Jewish. But what does this mean? When asked, very few Brigadistas think that Jewish identity influenced their decision to volunteer. The events in Europe of the late 1920s and early 1930s made many people politically aware, including Jews, many of whom had a background of fleeing from terror. But in Spain, the only time being Jewish mattered was as Bob Doyle described – if you were captured. Jews, Communists and Socialists were singled out for particularly brutal treatment.

A very interesting documentary, *Madrid Before Hanita* – Jews from Palestine in the International Brigades (Dir: Eran Torbiner, 2006), deals with the struggles and motivation of the Palestine Brigade,

who were widely criticised for putting the struggle for democracy in Spain before that for a Jewish state – in other words, the group were true Socialists, like the European Brigadistas. However, let us not forget that the official position of the yishuv (the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine) was to send money and aid to the Republicans. An interesting paradox.

This was our Civil War: the stories of how it had been, the people met, the comrades killed, the defeat of democracy. In recent years we have seen films and read books and heard many descriptions of life under the terror. Many Spaniards lived in exile for 40 years, aware that to return would be extremely dangerous. Many others, captured by the Nationalists, remained in prison until the 1970s. We know now that the Valley of the Fallen, Franco's memorial to himself, was built by inmates of Spanish concentration camps. More recently we have learned that women were treated, if possible, more harshly than men for supporting the rightful government. And Franco, like Hitler and later the Argentinian junta, operated a policy of kidnapping the children of Republican families and giving them to his supporters.

Meanwhile, although excluded from the United Nations as a fascist state, Spain in the 1950s managed to establish a tourist industry and attract thousands of visitors. How was this possible, given what was going on? The courageous Pamela O'Malley worked in Spain from the 1950s onwards, and was often detained by the police for her underground activities. A British fellow teacher described how she would disappear for a few days, never accounting for her absence. But few of the expatriates working there had any idea what went on under the surface of daily life in Madrid. The clampdown was absolute – no one would talk.

At the same time, many people were leaving Spain freely to work elsewhere; there is quite a long-established Spanish colony in London, completely unconnected with the exiled Republicans, whose children have been born and educated there and are at home in both countries. I am connected with

some of these families and, as in Spain, they now talk about the Civil War period freely. Some were Fascists, some Republicans, and in some families, inevitably, there were both, causing rifts which continue to this day. My grandson has one great grandfather who was a Brigadista, and another, a Spaniard, who fought for Franco! The wounds will probably not be healed as long as those who experienced the war – now all over 75 – are alive to tell the tale. But their children and grandchildren, like their British counterparts, are now encouraged to take an interest in what is now a 'historical period'.

Spain is a success story in every way – a democracy with a democratic king! It has a viable economy and universal education, and civil rights its people hoped and awaited for 40 years. My father watched this with interest, visiting often and waiting for the time when history was finally accepted and speech was truly free. He has not lived to see it but he, and all those who fought for it, would have been pleased with their passports, though quite embarrassed by the VIP treatment. All the Brigadistas always emphasised that volunteering was the right and only thing to do. They were rebels with a righteous cause, now universally acknowledged. No jubileum la memoria. Salud!



Frank (left) and Sam, taken in 1938, shortly before Frank was sent home.



dissenting voices? My father Frank, Sam's brother, was also a volunteer, as were two brothers-in-law – one, killed aged 19 on the Ebro. Sam's wife, Margaret Powell, a nurse, was made a Dame of the Order of the Loyalty to the Spanish Republic, an honour conferred by Luis Portillo, head of the Republican Government in Exile.

Frank was turned down when he applied to go to Spain in September 1936 together with Sam. He was not yet 21, so had to wait until the following year. Wounded on the Ebro front, he returned home in December 1938, and was welcomed at Victoria Station by his parents and Clem Attlee.

Frank saw the failure of the Spanish Republic as a personal defeat, and would not set foot in Spain while Franco and Francoism continued. At an age when my contemporaries were going on package

Agitating in Yiddish

'It is an irony of history that the first Hebrew print to appear in Spain in more than four centuries was produced by a Yiddish speaking military unit.' So wrote Joshua Rothenberg. The place was Albacete and the unit was the Naftali Botwin Company of the Polish Dombrowski Battalion – a mainly Jewish battalion in the Spanish Civil War.

The company was named after a young Jewish Communist from Poland, executed in 1925 for assassinating a police informer. The publication was called *Frayhaytskemfer* – freedom fighter. Later the company

published Botvin, with its masthead slogan 'For our freedom and yours'. A few years later this same slogan was echoed by the Warsaw Ghetto resistance.

Around 15% of the fighters who travelled to Spain to fight for the Republic were Jews, many from countries where they were less than 1% of the population. Most fought in the units of their country of origin and not in a specific Jewish unit, but the existence of the Botwin company and its agitation in Yiddish symbolised the unified desire of Jews around the world to resist

the fascist forces gaining ground in so many countries.

Here in Britain the Jewish Workers' Circle focused its aid to Spain campaign on the Botwin company, transporting food, clothing, thousands of cigarettes and a 2-ton lorry.

A radio broadcast in Yiddish by the Botwin company said: 'Jew, worker or man of the people, wherever you might be ... wherever you live, where you work and suffer, know this: your hope for the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini is being decided today in Spain.'

David Rosenberg

After reading 'Do Jews Have Horns?' (JS57) it struck me that there is a story in the role of Jews in the early days of soul and blues music. Cadillac Records has just been released, this is a thinly disguised retelling of the Chess Records story, a label that gave us Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Howlin' Wolf and Etta James. Leonard and Phil Chess, known to their mother as Lejzor and Fiszal Czyz, founded the Detroit label that electrified the country blues of the southern USA.

Jerry Wexler at Atlantic in New York, in cahoots with the Turkish Ertegun brothers, had perhaps the finest R&B roster in the world, including Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett and Solomon Burke. They also bankrolled Stax and so helped along Otis Redding and Booker T and the MGs. Soul and blues has had a long history of miscegenation, but that 1954 meeting of a Jewish journalist with two sons of the Turkish ambassador to the USA, who went on to found one of the most influential labels ever, must have been one of the strangest.

Art Rupe founded Speciality Records, initially in New Orleans, signing Little Richard and Fats Domino. Rupe was enthralled by gospel music, although his good sense left him when he passed on a young Sam Cooke, deserting gospel for the devil's music, with the sublime 'You Send Me'!

For Jackie Wilson, Gene Chandler and The Chilites (much under-rated by soul fans – listen to 'There Will Never Be Any Peace Until God is Seated at the Conference Table') we can thank Nat Tarnopol at Brunswick, a label he bought in 1950. Tarnopol, a professional baseball player, was driven into music by the antisemitism of the spectators.

More musical Jewish guys found a way in as songwriters and producers, Jerry Ragavoy (using the name 'Norman Meade') wrote 'Time is on My Side' for Irma Thomas, and later covered by the Rolling Stones, and 'Stay With Me' for Lorraine Ellison. Bert Berns, a failed mambo dancer of Russian Jewish extraction from the Bronx, wrote 'Piece of my Heart' for Erma Franklin and 'Down in the Valley' for Solomon Burke. The mighty Lieber and Stoller, perhaps the wittiest songwriters of the last century, wrote 'Yakety Yak', 'Charlie Brown' and 'Poison Ivy' for The Coasters alone. They also, wrote, 'Stand By Me', which as a good republican, I would happily see replace the national anthem. They also gave Elvis 'Hound Dog' and 'Jailhouse Rock', so were there at the birth of rock 'n' roll. Carole King, one of the few women writing songs at the time, was producing gem after gem for groups like The Drifters and The Crystals. She wrote one of the most sensitive 'first time' songs in 'Will

You Still Love Me Tomorrow?', although feminists have always had a problem with 'He Hit Me (And it Felt Like a Kiss)'.

