

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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"Hi, my name is Steve Rothberg and I am 44 years old. Until March last year, everything was great – I worked a bit too hard, spent weekends cheering on my football team, ran the occasional half marathon and enjoyed my family time as a husband and dad to my two young daughters. And then I was diagnosed with leukaemia. Now I need a life saving bone marrow transplant in the next few months."

The Anthony Nolan Trust's bone marrow donors have already saved 8,000 lives over the last 35 years but their register is desperately short of donors from ethnic minority groups. We want to add 500 new donors to the register. Steve is Jewish so the Spit for Steve campaign aims to add as many new Jewish donors to the register as we can. Bone marrow registers are shared across the world so your precious gift could really save a life like Steve's. The chance of patient survival is very good when a match is found.

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To listen to Steve & Gillian on BBC Radio Leicester go to:
www.bbc.co.uk/1/player/episode/p007t4d7/Ben_Jackson_18_05_2010/

JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

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

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

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JEWISH SOCIALIST

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

No 60 Summer 2010 £2

LOOKING FOR A NEW ENGLAND

- Defeating the BNP
- Politics of disability
- Joel Kovel interview
- Zeitgeist exposed
- Women partisans

Thirteen years ago, Labour came to power on a wave of disgust at the corruption, lies and incompetence of the Conservatives, who had spent 18 years destroying industries and unions, privatising and cutting public services, attacking immigrants and refugees, and building close ties with the American Right. Thatcherism had become a euphemism for bone-headed, uncaring destruction. And the people had had enough, so in 1997 they elected Labour in 419 seats, leaving the Tories with just 165 – their worst election result since 1906. With such a huge majority Labour had a unique opportunity to challenge inequality and discrimination, and create structures to protect us from ruthless power and greed.

For a moment people's excitement and hope overcame their cynicism. Brokering peace in Ireland, introducing the minimum wage and legislating on freedom of information and civil partnerships surely fulfilled some of this promise.

But 13 years on, we remember New Labour as the government that faced down 2 million people on the streets and took the country into an immoral and illegal war with Iraq, that colluded with the US "war on terror", helping to spirit people away to be tortured in secret, and locking up innocent men, women and children in detention centres.

Tony Blair squandered chance after chance to change direction, and Gordon Brown seemed incapable of doing so. So when the bankers gambled away our economy, they handed over what remained of our money so the casino could continue.

For all Blair's rhetoric about education, this was the government that entrenched high stake tests and punitive league

tables, imposed academies, and promoted schooling provided by unaccountable religious institutions. Far from repairing the damage wreaked by the Tories, New Labour continued to dismantle the state services that people need – housing, schools, health, social care, transport, mail, and more, leaving the vulnerable and powerless struggling even more.

Some people find remarkable resources within themselves to meet these challenges and Simone Aspis describes on page 7 her extraordinary efforts; but many more will have fallen by the wayside.

And now we have reaped the consequences, with a Conservative-Liberal Coalition, which has pledged to "free" schools from the burden of democracy and accountability of local authority control, slash public transport, repeal the Human Rights Act and protect the rich from any increase in inheritance tax.

But it has not all been gloom. There are chinks of light too. In Brighton, a contributor to Jewish Socialist, Caroline Lucas, overcame the big party machines to win a first seat for the Greens on a radical platform. And when Labour politicians, nationally, struggled to hold their seats, let alone their majorities, the band of committed socialists on Labour's left increased their vote. But perhaps most satisfying of all, the British National Party was routed by a brilliantly organised campaign, described by Dan Ozarow on page 12.

For socialists this will be a time of regrouping and rethinking. Old orthodoxies won't do, but we can look to our history in imagining and shaping our future, and as Piers Mostyn intimates on page 14, a new England and a new world are there to be made.

Cover picture: Martin Carthy of The Imagined Village displays his Folk Against Fascism T-shirt, Judith Burrows, www.flarefilms.co.uk

We would like to credit John Nassari for the two pictures we used with his article in the last issue: Abu El Majeed (2007) and Noura (2007)

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Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Mike Gerber, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, David Rosenberg, Andy Simons.

Printer: The Russell Press, Bulwell La, Basford, Nottingham NG6 0BT.

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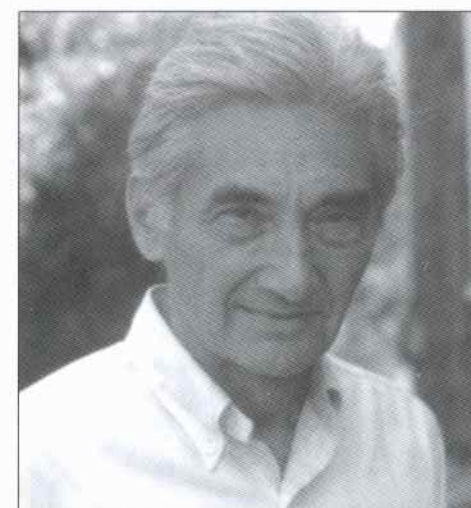
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Howard Zinn, 1922-2010



If he had only written the outstanding book *A People's History of the United States* in 1980, Howard Zinn would have been special. He made no attempt to be objective, but instead tried to chronicle what he called "the continual struggle of people for justice, [and] for equal rights, because I think this is a theme that runs all through history: the people struggling for a better world. I think all of the information that you can put together in history can fit into that master narrative." The book is not subtle. It gives details of the genocidal violence of Christopher Columbus. This book also has chapters like "Robber Barons and Rebels" – about the rise of industrial corporations, their corrupting

effect on democracy and the resistance to them – and "The Other Civil War" about strikes and protests. It continues to sell about 100,000 copies a year. It's a fabulous read, and I urge you to get hold of the audio version, as well as the DVD of his autobiography, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*.