In the '60s, people asked: 'Can White Men Sing the Blues?' (The Bonzos, more sensibly, asked 'Can Blue Men Sing the Whites?'). It hardly seems worth answering, though it's difficult to think of any great Jewish soul or blues musicians – certainly not anyone of the status of Stan Getz and Benny Goodman. However, Jewish men did seem to have an uncanny ear for great soul and blues music. In New York, Chicago, LA and New Orleans, there were hip Jewish men hooked on great music, but not hip enough to perform it! Leonard Chess was a bass drummer, possibly the most unhip musician possible! Perhaps the Chess brothers, Wexler, Rupe and others got involved in the music they loved in the only way they could, by starting a label.

There is probably social and economic theory behind this that I might want to think about but I'd really just rather play 'I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You' by Aretha! This was 'the epochal first album', according to the greatest historian of soul, Peter Guralnick. Now that's an interesting name...

Richard Henley, Herts

Send your letters to Jewish Socialist, BM3725 London WC1N 3XX or js@jewishsocialist.org.uk

A LIFETIME OF DEFIANCE

DAVID LANDAU pays tribute to Steve Cohen who died in March this year

Steve Cohen struggled for socialism and against all forms of oppression through his activism and by applying his formidable intellect to progressing struggles, often in the form of publications.

Steve joined the International Marxist Group (IMG) in 1968 and left at the end of 1974. He was attracted to it because of its dynamism, openness to ideas and the seriousness with which it took oppressions that the rest of the left either avoided, such as sexuality and gender, or which they didn't see as fundamental, such as racism. He was also impressed by the robust anti-imperialism of the IMG regarding Ireland.

But there were limits both to how much the group supported self-organisation of oppressed groups, particularly when raised in relation to the internal life of the organisation, and to the extent that they welcomed ideas from outside the Marxist canon from feminism, psychoanalysis and politics emerging from the Black movement. Despite the apparent freedom of discussion and plethora of internal tendencies, Steve felt there was an authoritarian streak running through the group. He questioned Trotskyist and Leninist ideas about democratic centralism, dictatorship of the proletariat and so forth believing that we have to learn from other traditions such as Anarchism and Bundism.

Steve valued his experience in that organisation, though. He always had a high regard for Trotsky's

ideas, commenting that his own views were often more in line with what Trotsky argued than the Trotskyist groups themselves. He developed strong criticisms of positions he had held whilst in the IMG, in particular the idea of unconditional, but not uncritical, support of anti-imperialist movements around the world. Some of these movements had murdered thousands of political opponents – often left wing opponents in the communities they claimed to represent. Or they promoted a nationalism that would come to show its vicious side to minorities in the future. Later he argued that this prepared the way for uncritical support for groups driven by religious fundamentalism by sections of the left in recent times. Steve became very interested in the debates between Trotsky, Cannon and Shachtman around these questions. These debates sit at the core of an unpublished novel that Steve wrote and was editing at the end of his life.

From the IMG days, though, Steve appreciated the centrality of Ireland to the struggle for socialism in Britain. He linked this struggle to that against racism, focusing on the treatment of Irish people in this country. He wrote a pamphlet against the Prevention of Terrorism Act entitled 'Apartheid in Britain'. In these days of the 'war on terror' and the racism surrounding it, Steve's pamphlet anticipated a phenomenon which has since spread deep into the body politic.

In 1976 he was invited to speak about this pamphlet at a meeting organised by the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty). The meeting was broken up by fascists and Steve was knocked unconscious.

Steve's longstanding work at North Manchester Law Centre opened a door for him on the world of immigration controls. People came in who were facing deportations, fighting to bring in other members of their families, or falling foul of internal controls through refusal of welfare, educational or health rights. His theoretical opposition to immigration controls became a living issue for him as a community lawyer. He believed that a key to success was open campaigning and was soon involved in a number of high profile campaigns. Nasira Begum, Anwar Ditta, Said Bibi, Nasreen Akhtar in the late '70s, and later Viraj Mendis, Florence Okolo and the Rahman family campaign, to name just a few.

Steve researched the history of immigration controls, uncovering the antisemitic campaigning that led to the introduction of the Aliens Act back in 1905. He brought attention to the British Brothers League, the proto-fascist group at the turn of the 20th century. In order to bring the lessons of these campaigns and of the history to a wider public, he wrote a number of pamphlets whilst at the law centre. Steve also saw the necessity for a specialist centre of resistance and legal support, and he campaigned for the establishment of the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, of which he was the first co-ordinator.

Steve saw the weaknesses in the movements resisting different aspects of immigration controls: the idea that there can be some kind of fair and non-racist controls; not seeing the need to marry forthright campaigning with legal tactics; and a lack of knowledge in different professions about the impact of immigration controls and what to do about it. He wrote a series of books: Immigration Controls, the Family and the Welfare State, No One is Illegal, Standing on the Shoulders of Fascism, and Deportation is Freedom, which drew close parallels between Orwell's 'newspeak' 4 and the discourse of the 'immigration service', the Home Office and Government.

Illness forced him to leave the Unit but he continued to write. He became increasingly aware of the need for a voice which called openly for the abolition of immigration controls and, with the assistance of a few comrades, wrote the No One Is Illegal Manifesto. The No Borders Network and the Campaign Against Immigration Controls are strongly influenced by the ideas of the manifesto.

Being Jewish was always significant to Steve. Not in a religious way, but in recognising an important history, being part of a persecuted, refugee people and his awareness that antisemitism is still very much alive. This informed his opposition to racism, fascism and immigration controls. Steve regarded heterodoxy as a central part of his Jewish identity as well as of his socialism, and he frequently challenged the self-appointed leaders of the Jewish community who claim to speak for all of us, but usually say things we are trenchantly opposed to. Steve was a member of the Jewish Socialists' Group off and on over a number of years, and was a member when he died. His approach to life and his humour were quintessentially Jewish.

From his IMG days onwards, Steve championed the rights of the Palestinian people. He trenchantly opposed the 'two-state solution' on the grounds that it was inherently racist and could only be achieved through ethnic cleansing, apartheid or a combination of both. Exclusive states, Jewish or otherwise, were anathema to Steve. Taking the fight into the Jewish community itself, he was physically thrown out of a synagogue in the 1980s.

At the same time Steve felt that there was an antisemitic strain contaminating the anti-Zionist movement. Sometimes this was a deliberate use of the anti-Zionist flag of convenience under which antisemitic ideas were peddled. More often, old antisemitic notions would unconsciously emerge. He wrote a pamphlet in 1983 entitled That's Funny You Don't Look Anti-Semitic about antisemitism on the left, which infuriated many. When the Jewish Socialists' Group didn't publish it, it was eventually brought out by the Beyond the Pale Collective.

Whilst Steve looked back critically at this book, he believed that its central thesis remains even more pertinent today, when sections of the left sing the praises of Hizbollah and Hamas. He was very concerned that there appeared to be an exceptionalism about how Israel is talked about and acted upon, compared with other equally or more appalling regimes. He argued that campaigns and actions in solidarity with the Palestinians should always explicitly have opposition to antisemitism as part of their platform.

In 1995 Steve developed chronic rheumatoid arthritis with intense acute episodes. Over the years these became increasingly debilitating and intensely painful. His medicines weakened his immune system leaving him vulnerable to infection. He was in and out of hospital in the last few years of his life.

Despite his illness Steve went to Lithuania, taking me as his carer, to investigate the role it played as a buffer state in terms of immigration control, and to alert students to the evils of developing controls. Whilst in Lithuania he took the opportunity to research the fate of his own family during the Nazi era, visiting the shtetl where a branch of his family came from.

His illness presented him with a new battlefield. He found many wonderful dedicated workers in the health service and in the local authority caring service on the one hand, and institutions which could not properly come to grips with or even understand the issues of disability on the other. He had a series of battles; one was to fight for a different design of chairs in the hospital as the existing design was unsuitable for many disabled people.

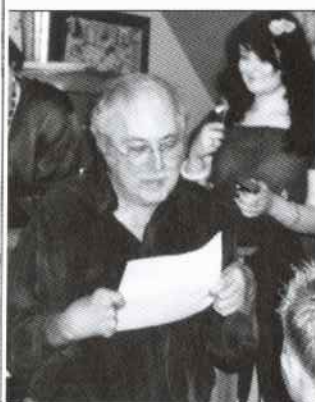
Steve's last battle was against the New Labour policy of privatising home care in the name of 'choice'. The only choice he wanted – to keep his existing regular carers – was not on offer. He won the battle in his own case but saw this as the opening salvo against a system in reaction and a union in retreat. That war has yet to be won but it has lost one of its most militant soldiers.

Steve lived his life according to the No One Is Illegal motto 'Defiance Not Compliance'. He will be sorely missed by his children, Rachel and Tom, his daughter-in-law Cecilia, his two grandchildren, Fintan and Ellen, his friends and comrades.

Lotta continua!



Above: Steve Cohen's challenge to the language of the state. Opposite: Steve speaking at his 60th birthday party.



OCCUPYING SAFER TERRITORY

Humour changes our perspective by transgressing taboos and challenging conformity, so why has Jewish comedy gone into retreat? asks IVOR DEMBINA

I hadn't yet read Simcha Weinstein's book *Shtick Shift: Jewish Humour in the 21st century* but, after reading the review on the *Chortle* website, I already felt ill-disposed towards it. It's hard to know what to say about a book which claims to bring the story of Jewish humour into the present decade yet doesn't make a single reference to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. It feels like reading about Germany in the 1930s without any mention of you-know-who; a breathtaking omission that *Chortle* should have pointed out.

If, as Weinstein reminds us, comedy equals tragedy plus time, how long do we have to wait before Jewish humorists start addressing the subject of Israel? If the art of Jewish comedy stems from self-deprecation, where's the stuff on imprisoning your neighbours, grabbing their land and then blaming them for all the trouble? Weinstein's assertion that 'suffering inspires humour which in turn can be used to fight oppression', would be easier to stomach if he had added that in the 21st century the general audience no longer sees Jews as the oppressed, but is in danger of seeing us as oppressors.

Israel's apologists have so assiduously peddled the lie that any criticism of the Jewish state is inherently antisemitic, that the audience is now in jeopardy of believing it. When you relentlessly tell people: if you dislike Israel then you automatically dislike Jews, eventually they're going to turn round and agree with you. This calamitous backfire-in-waiting has to be prevented and today's generation of Jewish comedians should take up that challenge.

Of course not all Jews are responsible for the mistreatment of Palestinians, and plenty of Israelis are openly against the excesses of their own country. But today's Jewish comedian inhabits an age of ethnicity; publicly debunking your own nation is acceptable but targeting your own racial group isn't. If a Jewish comic wants to do some straight talking about Israel, he or she finds they cannot: it isn't their nation, and to criticise it publicly is perceived (wrongly) as an attack on their own ethnicity.

Weinstein suggests that Jewish humour is alive and well, often citing Larry David and Sarah Silverman as proof. But however popular or successful these two have become, it doesn't disguise the fact that Jewish comedy is in retreat. David and Silverman may have updated the public's taste for Jewish people externalising their

anxieties, but they both stay well clear of topics like Israel's ethnic cleansing, its appetite for apartheid, and its penchant for dropping phosphorous bombs on innocent people.

So what do we Jewish comics do? The real story of modern Jewish humour is the way it deals with today's pain. Sadly, a small number pocket the Zionist shekel by performing at gruesome pro-Israel flag-waving 'family entertainment', which now routinely includes singing groups from the Israeli army. Most, however, prefer to keep their heads down and follow the path of perceived success, knocking up a workable set of material: a little bit of politics, a little bit of sex and a little bit of Jewish, and slide noiselessly into the swamp of value-free comedy that drowns today's live scene.

As the comedian knows, words are less potent than the silences in between, and Jewish people endorse Israel by keeping quiet. With pragmatism the order of the day, the modern Jewish comic either avoids the subject altogether or tailors his or her jokes about Israel to be as uncommitted as possible. The fear of being smeared as self-hating or treacherous by your own community drives the dominant attitude of 'maybe if I keep quiet, the problem will go away'. Where have we heard that before? I don't claim to discern what goes on in the souls of others, but surely cowardice affects entitlement to the accolade of true comedian.

I recognise it's a lot easier to talk about cowardice in others than to avoid it oneself. For some years I've had my own courage tested and I've often fallen short. I've been writing and developing a comedy show about how I see the Middle East conflict and I've often softened material or declined to perform for fear of rejection by fellow Jews. I've often retreated myself, distracted by quiet warnings from other Jews to keep my mouth shut. My name has appeared on a Zionist internet hate list and I often receive mail designed to insult, threaten and provoke. It's not the vulgarity of these anonymous slanders that unsettles, but the smell of fear beneath them. It seeps up from the sewer of delusion and self-pity that demands forgiveness for Israel's outrages of today in return for the persecution Jews have suffered in the past; a nauseating insult to Holocaust victims that reduces their annihilation to a matter of political strategy.

I keep going because my own intellectual and emotional discomfort is embarrassingly

small when set alongside the actual suffering of the Palestinian people. The ludicrous claim that Zionism makes to represent all Jews, and the widespread perception that all Jews are implicated in Israel's actions, forces me to confront my own cowardly demons and gets me to try and speak through my work against Israel's disgraceful behaviour.

Over the years I've worked in comedy with some highly talented Jewish comedians. They're not just funny but also fundamentally decent people who happen to occupy the privileged position of being paid to say what's in their hearts and minds. So I call upon us all to start doing the job we're paid to do and take on an unfolding tragedy that claims to be perpetrated in our name. For my part, all I can say is, if you do, you won't be alone. You'll be disliked by some fellow Jews, vilified by others and maybe labelled a troublemaker. But you have not made the trouble, they have.

The compensations are many. You'll be writing about something that matters, and the audience will applaud you for trying to grapple with the truth and how it affects you. You never know, you might even get a mention in Weinstein's next book. But right now, rather than celebrate Jewish humour, offerings like Weinstein's suck the life out of it and speed the process by which it is becoming a relic of a bygone age; a comic heritage viewed through an historical prism from a time when Jews were either immigrants or being truly persecuted.

In fairness, provided you can get over the publisher's warning that 'no part of this book may be reproduced', followed by 116 pages of comic material culled from elsewhere and 'analysis' we've heard countless times before, Weinstein's book isn't entirely without merit: for sure, the early stuff rings true. His account of why notoriously antisemitic television stations in America eventually allowed Jewish comedy on screen in the 1950s is worth reading, and some of his religious baloney is entertaining in a baffling sort of way. But in answer to your question, 'Is this book worth buying?' do what the author did: run away.

This article first appeared in July 2009 on the UK's leading comedy website, *Chortle*, at: www.chortle.co.uk



Music for the diaspora



Even before seemingly every country exchanged the welfare of its citizens for the Great Dream of Endless Coin, Daphna Sadeh wasn't glutting the CD marketplace with her albums. They've appeared modestly, despite the popularity of so-called world music, but no less carefully considered for that.

The Voyagers band set off in 2007 with *Walking the Thin Line*, which is rather evocative of the wider Middle East, with a range of Jewish styles that emerged, as many Israeli Jews have, from all over the region. The Voyager Song is the only vocal, apparently in Turkish, although a printed translation in the booklet would have been nice.

The latest outing for the Israeli ex-pat sees her with half the Voyagers replaced and a transfer to John Zorn's decidedly Jewish New York record label. She's retained the bond with drummer Ronen Kozokaro, who teases a wide range of whomps from what we used to call a cocktail kit: bass drum, snare drum, hi-hat, and ride cymbal. The darabuka is a goblet drum, meant to be played with the fingers, although he often ignores this and treats it like a conga; while hands are thus occupied, he makes with the feet on the kit's foot pedals. Stewart Curtis is first call saxophonist with lots of pop sessions, London stage musicals, and TV to his credit.