But Zinn did much more than that. He taught history at a college for black women in Atlanta, Georgia from 1956 to 1963 and played an active part in the struggle against racism. Zinn was fired for encouraging his students to protest on campus and on the streets. In 1967 his book *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* took a principled stand against the Vietnam war. As Noam Chomsky said recently, "Howard was the first person to say – loudly, publicly, very persuasively – that this simply has to stop; we should get out, period, no conditions; we have no right to be there; it's an act of aggression; pull out." As an academic he led strikes and irritated university managers repeatedly by refusing to compromise.

My favourite of Zinn's books is his 1974 *Justice in Everyday Life: The Way It Really Works* (reissued by South End Press in 2003). He asked his students at Boston University to go out and look at the criminal justice system – not just the courts, but also the police, prisons and the working lives of the system's victims. They observed casual racism and police savagery, reproduced parts of the diary of a life prisoner, and wrote about other episodes in the onslaught of the privileged against the poor. It's eye-opening and liberating – everything that an education should be and light years removed from the business model that elites want for universities.

Zinn's parents were Jewish immigrants to New York who worked in factories, and he saw and experienced poverty in his early life. Eager to fight fascism, Zinn joined the US military during the Second World War. As a bombardier flying over occupied Europe in 1945, he was part of the first use of napalm in warfare during the raid on the French seaside town of Royan. After the war Zinn visited the town and learned that the bombs which he had helped to drop had killed over 1,000 French civilians, along with a smaller number of German soldiers who were waiting to surrender. He later

denounced the bombing of civilians passionately and repeatedly, both in his writing and in his campaigns against other imperialist wars, speaking from bitter experience.

The main thing we should learn from Zinn's life is that we shouldn't let fear stop us standing up for justice. He advocated civil disobedience, regularly took part in it and was tough and uncompromising. In one of his last interviews, Zinn said: "Don't obey the rules ... if you don't take any risks, you're not doing the right thing. You have to be independent-minded." In every talk and interview, every book, every tribute from his friends and comrades, Zinn's courage shines out. He didn't give a flying cluck about academic success, his own safety, or much else, except the struggle for a better world. Zinn was a working class intellectual who made conformists feel uncomfortable. As one friend put it, he was "untainted by the often corrupting privileges of class entitlement."

The website www.howardzinn.org has lots of Zinn's writing and recordings: I particularly recommend *A People's History of American Empire* on Youtube and the short video of how he would like to be remembered at <http://bigthink.com/ideas/122>

Raf Salkie.

School leavers refuse to take up arms

To obey your conscience and reject military orders in doing so is no small thing for a young Israeli. When National Service is not simply the norm, but also morally and professionally admired, taking such a step at any age is momentous. At the age of 19 it is life changing.

That, though, is what the latest wave of Shministim – high school leavers who refuse to join the Israeli army because they will not take part in the Occupation – have done. One of them, Or Ben David has been touring the UK, to strong acclaim. She spoke to trades union groups, politicians, diplomats and schools, not just about about why she refused to be drafted, but also about the feelings of Israelis towards Palestinians, activists and the outside world.

Much of the picture she draws is disheartening. She describes the deep enmity of many Israeli citizens towards Palestinians; their fear that Palestinians wish only to drive all Israelis away, which is ramped up by some politicians, leading to the assumption that any military action is justified.

Under such circumstances, the decision to refuse is immensely important – and it is unsurprising that there has been increased pressure on draftees to conform. Those who do refuse face longer prison sentences; and for those who are less confident about refusing, opportunities to avoid the draft legally are being closed off. While over 1,600 Israelis from all walks of life have explicitly refused to serve in the IDF, a much greater number have chosen "grey" refusal

– where mental or physical health problems are cited to gain exemption. People were shocked to hear of plans by the Minister of Education to pay bonuses to teachers whose classes had a high proportion of volunteers for combat units.

Or has been categorical about the moral basis for her decision: "I refuse because ... I want Palestinian youths ... to see that there are Israelis who care and who make a different choice. I want all those of my friends who became soldiers or who are about to become soldiers to see that things don't have to be the way they are." There was also a note of light relief. Or will frame the letter dismissing her from the army. The reason? It says she is "too humane" for the IDF.

Dan Judelson

POISONING THE

DAVID ROSENBERG spoke to **JOEL KOVEL** about how ecosocialist perspectives could illuminate the problems and point to solutions in the Israel-Palestine conflict

What beliefs did you grow up with about Israel and Zionism?