However, a few years ago he started up his jazz-klezmer outfit K-Groove and, naturally, he joined up with like-minded Daphna Sadeh.

What sets these Tzadik numbers apart is that the Arabic oud has been ditched and the new accordionist is less Levantine. So there's less of a 'world music' costume to this music. With conventional Western instruments, their numbers frequently change tempo and sometimes rhythm as well, only to return to a given piece's starting point. Daphna Sadeh composes the melodic or lead lines as a step-up and step-down in terms of the root notes. Easy for the bass player, you say? Well, keep in mind that a double-bass is fretless and so doesn't suffer bum notes with grace. That Sadeh likes to play shut-eyed is proof of her knowing her instrument.

This variegated approach makes for more than just joyful music, well played, although it certainly is. And it's not, like some vintage jazz-rock fusion, an excuse for everyone to show how musically athletic they are, although these players are perfectly fit. Rather, the changing of the gears within a composition is to show a broader philosophical outlook. Stereotype or not, it ain't just the Jews who shrug at life's ironies, and this is healthy.

Daphna herself isn't small-minded, having studied at the Manhattan School and now perhaps living in London. But these compositions reveal unresolved longings of place, introspections that are very public. So it's music for the diaspora, whatever wandering sort you might be.

The numbers dip into obvious pots: the klezmer language, a Spanish palate, some whisks of loose folk, and George Benson-like jazz. But what peeks through is a late 1960s sensibility, which was, like early prog rock, a kind of Western rhythmic trance.

And, like yer old LPs, this set clocks in at 47 minutes, not the typical CD marathon one never seems to finish, do one? Treat the whole album as a travelogue of the heart, which it is.

Andy Simons

www.daphnasadeh.com, www.33jazz.com
Tzadik, 300 East 10th Street, pmb 126, New York City 10003.

DAPHNA SADEH & THE VOYAGERS

Walking the Thin Line

33 Records 143

DAPHNA SADEH: RECONCILIATION

Tzadik Records

Present images of the past

REDISCOVERING TRACES OF MEMORY: THE JEWISH HERITAGE OF POLISH GALICIA

Jonathan Webber, photographs by Chris Schwartz
Galicia Jewish Museum / Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, £15.95

Hidden away in the basement of the London Jewish Cultural Centre, is a stunning exhibition of photographs of Polish Galicia, the region of southern Poland where the Nazis built Auschwitz, which had been home to a huge Jewish population over many hundreds of years. The images are the work of Chris Schwartz, who died prematurely in 2007, after devoting the last years of his life to photographing the traces of Jewish life that could still be seen, and creating the Galicja Jewish Museum in Krakow, where they constitute a permanent exhibition, called Traces of Memory.

The book of the exhibition, beautifully produced by the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, gives many more people access to this remarkable record of what remains of the rich history of the Jews in Poland after the devastation of the Holocaust. Most striking is the freshness of the images, and the lack of clichés. The tragedy stares directly from the pictures but not in the forms we are familiar with. 'The last functioning synagogue of the city of Nowy Sacz' – a tiny, plain entrance with a small blue car

parked outside and a cat wandering across the forecourt – is juxtaposed with the town's former grand main synagogue, now an art gallery. The main square of the small town of Biecz is deserted today; before the war it would have been full of Yiddish-speaking Jewish traders.

Of course, there are many ruined buildings, such as the tiny private synagogue tucked away in a Krakow courtyard, where the

wrought iron doors look all the more exquisite for the rubble piled up in front of them. In the derelict prayer room of the ruined synagogue of Dabrowa Tarnowska, the ark is now a gaping hole; the remaining walls are covered with cheerfully coloured murals but someone has scratched the word 'Polska' (Poland) over one of the Stars of David. There are antisemitic graffiti but there are also anti-Nazi graffiti.

The former Jewish area of Kazimierz in Krakow has become a thriving tourist attraction, with fashionable shops, hotels and eating places, including kosher restaurants and Jewish music venues. A painting by a Polish schoolgirl, expressing both regret and hope, shows a Jewish boy arm in arm with a Christian girl, their heritage signified by a synagogue and a church.

There are gravestones decorated with elaborate

carvings, a hilltop cemetery of simple graves that still attracts Hassidic pilgrims and mass graves testifying to the murder of whole communities, as well as stark and unusual images of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The only photo that is at odds with the focus on Poland itself is one in the section documenting 'People making memory today'. This shows the March of the Living and describes how: 'The participants usually wear a special uniform and carry Israeli flags; when the groups march out of Auschwitz, they are commonly led by a rabbi holding a Torah scroll.' The participants then go on to Israel to celebrate Independence Day. The text adds: 'The intense emotional experience of encountering the reality of both Auschwitz and present-day Israel in a single, structured trip is unquestionably powerful and life-changing for these young people.' The March of the Living is a cynical attempt by Zionists and religious fundamentalists to claim the souls of the murdered Jews, many of whom might not have endorsed either of these sets of ideas.

This seems like a crass misuse of the memory of those hundreds of years of civilisation, compared with the rest of the book and exhibition, particularly the remarkable section on how the past is being commemorated by the population of the region today. Fragments of smashed tombstones have been put together to create a memorial wall. A former synagogue has been reinvented as the local public library, with the original vivid art and texts on the walls and ceiling carefully restored. A festival in Krakow is packed with people craving access to Jewish culture.

The exhibition at the London Jewish Cultural Centre runs until 30th September, if you can get past the spurious security and unwelcoming reception desk and find the photos without so much as a handwritten sign directing you to them. Whether you go to the exhibition or not, though, buy the book, study the images and read the text. It gives a remarkable and moving insight into what Poland – and the world – has lost.

Julia Bard



Above: A former synagogue, now used as a public library. Right: A famous 16th-century synagogue, the oldest in Poland, which is still in use



The London Jewish Cultural Centre, 94-96 North End Road, London NW11 7SX, www.ljcc.org.uk

A CHANGING PICTURE

When Bill Fishman collaborated with the photographer Nicholas Breach to produce a poignant illustrated book, *The Streets of East London*, in 1979, they chronicled, in stark monochrome, the momentous events and the dramatic changes of populations within this tiny neighbourhood over a relatively short period. At that time the East End had just endured its latest round of slum clearances, a seemingly cyclical event in an area that has been one of the most densely populated quarters of London, once by the Irish poor, then the Jewish poor, and later dominated physically and culturally by the relatively recent immigrants from the Sylhet district of Bangladesh.

Fishman recalled Israel Zangwill's fictionalised account of the 19th century Jewish immigrants, *Children of the Ghetto*. Back in 1979 he commented, 'Zangwill's ghetto is gone. But in the side streets of Brick Lane – Fournier Street, Wilkes Street, Princelet Street and Hanbury Street – can still be heard the endless hum and whirl of tailor's machines, just as it was when the great Jewish chronicler walked these same streets a century ago.' And Fishman was sure this way of life would endure.

In the late 1980s, when I worked in Princelet Street, you could look through the pavement level gratings next to the old Huguenot houses and see the sweatshop workers at their machines, but two decades further on, it is a very different scene. Especially in the evenings and at weekends, the hum and whirl of machines has been replaced by drum and bass and urban grooves. The Bengali faces are swamped by young, mainly white trendies, the old Huguenot houses, which had been subdivided into flats and factories, are no longer producing clothes. They have been restored and bought up by a new wealthy class. But Brick Lane and the streets to its east still reflect the deep layers of poverty that the majority of East Enders continue to contend with on a daily basis.

Bennett comments that 'East London's role as a resettlement for incoming foreigners is possibly over ... newly refurbished pubs, wine bars, eateries and apartment spaces are spreading southward from Islington and Shoreditch ... like creeping brambles.' But, he adds, 'the East End is a physically dense place and it will take more than up-market attitudes and a lick of paint to eradicate its equally dense history.'