I was born in 1936 and I have vivid memories of 1948. My family were divided on this question. My mother was ardently Zionist. She was a very active member of Hadassah – the women's Zionist organisation in America – and very definitely taken with the ideology of making the desert bloom. I am certain that quite a few trees have been planted in my name. My father was ardently anti-Zionist. His anti-Zionism was very political but in a way that I abhor because it derived from his extreme right-wing orientation. He was one of the founding members of the American Council for Judaism, very loyal to the United States and sensitive on the questions of divided loyalties. He was also very hostile to what people considered the socialism of Israel in the 1940s and '50s. My mother and father quarrelled over Zionism and that made the issue problematic for me from an early age. I had no firm attitude and little curiosity about Zionism as a youngster, but I didn't have to follow any particular line when the family was so divided.

What do you think the attitude of Zionism has been towards nature and towards the land?

Of course this has been complex, yet taken all in all, Zionism has been very much about conquering nature. Within the Zionist movement there were, from the beginning, people who cared deeply for the natural world. This was connected to an ideology that wanted to negate the association of

Jews with the stifling urbanism that had cut them off from the land, and was a mark of their historical oppression, hence the ideal of the "suntanned Sabra". Thus nature became a theatre, an arena, a platform or stage on which the Jewish people could prove they were virile. They cared a lot about the land, therefore, but chiefly because it was instrumental in the effort to advance a new identity for themselves. There was not, however, an intrinsic respect for nature. By and large Zionism is an ideology of conquest, with a military ethos. Thus nature was drawn into the logic of conquest.

It wasn't just Zionism that connected Jews to the land, though, was it?

That's correct. Despite the restrictions, certain Jews were raised on farms, like Trotsky, for example! My uncle grew up in a farming community in the Catskills, where there was a large Jewish community and a lot of countryside.

Israel was once well known for its advances in agriculture. What has happened to that?

Credit must be given where it is due. Israelis created a considerable number of sophisticated technological developments, such as drip-irrigation. However, their technological prowess has been undercut because of a basic conflict about who would work the land. It was essential for Zionism that Jewish labour was to make the desert bloom. This was to be a sign of national renewal – and it excluded the Arabs, of course, who were

CHANGE THE WORLD

South Africa is high profile just now as host of the 2010 World Cup and because of the alleged murder of Afrikaner white supremacist leader Eugène Terre'Blanche.

But we'd like to divert your attention to an initiative we think you'd want to back – the Lexi social enterprise cinema in Kensal Rise, north west London. All profits from this intimate, comfortable and strikingly designed cinema and its shop and bar are covenanted to support The Sustainability Institute based at Lynedoch EcoVillage near Cape Town.

The Sustainability Institute is a non-profit trust, founded in 1999 – an international living and learning centre focusing on studies and experience in "ecology, community and spirit". It facilitates the establishment of sustainable neighbourhood developments in various localities, contributes to

policy research in the sustainable development sector, and its educational programme includes Masters and PhD degrees in sustainable development planning and agriculture.

"The Sustainability Institute, a project that is extremely close to my heart, is setting an educational precedent in a part of the world that understands the true meaning of hardship," says Sally Wilton, who established the Lexi cinema in 2006 from the money she made by selling her etc.venues business.

Two members of the Jewish Socialist editorial committee and Jewish lefty friends were among the audience that attended a recent showing of the post-



apocalypse movie *The Road*. That was preceded by a screening of a short Reuters film about the cinema and The Sustainability Institute. This can be viewed online at www.sustainabilityinstitute.net

The Lexi Cinema is at 194b Chamberlayne Road, Kensal Rise, London, NW10 3JU.

For programme schedules and prices, see www.thelexicinema.co.uk

For general information, contact Rosie Greatorex: 020 8955 1521 or rosie@thelexicinema.co.uk

PROMISED LAND



Joel Kovel, ecosocialist

never allowed to participate in the development of Eretz Yisrael, even as their own agriculture became greatly degraded by Israeli conquest and occupation. Meanwhile, Israeli society itself turned away from its agricultural base. There is a lot less agriculture now than there used to be and a lot of the land that had been used for agriculture is used for tourism and industry. More basically, the privileged position of Jewish labour contributed to the inexorable retreat from the original socialist impulse of the Zionist settlers. As a result, the kibbutzim have been largely privatised, a terrible downfall from their original promise.

How has the move away from an emphasis on agriculture affected the environment?

A lot less of the production now is of agricultural commodities and a lot more devoted to the military. Much of this is mediated by chemical processes, including the imperative of cleaning off the machinery with solvents such as trichloroethylene. So there are a lot of effluents, along with other pollutants. This is true for all modern industry but especially for the military-industrial complex which, of all human endeavours, has been the most devastating to the environment.

Has the Israeli environmental ministry not been able to challenge this logic?

There are some meritorious people who work at this but they have mainly been frustrated. They have never been treated with the respect they deserve. The environment has a very low priority in today's Israel. Over and over again priority is given to the military. Zionism wanted to redeem the land, but this has been constantly negated by the projects of the military.

And presumably by the settlers too?

Definitely. Some settlers are just passive recipients of state aid but a considerable fraction are ideologically very hard-line Zionists who perpetrate direct violence and tear up and destroy the integrity of the Palestinian environment. The settlements are inserted in the midst of the Palestinian world and almost invariably above it, literally as well as figuratively. Thus a great deal of their sewage flows down to the lands below.

How has the occupation affected access to clean water?

The distribution of water is outrageous. The average Palestinian in the West Bank has 70 litres a day, when 100 litres is considered the minimum by the United Nations. The settlers have five times the minimum. They have their sprinklers and swimming pools and golf courses. In Gaza, 90% of the water is not drinkable – a nightmarish situation. Clearly, a lot of Israeli state policy is built upon expropriating the water for their own purposes.

It has been said that the wars of the 21st century will be about water.

It has already happened in this region. The 1967 war was significantly about water. Obviously they wanted the land but the land also happened to be the watershed for the Jordan River. The Israelis got that but still do not have enough water for their own use. The Sea of Galilee in the north has been drawn down below what they term the "red line" – the minimum level at which it can adequately replace itself. If Israel were Dubai, it would have the oil revenue to run desalination plants. But even though they are very prosperous, they don't have

THE SPIRIT OF DISREGARD FOR RULES, REGULATIONS AND BOUNDARIES, WHICH IS SO DOMINANT IN THE ZIONIST ETHOS, INEVITABLY AFFLICTS THE ENVIRONMENT.

the capital to do that. In 2005-6, when I was doing the research for my book, about 90% of the rivers in Israel were totally toxic, and I believe the Jordan remains a nightmare, while the River Litani near Tel Aviv is like a toxic dump.

In your book *Overcoming Zionism* you described a mindset of ecological fecklessness in Israel. Could you expand on this?

I used many sources but the principle one for that section of the book was a detailed study by Allon Tal, evidently a very caring person who is distressed about how Israelis have allowed the environment to run down. This is partly the result of the idea of exceptionalism, the notion of a chosen people who don't have to submit to anybody's rule – an attitude of “we're not going to follow that law” and “nobody can tell us what to do”. The spirit of disregard for rules, regulations and boundaries, which is so dominant in the Zionist ethos inevitably afflicts the environment.

What do you see as the environmental implications of the security wall?

To understand this we need to distinguish between environment and ecology. Environment is what is outside of us but ecology is a more basic term because it is to do with relationships, and regards people as part of nature. The wall is ecologically nightmarish, partly because it separates the Arabs on the West Bank from each other, but also because it separates the Arabs from the Jews, and causes the latter's consciousness to be attenuated. It is all too easy for Israelis to forget there are human beings on the other side of that 18-foot [6-metre] monster.

These absences and forgettings are ecologically devastating, but the security wall also prevents what is necessary for any healthy environment – the free motion of substances. If you introduce barriers, then eco-systems can't flourish because they require connections and interchange. This is obviously a conscious intention on the part of Israelis. They want to appropriate more land and destroy the Palestinian rural economy, so they frequently separate farmers from their fields with the result that their fields can't be properly cared for.

The occupation in general, and the wall in particular, exacerbates every bad ecological tendency. For example, it encourages the Israelis to dump toxic substances because, if you have a fence, you can chuck stuff over it and not worry about the consequences. There is a lot of illegal dumping throughout the West Bank and the wall only aggravates this. And think about house demolitions – up to 19,000 demolished homes a few years ago – with all the debris. Do you think they clean this up properly?

What are the prospects for green activism on either side of the wall?

There are lots of people who care, but they run against the more basic priorities. For the

Palestinians, when you're that powerless you can't really think about caring for nature. You just have to scrounge and survive, which is not conducive to taking care of your world. If they had a sense that this is also their land, to be cared for jointly with the Israelis, they would be quite capable of doing so. The same would be true for Israelis if they could be released from the paranoia induced by racism and the occupation. There is another feature as well: the population question. Israel has to try to keep bringing people in so as to maintain their shriveling “demographic advantage”. High population density is not a bad thing if people are working hard to keep nature healthy and renewed. But if they are involved in intense and intractable struggles, then additional people become an unbearable burden on ecosystems.

Though it seems unlikely, what if peace broke out? What then would be the main challenges to sustainability?

Of course you mean peace with justice. In any event the main challenge would be demilitarisation. The one measure that would create the pre-condition for renewing that part of the world would be to break up the Israeli military industrial complex. And we should never forget the Dimona nuclear weapons plant, which is totally unacceptable. A society that wasn't preoccupied with war and military values and wasn't polluting the world by running tanks, bulldozers and jet planes all the time could reallocate resources and redirect energies towards the reclamation of nature. It will take a long time because the scars are very deep – not just the resource questions around water but the toxins in the soil, especially from military sources. But it could be done.

Socialists have struggled to find and successfully promote a just solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Would you argue specifically for an eco-socialist approach?