The proximity with which rich and poor, black and white, old and young encounter each other in the East End today reflects the immense changes since Fishman and Breach's book was published. John Bennett, a north Londoner, is descended from generations of East Enders. Since the early 1980s he has been returning frequently to the East End armed with a camera and notebook, and has produced a worthy companion to the *Streets of East London*. While adding a few archive photos,

most of the pictures in this book are from his own collection and are much more recent – streets, pubs, markets, alleyways and people, with particularly atmospheric evening shots. His text flits engagingly between past and present, and there is as much for the historian in this book as for the reader wishing to understand the East End's current configuration.

He declares at the outset that 'for those new to the subject I hope this will be a journey full of surprises', and in his fascinating and accessible text you sense his own surprise at what he finds. He adds: 'For those who are already aficionados of the East End I would like to believe ... you will discover at least one thing you didn't know before.' Placing myself in this category, I gleaned many new and quirky pieces of information: that Dick Turpin worked as an apprentice in a Whitechapel butchers, but was dismissed for 'the brutality of his manner'; that Whitechapel High Street was paved during the reign of Henry VIII; how Fieldgate Street synagogue was nicknamed 'little Odessa'; how Altab Ali Park, named after the victim of a racist murder in 1978, also contains the grave of Richard Brandon who was paid £50 for beheading Charles I.

Bennett summarises the story of the East End as one of 'prosperity, labour, immigration, decline, poverty, crime, neglect and rebirth and in that order'. And through the book he pays proper attention to each of these elements in a matter of fact manner that avoids the glamorisation, stereotyping or condescension that pass for too much comment on this still fascinating quarter that was the cradle of London's Jewish labour movement and so many struggles for equality, dignity and freedom.

David Rosenberg

David Rosenberg regularly leads historical walks through the East End. Details are available at www.eastendwalks.com

Gunthorpe Street after dark, retaining the atmosphere of the sinister East End of times past



E1: A JOURNEY THROUGH WHITECHAPEL AND SPITALFIELDS
John G Bennett
Fiveleaves Publications, £9.99

YEASTENDERS

UNION BREAD: BAGELS, PLATZELS AND CHOLLAH – THE STORY OF THE LONDON JEWISH BAKERS UNION

by Larry Wayne
Socialist History Society/Jewish Socialists' Group, £6

Much has been written about the garment trade that dominated the East End labour market, first for Jewish immigrants and later for Bangladeshis. We know of their struggles to unionise and demand a living wage, the strikes for a 12-hour day with two breaks, and the craft-union style battles between different grades of workers. In this account, meticulously researched from both English and Yiddish sources, Larry Wayne has shone a light on the conditions and campaigns of a different set of workers forced to work even longer hours for less pay in equally torrid and cramped working conditions, while the tailors sweated.

These were the bakers who, despite the constraints of working within small family-based firms, managed to create a union – the London Jewish Bakers Union. Though small in size and stature, it outlived other Jewish trade unions in Britain by many years. Its total membership rarely exceeded 150 individuals at any one time, but it fought continuously to ameliorate and challenge the exploitation of its members.

Man cannot live by bread alone – so the Bible tells us. For immigrant Jewish workers of yesteryear, slaving away making bread on shifts of up to 20 hours, living was something they barely had time to do.

When Jewish immigrants flooded into London's East End escaping Czarist persecution, there were already many bakeries based within the local (non-Jewish) German community, but there was a

demand for the special breads that Jews consumed in the old country. Within a few years up to 60 Jewish bakeries were established.

Many employees in the German bakeries were already organised through the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers and Confectioners (AUOB), and increasing numbers of Jewish bakers were organised as branch 21 of this union – a branch later known as the International Bakers union, reflecting the diverse countries the Jewish immigrants emanated from. After periods of amalgamation and dissolution it eventually emerged as the London Jewish Bakers Union (LJBU).

Larry Wayne does not romanticise their struggles – rather he shows the difficulties they encountered in organising a membership scattered in small enterprises where unscrupulous employers happily used unskilled scab labour from their families to break union campaigns. And he doesn't skate over the in-fighting within political organisations supporting the workers. Rudolph Rocker's Jewish anarchists influenced and led bakery workers in several strikes and campaigns but their tactics were often criticised by activists in the Social Democratic Federation. The employers' organisations of master bakers were often more united than the employees and their supporters.

Larry Wayne describes some of the unionised bakers' novel tactics, such as going to the Beth Din, the Jewish Rabbinial court, to seek the Chief Rabbi's support for a union label on bread prepared in

Jewish bakeries. Rabbi Adler refused: 'I cannot favour the use of such a label as proposed, as we cannot mix up religious with social questions.' Good to know that Chief Rabbis have always been such a help to progressive struggles!

We might assume that the establishment's newspaper, the Jewish Chronicle, would have been singularly unsympathetic to the plight of Jewish workers, but Larry Wayne shows that its 'labour movement correspondent' often gave fair and supportive accounts of the Jewish bakers' struggles.

Other less orthodox union actions owed more to socialist thinkers. In 1894 several Jewish trade unions combined with the bakers to help them by-pass their employers' intransigence by establishing a (short-lived) co-operative bakery. Other co-operative experiments followed, offering workers decent hours in sanitary conditions, but bad debts among an impoverished local population defeated them.

The relationship of the Jewish bakers to their largely German non-Jewish counterparts fluctuated over the years. There were many instances of great solidarity, but also accusations that non-Jewish workers scabbed during Jewish bakery disputes. And from the German side, Jewish bakers were charged with undermining their attempts to prevent Sunday baking.

In a period when trade unions were financially weak and with no welfare state cushion for the unemployed, the decision to strike could not be taken frivolously, but there were a number of strikes by the Jewish bakers, especially before the First World War. The most successful one was in 1913, at a time when, according to the Journeyman Bakers journal, 'a journeyman baker could be working a 90 hour week' for the same wages as 'a street sweeper

working 8 or 9 hour days'. Through the 1913 strike the LJBU won reduced hours, better weekly pay, including holiday pay, and recognition of the union.

The fight for justice in the workplace today is carried on not merely by trade unionists but also by consumers using boycotts, and campaigning groups promoting fair trade and ethical consumption. Larry Wayne quotes the Daily Herald of October 1913 remarking that 'labelling of trade union goods and boycotting of blackleg goods' could be 'of great power.' It added: 'If no one drank beer in any public house where the bar workers were not in a union, do you think the disgraceful hours worked in public houses would be shortened?'

The last recorded meeting of the London Jewish Bakers Union was in 1964, when it was down to 32 members and it officially wound up in 1969. But its great efforts to organise, including the attempts at co-operative production and its pioneering use of the union label should not be forgotten.

Socialists often say: 'We don't want a loaf of bread, we want the whole bloody bakery'. Larry Wayne has shown that bakery workers have hardly been loafing around waiting for the revolution.

David Rosenberg



NAOMI WAYNE, daughter of the author of *Union Bread*, writes about her father's life

AN ORDINARY-EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

Harry Wayne was born in the East End of London. His English-born mother 'returned' to Lithuania as an infant, and arrived back in London, a Yiddish speaking 10-year-old, while his father came from Lithuania as a baby. At 24, Louis met 16-year-old Rachel, and they were married and parents within 12 months. A master cobbler, skilled and ferociously hard working, but in an industry ripe for mechanisation, Louis was permanently unemployed by the time Harry reached adolescence.

Harry's family started as 'high day and holy day' Jews, only becoming extremely Orthodox when he was eight. However, deeply intellectually curious, Harry rejected religion by his mid-teens after he had explored a different shul each Saturday to see if any had something to offer. Instead he became a Communist – a common path then for Jews with a strong sense of justice. His passionate love for his mother was cemented after he was 'reported' to his father for selling the *Daily Worker* on a Saturday. With no money, and nowhere to go, but vowing to leave home if his Sabbath political activities were stopped, he was saved by his deeply religious mother's declaration: 'If he goes, I go'. Nobody went.