Yes. Ecosocialism is an essential point of view for bringing justice and peace to Palestine, because it builds upon the basic concepts of socialism, in particular, to bring down the imperial system whose expansion into the Middle East has been essential for the presence and history of Zionism. And also, because it adds to the traditional notions of socialism a central concern for overcoming the growth psychosis of capitalism, the expansion of which is destroying civilisation. In addition to the particulars mentioned already, this means inaugurating a “post-petroleum” era, to contend with climate change. This development can't be elaborated here for lack of space but it can be said that if the only oil produced in the Middle East were olive oil, things would be very different and the Zionists would not have their imperial patron. In any case, the oil age is coming to an end and we are going to have to deal with that, hopefully, in an ecologically rational way, which means the way of justice and peace.

FROM DISCRIMINATION TO ACTIVISM

I am Simone Aspis. I describe myself as a disabled activist who has been labelled by the standard psychological tests as having learning difficulties because it is the labelling of the psychometric tests that has led to the discrimination and the experiences that I have had in my life.

MY EARLY LIFE

My early life was dominated by professionals who spent their time measuring me against what a non-disabled person should be expected to achieve.

I did not talk and play in the same ways as girls were expected to. Being a girl does not help as girls are supposed to mature in a much shorter time than boys who are allowed to progress “more slowly” and “differently”. No one questioned these milestone tests stating what children should be able to do, at what age and in a specific time scale.

It was these measurement instruments which began to undermine a natural loving relationship between my parents and myself. These instruments made my parents focus on their daughter's “deficits” rather than gifts. All of a sudden my needs as a child for love and value for who I am and what I can do become secondary.

It's a vicious cycle where the more my parents entrusted their faith in the medical profession, the less was their confidence in helping me to develop as a child within a mainstream environment, starting off within the family home and thereafter in other mainstream environments.

I don't think my parents set out to choose to send me to a special nursery school or any other segregated institution. I don't believe that any parent would do it, including my parents. I think they are pushed to do this by the system that actually creates these kinds of institutions.

TO A RESIDENTIAL JEWISH SPECIAL SCHOOL 200 MILES FROM HOME

The thing I remember was actually being sent away, being taken away from my parents. Why was it me that ended up being separated from the family? Why was it me who ended up being in an environment where it was quite clearly about holding you back in terms of focusing on what you can't do?

I became very interested in computers as I loved maths. I loved algebra and manipulating formulae. Computers provided me with the foundation for my future intellectual development. I started to learn that I could develop my own algebraic formulae, which was replaced by developing ideas once I completed a sociology course. That was the reason I got into computers because I felt I had very little control over any aspect of my life.

Girls were not supposed to be intelligent and independent but rather subservient. The head used to get the girls to do the fetching and carrying.

There was much emphasis on learning about being in a female role (domestic science, make-up lessons and needlework). There were more subtle ways of ensuring girls did not get above their station. For example the girls were expected to stay with boys under barmitzah age and that included children who were much younger than ourselves. We ended up being with these boys who were under 13 and we had to share the same TV, the same sitting room. What does a 15-year-old girl have in common with a 6- or 7-year-old boy who wants to watch cartoons? I wanted to watch the news, Panorama in those days or World in Action, but I certainly wasn't into watching cartoons. So there was no acknowledgement of different interests whilst growing up.

The opportunities to mix with non-disabled youngsters were pretty non-existent. We used to attend a Jewish youth club every week whilst at the special school. It was awful – we were known as the “special school spazas”. There was a lot of name calling and teasing. We just did not belong. All the kids knew each other from the local Jewish schools or other youth clubs. We knew no one but they all knew us from the Variety Club minibuses which, when they were replaced, had the school's name and address on it. Some of the Jewish mainstream children moved to the Jewish special school after being labelled disabled. So the mainstream school kids only learnt that disabled kids are removed from mainstream schools, and that reinforced the negative perceptions.

Special school was just preparing you to accept entry level work or to live in institutions. It prepared you to accept authority in routine boring work for low pay. After all, society needs a willing workforce that can be exploited in order to keep everyone else's wages down. Whilst we can see it's the economic migrants doing this now, it used to be people with learning difficulties who have been trained to be exploited by special schools. There was very limited or no choice. Special School was more about control, conformity and containment.

I always wanted the right to attend a mainstream school. Unfortunately this was not possible as parents and the local authority can force children to attend a special school against their wishes.

CAREERS GUIDANCE

I left school with five CSEs in maths, english, commerce, computer studies and religious studies. At 16 opportunities were closed to you. You couldn't do science, geography, humanities or languages. On top of this you didn't have any opportunity to develop an interest in extra-curricular activities. So at 16 you don't really have any idea of what you are good at outside school. A lot of kids at 16 are able to take a wide range of subjects and qualifications, and to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Youngsters are exposed to a wider range of opportunities such as being a member of a choir,

In 1994 *Jewish Socialist* (JS31, Spring 1994) ran a hard-hitting article in which **SIMONE ASPIS** described the rejection and exclusion she experienced in the Jewish community as a person who was labelled as having learning difficulties. Sixteen years on, **SIMON LYNN** has interviewed her about her life. Here are some extracts from those interviews.



Simone Aspis

editing a school magazine, playing for a sports team, exchanging magic tricks during a magic lesson or getting involved in Amnesty International or Article 12 (a children's rights organisation). This was not the case for me and therefore I really did not know what I could do other than simply computer programming

BACK HOME AT 16

When I came home, I felt like a stranger in my neighbourhood. I had no local friends to play with. I missed out especially when we lived in a cul de sac where everyone knew each other.

Making strong relationships once I left school was difficult without an existing network of friends. One does not make friends by joining others in a group if you are not with at least one other. Being in a residential special school prevents you from both making your first network of friends and thereafter a revolving network of friends. Without the initial web, there is limited opportunity to make friends. This I soon discovered after attending various youth clubs including ones that were supposed to be integrated. I ended up being at youth clubs that were allegedly integrated but this was absolutely rubbish. We used to go out on a Saturday night but it was only if you rang the girls up; there were no return calls. The relationships ended when the members went to university. In reality the club didn't really support the two groups of people in coming together to form long-lasting relationships.

MOVING INTO A JEWISH GROUP HOME

I was living at home from the ages of 16 to 21 and then I moved into this crappy group home for people with learning difficulties. I was very unhappy there.

I think group homes are a crap idea because you don't get much choice where you live, you don't get any choice over who you live with and you don't get a choice of what the rules are. Even though our home probably had a lot less silly rules than a lot of group homes, it was still that whole idea that other

people had control over who you lived with, where you lived, what the rules are.

And it is just the whole idea, even when you wanted to move on, that a social worker had to justify the reasons why you had to move on. Well actually you shouldn't have to justify anything. The whole idea of living in your flat, having support, that's what Direct Payments that I've campaigned for over the years are all about: disabled people being able to choose where they live, how they live their lives, and what support they need to do that.

The problem is, a lot of people with learning difficulties get the support just to manage their lives in their own home but do not necessarily get the support to be able to manage their lives outside, in the local community, being supported to make decisions.

A lot of my experience of entrenched disablism, discrimination, has happened within the Jewish community. Jewish organisations have never really engaged with disabled people other than in the role of passive service user. I have found the Jewish community hates disabled people who are politicised and challenging. I have lost count of the number of times that Jewish people had the nerve to tell me that I needed counselling, had a chip on my shoulder etc etc. And with reflection it's not surprising, where more and more the Jewish community is building increasingly segregated and discrete provision. This is at the time where more and more organisations are preparing themselves for direct payments and individualised budgets, where disabled people can choose where they want to live and with whom. The Jewish community sees disabled people as second class citizens who need to be cared for, preferably within care institutions. The Jewish community does not see disabled people as in need of rights. No Jewish organisation has ever engaged in disabled people's human and civil rights legislation and policy.

The Jewish community, I suspect, is still surviving the Holocaust – still needing to assimilate and not rock the boat. People with learning difficulties challenge much of the internalised oppression that Jewish people experience about needing to be seen as productive, intellectually astute and just fitting into society. This is clear as the Jewish community fails to acknowledge disabled people as needing human and civil rights as themselves. If they do, then Jewish people will have to consider what they need to change in order for disabled people to be included rather than the other way round, which they are not prepared to do.

FINDING MY OWN WAY – WORK, STUDY AND ACTIVISM

I started to work at the BBC for the Disability Programmes Unit "From the Edge". I was a Disability Programmes Unit trainee assistant producer. And after watching everyone else change the world, I decided I wanted to be on the other side of the camera doing the same. I got involved with disabled people's Direct Action Network (DAN). My first encounter with disabled people's rights was around Block Telethon, a campaign to challenge images of disabled people. Since then, I have been involved with lots of different campaigns on getting disabled people's civil and human rights on the agenda of government and disabled people's

organisations.

I moved into my own flat. After the BBC contracts came to an end, I decided to take three months off and start to think about what I really wanted to do. For the first time I had my own space so I just spent three months enjoying being me, free from any arguments.

I became People First's campaigns co-ordinator. I started working to ensure that people with learning difficulties were properly included in the Disability Discrimination Act and thereafter in Direct Payments legislation. I was successful in getting people with learning difficulties included in both pieces of legislation. More importantly, campaigning was now on People First's agenda, and still is to a certain degree. Alongside working at People First I enrolled onto an A-level sociology course. This is when my education began – the opportunity to consider for myself on how society functions. A lot of my thinking and ideas have been based on the sociology theories that I learnt in this course.

I picked up the social model of disability, and a light went on, because then I was able to identify that I was disabled person who happens to have a learning difficulty; I was able to say that the barriers were actually ones society put up. When I was younger I had grown up within the medical model. I talked about life I suppose as being unfair, unlike now. When I started working at People First, I talked about it in terms of civil rights..

Whilst at People First, I learnt a great deal about self-advocacy and how it's often practised and used to give people very limited power to change things. I developed an advocacy model which includes understanding what types of changes are needed and whether it is necessary to do this as a group rather than individuals. Too often self-advocacy has just been limited to asking a staff member to make a change. It's not been about people making changes to institutional policies, government's legislation and society's values.