Reading history at the London School of Economics (LSE), he was one of a handful of working class university students. Though 1930s LSE was

regarded as a radical hotbed, Harry's memories were of a largely reactionary student body. His experience was defined by his background. Penniless, he walked between home and college, and hugged corridor walls to be inconspicuous. He only had his first cup of tea in the college canteen when his older daughter followed him to the LSE 36 years later.

Graduating in the Depression, Harry's correspondence college job ended after he and two friends organised a strike for higher wages. His next three years were with the Jewish Refugee Committee, where he met the resentment of middle class German Jews for having to rely on support from working class East Enders. Post-war he became a teacher, but had to fight for the job he wanted against the bewilderment of London County Council (LCC) bureaucrats who objected to an LSE graduate 'wasting' his degree on secondary modern school kids.

In the late 1940s Harry met fellow Communist and East Ender Lily Bloom. Committed and independent minded, even in the 1940s Harry (or Larry as Communists called him) and Lily were anguished by Stalinism, especially Stalinist antisemitism. They were appalled at Jewish experience in the 'socialist' countries and at the British Communist Party's largely uncritical response. Yet, as others who had previously defended the Soviet Union, fled the British

HARRY (LARRY) WAYNE 1914-2008

Communist Party after Krushchev's 1956 speech, Harry worked even harder for the cause. His 1957 resignation came, not because of Hungary, but because he doubted the British Communist Party would democratise. (With similar views, Lily stayed, convinced in those pre-feminist days, that her leaving would be attributed to him!)

Fewer outside commitments meant that Harry focused on proving the error of writing off children at the age of 11. Today, all children are expected to get 'five good GCSEs', but entering secondary modern boys for public exams in the 1950s required determined dualling with the local authority. Harry's battles were vindicated by his students – only one ('little sod' as Harry called him) failed to get an 'A' grade.

Though successfully treated, when Harry contracted throat cancer in 1972 he had to retire. This meant a return to political activism, fundraising super-effectively for Medical Aid for Vietnam, and later, with Lily, establishing the Redbridge Trade Union and Pensioners Action Group. And his curiosity never diminished – when a friend complained that it was too painful even to think about the Soviet Union, Harry said he was tired of secrets and lies, and wanted to know everything!

Harry always saw himself as Jewish. He admitted to irrational food aversions (no pork or shellfish), would

always challenge antisemitism, and spoke with the cadences and occasional Yiddishism of a Whitechapel Jew of his generation. He – and Lily – were among the earliest Jews for Justice for Palestinians signatories and, when too frail to march, indeed, barely able to walk, he would take the Tube into London to stand at the kerbside in solidarity with demonstrators campaigning for an end to the Occupation.

Harry came from a large, noisy and talented family. His two older brothers sought work on leaving school and emigrated to the US, but the youngest followed him to the LSE and became a government statistician, while all four sisters were teachers. When asked for his happiest memories, he said it was growing up with so much love, laughter and family feeling.

Most of all, Harry valued his partnership with Lily and was devastated when she died at 83. To everyone's surprise, he lived another five years, critical faculties unimpaired, still passionate about theatre and film, struggling to central London matinees, as political as ever. He would have been overwhelmed at the publication of his little book. His only (and serious) complaint would have been the failure to recognise those whose work on his manuscript ensured publication. On his behalf, many thanks to Sid Kaufman (and any others) for that.

CARTOONS AND EXTREMISM: ISRAEL AND THE JEWS IN THE ARAB AND WESTERN MEDIA

Joël Kotek, translated from the French by Alisa Jaffa, with foreword by Alan Dershowitz Vallentine Mitchell / European Jewish Congress 2009, £15.

Where to draw the line

From what I've seen, perhaps too much, Dr Goebbels had a nuanced take regarding what the public would accept regarding graphic malevolence. The illustrations in Nazi literature for children weren't so overtly vile as in this book of anti-Jewish hate cartoons. He had to allow a crude Jewish landlord in 1933's *Hitlerjunge Quex*, but that's because the book had been a bestseller a year earlier, before he got the keys to the film studios. By 1940, the lead actor in *Jud Süß*, Ferdinand Marian, is a handsome Gene Wilder doppelgänger. And in the 1930s, even Oswald Mosley's brutish British Union of Fascists barely generally avoided bloodthirsty, exaggerated cartoons. Some might have had trouble reading the captions.

But the tradition of bad characterisation has continued and we ought to be grateful to Joël Kotek for documenting these hundreds of mainly editorial cartoons. David Duke, America's leading fascist, once asked me, 'If the National Socialists said the sky was blue, I'd have to agree, wouldn't I?' On the flipside of that counterfeit coin, Alan Dershowitz writes in this book, asking us to agree that the cartoons are vile. And yes, many of them are. It's not a publication we'll particularly treasure.

The first section is a brief overview of centuries of anti-Jewish artwork. The early chronological section is a condensation of academic monographs which

you may not have the mindset or the stomach to read. So, with Joël Kotek's paperback, you don't really need to immerse yourself in Isaiah Schachar's *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (Warburg Institute, 1974). This title under review, being in colour, is more vibrant, in depicting the time-tested images of child-slaughtering, and an easier read. But blinded as today's Zionists are, especially in the West, this book slips off the rails when dealing with modern times. Although half of the newspaper cartoons, post-2000 too, are indeed racist against Jews, with warty hooked noses and equally ubiquitous knives, some of the images included are legitimate commentary on modern Israel's use of military force. So, many of the editorial images, used here as evidence in the court of Jewish public opinion, end up as own-goals, even if the author and other rabid Zionists don't realise it.

A generic hand holds a lit stick of dynamite representing the Occupied Territories; well, it is a powder keg over there. Ariel Sharon kisses Adolf Hitler in the famous manner of Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker; a clever use of modern irony to make today's pots and kettles think. Sharon shouts, 'Death to peace!', before blowing up a pizzeria otherwise full of dining doves; no further comment necessary, unless your son or daughter was one of the slaughtered.

A stereo cartoon shows the same rubble-wrecked neighbourhood, one captioned 'Warsaw 1943' and the other 'Jenin Today' (2002). Zionist and perhaps non-Zionist Jews may be offended but the Arab media's use of the Holocaust to reference the Palestinian dilemma is a legitimate use of metaphor. Ethnic cleansing did not start and stop with the Nazi's 'final solution' and we don't need to compete with Armenians or African-Americans in a perverse awarding of prizes. Author Joël Kotek plays his card by claiming there's no comparison between the numbers dead. Both are inexcusable tragedies, and if we don't stop joining-up and supporting armies, who knows what level of human destruction will be wreaked in this mightier century? My point here is that some of these examples are legitimate.

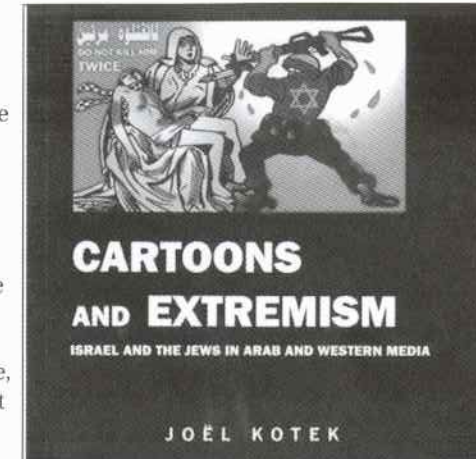
My favourite is the cuddly, long-haired nice Israeli soldier, kitted and with his gun, in a McDonald's. The author says that the chain 'has nothing to do with Israel or Judaism: it is not kosher.' All McDonald's beef in the Israeli-owned franchise is locally sourced and kosher, and they run strictly-kosher restaurants too. And, of course, if you go round the shops in Jerusalem you will see armed and khaki young men and women, although the guys can't have their hair like 1970s rock stars. Joël Kotek comments here that anti-capitalism is anti-Judaism, whether 'certain third-world militants' realise it or not!

Blood is a fair subject. And it's unreasonable to accuse any political cartoonist employing it as

making the 'blood libel' smear. After all, the Israeli Defence Force, like their uniformed and armed brothers round the globe in any direction, from Cairo to Mogadishu, deal in blood almost daily. Blood per se and the spilling of it for political purposes isn't an ethnically territorial subject; so to criticise the Israeli military for being disproportionately bloody makes bloody good sense to me, despite a cartoon such as Arafat telling the Jewish Israeli to slit Hamas' throat. Depictions of a Palestinian Pietà and Arafat behind barbed wire seem justifiable commentary to me.

Although the Israeli governmental mayvems make mayhem in the Middle East, there's dysfunctionality aplenty in most Muslim countries for us to condemn. Middle Eastern Muslims don't condemn their bigots enough, but, when it comes to Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, their political cartoonists are hipper, cleverer, and more nuanced than the generators of this book would have you believe. Condemn it for being atrocious yet partly wise; applaud it for the bravery of all the parties involved. But unless you have high blood pressure concerns, buy it.

Andy Simons



Rough justice

British rule in Palestine has not featured the same way in popular awareness as other conflicts. You can still see old films depicting 'our boys' soldiering bravely against the 'terrorists' in Kenya (without torture and concentration camps) and Malaya (without the use of RAF bombers or Dyak headhunters). But in films like *Exodus* they're not the heroes, and you know they are on the way out. The Brits in Palestine have apparently departed history without a fuss.

Even in the recent rush to publish anything on Israel/Palestine, they've largely been forgotten, and those who would uncover what we should already know about imperialism seem to flick over a couple of pages on Palestine.

Yet twice in two decades it took thousands of British troops to cope with insurgency in tiny Palestine, first against the Palestinian Arabs' general strike and revolt from 1936-39, and then through the 1940s against the Zionist underground. It was a testing ground for some of British colonialism's refined yet brutal repressive techniques, and for some famous soldiers.

Bernard Montgomery commanded a division putting down Palestinian rebels in 1938. Less than 10 years, and a world war, later, as Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 'the nation's most popular general', Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Monty had responsibility, inter alia, for dealing with the Jewish variety.

Post-war Britain was renegotiating its treaty with Egypt, and the military feared they might lose their

bases guarding the Suez canal – the 'Empire's lifeline' – and airfields in the Middle East that helped ring the Soviet Union. But Palestine was becoming no safe place for British forces as they tried to halt the waves of Jewish immigrants brought in by the Haganah, and came under particularly merciless attack from the Irgun Zvai Leumi and Lehi (Stern gang) fighters.

As the attacks became bolder and more ferocious, and Monty himself was threatened in his office, the Field Marshall dismissed those advising caution and co-operation with moderates, and demanded all-out war be waged on the Jews of Palestine as it had been before on the Palestine Arabs. At the beginning of 1947 the Labour cabinet agreed to give the army its way.

The man in charge of the offensive, Lt Colonel Bernard Ferguson, proposed setting up special units led by men with their own experience of terrorism. Step forward Major Roy Farran, a highly-decorated ex-SAS officer with a daredevil reputation who had commanded partisans in Italy and wouldn't play by the rules.

While more conventional forces and civil staff were withdrawn into fortified enclaves, Farran and his men, well-armed but wearing civilian clothes, ran around Jewish neighbourhoods in unmarked vehicles hoping to cause their own terror while capturing terrorist suspects. Just what they did remains little known, still less what, if anything, they achieved. But one particular operation was to make Farran's name, blotting out his World War II

heroism and cutting short his military career.

Alexander Rubowitz was a 16-year-old Lehi supporter, not a fully-fledged gunman or bomber, but one of those who went out at night putting up posters. He'd been expelled from school, his parents had tried to stop his activity, but what could they do? On 6th May 1947, he left their Jerusalem home at 6.30 in the evening. A couple of hours later two lads who were collecting wood for a Lag B'Omer bonfire saw a man forcing a youth into a car. Another boy went over to see what was happening, but the men in the car showed police ID, and to underline their point, produced revolvers.

Alexander Rubowitz was taken away, not to a police station, but out to an olive grove off the Wadi Kelt, some way east of Jerusalem. There he was tied to a tree and interrogated, though he could hardly have known anything important about the armed underground or its leaders. In the end Roy Farran grew tired of the game, and lifted a rock to smash Alexander's head in. After this they untied his body, stabbed it repeatedly, and burned the youth's clothes.

Next day Farran told Ferguson what he had done, and handed over a wad of paper said to have been taken from the boy, containing names of top Lehi members. The names were just contributors to funds. Alexander Rubowitz's anxious parents, meanwhile, were told the police knew nothing about their son's disappearance.

After Rubowitz's body was found, Roy Farran denied having been anywhere near where the youth was kidnapped, and ridiculed evidence such as a hat found nearby with his name. Then, when he was taken into custody, he managed to escape, and the British authorities had trouble getting him back. In the end, Major Farran was acquitted by a

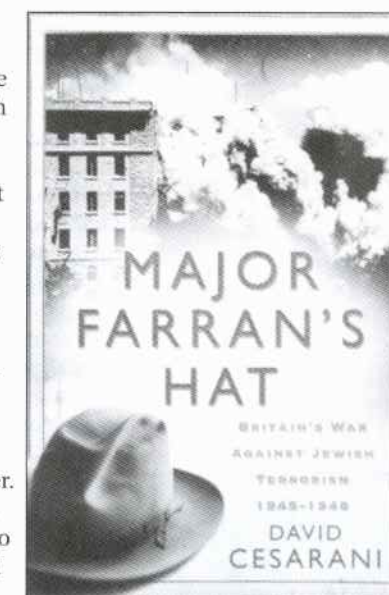
court-martial, and came home to a hero's welcome in Britain, notably Liverpool where feelings stirred over the Palestine bloodshed had fed anti-Jewish riots. The nearest Farran came to punishment was a Stern gang letter bomb which killed his entirely innocent brother Rex. Such is terrorism.

Roy Farran tried his luck in Rhodesia and then unsuccessfully stood as Tory candidate for Dudley and Stourbridge. He later went to Canada where he wound up Solicitor General for Alberta. His book *Winged Dagger* continued to inspire other British officers, such as Colin Mitchell ('Mad Mitch') who commanded the Argylls in Aden's Crater.

David Cesarani is to be congratulated on this well-researched book, digging into a no longer fashionable subject area, and incidentally delving into previously classified files to unearth some fascinating details of Irgun and Lehi activity in Britain, which I'm sure some will find uncomfortable and prefer forgotten.

I've got a couple of corks. Ahdut Avodah was a political party, not a youth movement (perhaps Cesarani meant to refer to its youth movement). And Menahem Begin did not exactly 'escape from Europe to Palestine'. He was released by the Russians to join General Anders' Polish army, then stationed in Palestine, and was thus enabled to take command of the Irgun. But that's by the way.

What's striking, as Cesarani points out, is that despite Britain's loss of Empire (which Roy Farran blamed on lack of will by politicians), it continued using elite SAS units and plainclothes counter-



RAF SALKIE finds his way around the convoluted world of human rights

gangs, as pioneered in Palestine, in counter-insurgency in Malaya, Kenya and Ireland.

We might note that Israel also has its mistaravim (officers chosen because they speak Arabic) and Duvdevan (undercover) units, some of whom have been dealt rough justice when caught on their dirty missions. In Iraq, too, two Brits dressed as Sunni Arabs, were caught with a carload of explosives and detonators on what was a supposed 'surveillance'

ON THE SHELF

Human rights. Ho hum. I'm in favour of them, of course. I joined Amnesty as a student and met people who had been freed from Soviet and Chilean prisons after successful campaigns. But I always regarded human-rights-speak as a way of criticising oppressive third world regimes, not something that applied to western democracies. And as a socialist I was more concerned with fundamental social change, not just polite letters to a foul dictator asking him to please release someone from their torture chamber.