One of the biggest barriers was with the support workers in the early days, as many of them either came from the therapeutic or care field. This often hampered the importance of civil and human rights work being at the core of People First's activities. What we needed were support workers who knew about civil rights work. I would much rather have someone who was an animal rights activist working with me than someone who has spent most of their life working in institutions for people with learning difficulties. At least with the animal rights activists they understood something about power and devaluing, even if that was between different species. It was likely they also knew about the role that law and policy and even direct action play in securing changes at a political level.

I absolutely enjoyed working with People First. It was an exciting time with lots going on. Understanding the power struggles between support workers and people with learning difficulties, between speaking up groups and service providers, and between People First groups and the disabled persons civil rights movement. At the time I felt I was taking on the world.

I strongly believe that disabled people do lose out in a capitalist society in every sense of the word. Disabled people are the ones who are most likely to be told they are a burden on society, more likely to be in exploitative work environments and in the worst living conditions. As there is more of a drive to force people into unpaid work if they cannot find paid work then this will mean increasingly that disabled people will be expected to work for nothing for the rest of their lives. Such unpaid work props up the capitalist system where there is a ready supply of free labour which can be taken advantage of.

I was invited to attend the Green Party's education policy debate where they were debating special schools. It was here I became aware of many of their policies. In particular, the Citizens Income policy was of great interest to me, where each individual would receive a fixed sum of money from the state to cover their basic needs. This income was not means tested or dependent on conditions. It would enable people to choose how they worked and contributed to society.

I became the United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council's (UKDPC) Parliamentary and Campaigns Development Worker. Here I was overseeing our campaign to make sure there was a strong public sector duty to promote disability equality. Soon after there was the backlash – welfare reform and mental health legislation that would press disabled people into work and which stated that disabled people could be treated for a psychiatric condition if it would prevent harm to others – no mention of compulsory treatment being of any benefit to the patient. This is completely inhumane and unjustifiable. This was a very important move for me as I was representing disabled people with different impairments and health conditions rather than simply those with learning difficulties labels.

Soon after my contract came to an end with UKDPC I began working with Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE). I have been there for 15 months – and what an eventful time it has been.

The last year or so we have been campaigning to ensure that disabled learners are able to access and have a right to mainstream education. Because, at the moment, disabled people are the only group of people who can be discriminated against when accessing mainstream education.

We have been campaigning hard around the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to make sure apprenticeships, including mainstream education, are accessible for disabled learners.

Inclusive education can never happen unless we abolish the exam system and universal intellectual standards that have been set by non-disabled people, who believe that some people's knowledge and skills are more valuable and worthy than others.

Inclusive education can only be a possibility if everyone learns together whereby each of us can learn at our own level in our own way and be assessed in different ways. All learners must be learning together in a joint educational enterprise where everyone's attainment is different but equally

recognised and valued. Inclusive education must allow for inclusive learning styles and assessments.

HOW LIFE HAS CHANGED ME

I have definitely changed a lot throughout my life and for the better! I have moved from viewing society rather than me as the "problem" which needs to be fixed. I also moved from realising that I can question and develop ideas on how society functions and what key ideas are, such as independent living, inclusive campaign work and what is effective speaking up. This is really important because it gave me the strength to realise we do not have to just accept this is the way the world is and we must fit in...

Getting involved in disabled people's civil and human rights campaign work has made me a strong and powerful disabled person, who is proud to be the person I am. I never realised just how much I can do – just thought I was capable of computer

programming and not much more. I have been doing parliamentary, media, training, academic and research work. Additionally I have developed a taste for art and singing as well. I have become a much more empathetic and joyful person since getting involved in disabled people's rights work – I have found my niche. Through my experience of being disabled, I have the opportunity to lead the way for a world that is based upon social justice. If we get it right for the most oppressed group of people then it's likely to be right for everyone.

Further information

You can find out more about the organisations mentioned in this article by visiting their websites:
Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLIE): www.allie.org.uk
People First: www.peoplefirstltd.com
United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council's (UKDPC): www.ukdpc.net

Direct Action Network (DAN) archive:
http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/de95/m_civrgt.htm

FROM WHERE

I'M STANDING

The first time I ever encountered antisemitism from a fellow socialist shocked me to the core and left me speechless. I was an impressionable 18-year-old in my first weeks of university back in the 1970s, and socialism had opened up a new world for me.

I had joined the International Marxist Group (IMG), whose politics I largely shared, though I was at odds with them over Israel. At that time I considered myself a left-Zionist and a revolutionary socialist. (I still hold one of these positions.) We argued and debated and I never felt that the differences my comrades expressed about Israel and Zionism were anything other than a matter of genuine political analysis.

I used to help out on a weekly stall we ran in the students union selling our paper *Red Weekly* and other literature, and giving out leaflets on the latest campaigns, but one day they asked me not to come to the stall: they were concerned about the Star of David I wore around my neck. I was told that "it might alienate Palestinian comrades". What was most distressing about this incident is that they managed to ask a very assimilated Jewish comrade in our IMG student group to take me for a coffee to explain this decision.