So I was sceptical when I downloaded a 176-page document by Thomas Hammarberg called Human Rights in Europe: time to honour our pledges (available from www.coe.int/t/commissioner/Viewpoints/publication2009_EN.pdf). To my shame I had never heard of this man, though neither has anyone else who I have asked. He is the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. The Council of Europe, I'm sure you can't wait to hear, is an international organisation in Strasbourg made up of 47 European countries. (The absence of capital punishment in Europe is largely a result of CoE pressure, so good for them.) Hammarberg's job is to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in CoE countries; this means he is paid by European governments to harass and hound them on issues like antisemitism, homophobia, discrimination against young people, and many other issues that are close to my heart.

Hammarberg writes regular short articles on topical issues, and this document is a collection of the most recent ones. It covers a huge range, with lots of good stuff about Roma people, asylum seekers, disabled people and – interestingly – social and economic rights, which include 'the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to food, the right to education, the right to housing, the right to health, the right to work and the right to rest and leisure', to quote the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. European governments have solemnly signed treaties committing themselves to granting these rights. We should bloody well make sure that they do what they promised.

On the Guardian web site I found a mere nine mentions of Hammarberg since 2001, most of them passing references in articles attacking 42-day detention of terror suspects. One of them refers to him as the 'EU human rights chief', making the common mistake of confusing the Council of Europe with the European Union (I'm an expert on this stuff now, so I can say that

operation in a Shi'ite town. They were sprung from jail by an armoured unit. Maybe the truth will eventually be released.

It could be argued that all these dirty tricks and special operations do not halt the movement of history, they just make it more bloody than necessary. But sadly, the one thing we learn from history is that governments learn nothing from history.

Charlie Pottins

kind of thing). With that level of coverage in a liberal newspaper, and plenty of negative news stories about the European Court of Human Rights (another CoE institution), my ignorance about all this is perhaps not too surprising.

I was more sympathetic, but still sceptical, when I read the recently published International Judicial Institutions: The architecture of international justice at home and abroad by Richard J Goldstone and Adam M Smith (Routledge, £16.99). This is a short introduction to international humanitarian law, focusing on the International Criminal Court in The Hague but with historical chapters that include the Nuremberg Tribunals, the Eichmann trial, and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The book is honest about the limitations of international law, even raising the question of whether it really exists. The authors do not gloss over the fact that actions such as mass bombing of cities were excluded from the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals because we had done more of it than the Nazis and the Japanese. Nonetheless, mass murderers increasingly have to recognise that they may have to face justice one day, and that has to be a good thing. (OK, Pinochet got away, but he had some nasty months until Jack Straw, with his predictably Blairite commitment to principle, caved in).

The book unfortunately says almost nothing about the International Court of Justice (aka the World Court, do try to keep up with me) which deals with disputes between states: something about its recent condemnation of Israel's separation wall, or the 1986 ruling against the USA for aggression against Nicaragua, would have been good. And their account of how Napoleon was treated by the victorious European powers after his defeat forcibly reminded me that international lawyers are not necessarily socialists: 'his territorial ambitions knew no bounds', we read, and 'none of Napoleon's wars were defensive conflicts; they were fundamentally expansionist' and could be called 'the crime of waging aggressive war'. Not a word about how the reactionary crowned heads of Europe ganged up against France after the Revolution; we are just told that at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 they were concerned with 'stability and peace' – not, of course, with ensuring that progressive forces should be crushed throughout Europe.

So what about the human rights agenda and 'international law': valuable moral and legal resources for the Left, or a liberal quagmire? I'm more impressed now than I was, but I don't think that people like George W Bush will live in fear of being locked up any time soon. Pity.



CREATIVE JOURNALISM

The award for generosity goes to the *Jewish Chronicle*, which reportedly paid £30,000 to Raphael Cohen, along with an apology, for printing a letter from a well known Zionist alleging Cohen, a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement, had 'harboured' two men involved in blowing up Mike's Place, a Tel Aviv bar, in 2003. His only 'connection' with the two men from Britain is that they introduced themselves to him at an occasion in Rafah, five days before the bombing. The paper apologised for the distress caused and said it welcomed the opportunity to set the record straight. Raphael Cohen is donating a substantial proportion of the damages to charities providing humanitarian relief to the Palestinian people.

I think Israel's security services also owe an apology, to the dead and injured people at Mike's Place. If they had the two in their sights, and the people they took tea with in Rafah, how come they lost them over the next five days during which they must have picked up their explosive devices and headed for Tel Aviv's clubland?

Another award for the JC goes to editor Stephen Pollard, for ingenuity in an item last February. Called 'Dirty Jew' by a passing cyclist, as he was leaving synagogue, he overcame his distress sufficiently to speculate that perhaps the offender had 'been reading the London Review of Books', as that issue had been critical of Israel. Citing several of the writers – all, as it happens, Jews – the JC editor did not go so far as to demand it should be banned, but suggests it is wrong for the Arts Council to subsidise such a publication. What award should we give Mr Pollard to make up for his upsetting experience with the antisemitic cyclist? Not the Nobel prize for logic maybe, but I thought the prize for cookery – it maybe an awful dish, but he can make a meal out of nothing.

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBSHITES OF ZION

They sleepeth not, the guardians of Israel, nor do they miss a chance of making stupid pains in the tockas of themselves. In July they caught someone they accused of 'trading with the enemy'. It wasn't the Israeli businessman sending spares for armoured vehicles to Tehran or those who have been bulk purchasing Iranian oil in Europe.

Mariam Kassis, a resident of the village of Mi'illya, near Ma'alot in the north of the country, returned from a visit to Amman with a dozen books in her baggage, presents for family members. The customs official who flipped through them did not understand Arabic, but he did see the books were published in Beirut, and so he confiscated them, quoting a law from British Mandate days about 'trading with the enemy'.

Whether because Mariam was seeking legal redress or because Ha'aretz began asking questions,

the Tax Authority said there had been a 'misunderstanding'. Customs had 'thought that there were 12 boxes rather than 12 books', and the books that were confiscated would be returned to Mariam Kassis, with an apology. Bringing 12 books into Israel did not constitute 'trade'.

But Ha'aretz found this was not an isolated case. Books were seized, regardless of their contents, and there is a problem for anyone wanting to import Arabic books for schools. The Trade Ministry will not issue licenses for anything published in Syria or Lebanon, regardless of where it is purchased. This particularly affects a Beirut company publishing children's literature translated into Arabic, such as Pinocchio and Harry Potter.

The ban is supposed to cover 'enemy countries', but it reminds me that three years ago a delegation of Birmingham women, including Selly Oak MP Lynne Jones, were detained at Ben Gurion airport, where they had arrived en route for Ramallah with books like Teddy's House, intended for a children's library which Birmingham people had helped fund. They were held and questioned for 11 hours before being sent back. So far as I know, Israel is not at war with Birmingham, at least not yet officially. But it is defending itself from dangerous infiltrators like Teddy the bear and Harry Potter.

KEEP IT KOSHER

After the first two cases of suspected swine flu were detected in Israel, Deputy Health Minister Yakov Litzman declared: 'We will call it Mexico flu. We won't call it swine flu.' That's the kind side of the ultra-orthodox. At least, if you get the disease, you will still be kosher.

Reb Menachem Eliezer Mozes, whose father would not enter the Knesset, calling it the 'entrance to Gehinnom', is a new Knesset member from the orthodox Agudah. He can sound almost like a socialist: 'The housing crisis has become a plague, taking away the health and peace of mind of thousands of parents who are buckling under the strain. Thousands of young couples are living in mouldy basements, and these's no relief in sight.'

But the reb is no revolutionary. Interviewed in Hamodia, which calls him 'an old-time shtadlan' (someone who intervened with the authorities for his community), he refers specifically to the problems of haredi (ultra-orthodox) couples. And though he does question why land which was given by the Almighty is so expensive, and says: 'We have a plan,' his first aim is to gain more influence. 'We must demand that the Housing and Interior Ministries as well as the Israel Land Authority be in charedi hands.'

I was going to say that sounds like what Americans call pork-barrel politics, but then I remembered the Litzman example. Let's call it herring barrel politics.