Well it put me off the IMG but thankfully didn't put me off socialism nor turn me more on to Zionism. Have I come across other blatant instances of antisemitism on the left? Yes – but in truth not very many since that occasion back in 1976. Along the way, within the left, I've met the most serious and dedicated opponents of all forms of racism – people I would really trust in a crisis.

But Jews and the Left do seem to have fallen out of love, and while open hostility to Jews is very rare, I have many times come across people who consider themselves thoroughgoing socialists but who share a set of unpleasant and mistaken assumptions about Jews that at least border on antisemitism: that Jews are overwhelmingly bourgeois and likely to be unsympathetic to left positions; that Jews are mostly an obscurantist religious group; that most Jews are racist towards Palestinians; that they exert undue influence on the American government.

Sometimes, on top of these assumptions is an indifference to or ignorance about the existence of antisemitism in Britain and the wider world, a cynical disbelief when they hear figures of antisemitic incidents, which sits uneasily with their very obvious and deep sensitivity to racism against other groups. Then there are the socialists determined to prove how pro-Palestinian they are by denying or trivialising any oppression suffered by Jews, cosying up to Islamic fundamentalists and justifying or explaining away the latter's openly antisemitic statements or actions.

Suffering is suffering of course, and the best thing that people who are aware of suffering can do is work together to remove it, not compete in a league table. It may be agonising to acknowledge, but these views are out there, and may be becoming more common. Of course they are part of the reason that the Jewish Socialists' Group exists. We challenge them from within the socialist movement and make the socialist movement a better place, more able to fight all kinds of oppression. And where can we as Jewish socialists have these conversations and challenge wrongheaded assumptions? There is nowhere better than when we meet each other in the same campaigns and on the

same demonstrations. So we continue to mix in left spaces and debate with our friends however wrongheaded we think some of them are.

But the word on the Jewish street is that the pools within which we have been swimming over these years have been thoroughly polluted with waves of open antisemitism. And that any Jew who thinks that antisemitism is a problem confined to the far right is stuck in a time warp. There is a "new antisemitism" apparently, these days, and it is the left that is in the vanguard.

So they say. But now they have a book to prove it. Their new bible is *Trials of the Diaspora* – a history of antisemitism in England by the lawyer to the stars, Anthony Julius.

Julius says that the left (and that includes you and me) "takes Israel and the Zionist project as collective term for Jews" and "regards the Jewish state as uniquely evil" and without the right to exist. That the way opposition to Israel is expressed is continuous with old antisemitism in its principal stratagems and tropes. Apparently we socialists demonise Jewish nationalists in place of the usurers, capitalists, communists demonised earlier. We regard Israel as a "global menace" (well it's not exactly well-behaved).

Julius says we are happy to treat with Far Right groupings (really?), obscurantists and theocrats of all kinds. We share space with antisemites untroubled with the company we keep. That in our apparent "support for radical Islam, hatred of the US, opposition to globalisation/neoliberalism/market fundamentalism", we have "abandoned the internationalism of the proletariat for the transnationalism of the Islamic umma" and "stand in thrall to conspiratorial fantasies, blood libels and holocaust denial".

Gevalt!

And there's more. He says, "There is one cause that all – leftist, liberal and reactionary – antisemites can agree upon, however, and that is anti-Zionism. Contemporary antisemitism mostly speaks the language of anti-Zionism; most antisemites are now anti-Zionists."

Oh yes. Now you might think you saw the English Defence League holding an Israeli flag, and you might think you read on the BNP website their enthusiastic support for Israel's invasion of Gaza last year – but you must have been mistaken. Where do you start with this overblown stuff? In terms of crass generalisations, stereotypes and a whole field of straw men it does everything he accuses the left of, and so much more.

And his greatest chutzpah is that, having branded every passing lefty with guilt by association with some terrible antisemite, he then chucks into the mix: "The charge of antisemitism should only be made as a last resort. It is important not to confuse a bad argument with a bad and antisemitic one."

My first reaction to this was that he needs to venture beyond the rarified circles in which he apparently lives and meet some living breathing representatives the left rather than the evil stereotypes he conjures up sitting in front of his computer. He might find that most leftists are in reality concerned with fighting for trade union rights, to keep their local library open, to prevent someone being deported, campaigning against public service cuts and so on.

When you go to a demonstration and get talking to people of the age I was when I got involved with politics they are fired up – not against Jews but against injustice. Ask their opinion about the Israel-Palestine



conflict and they won't give you Zionist conspiracies, they will tell you about the daily human rights abuses perpetrated by the Israeli state against the Palestinians. That is what they are rightly standing against.

Much as this book irritated me though, it has moments of insight. He says that many leftists set their own values (secular, collectivist, internationalist, universalist) against perceived "Jewish" values (religious, individualist, nationalist, particularist). I can probably think of more leftists today who tend towards defining Jews in those backward-looking and negative terms than I can in the past, and some individuals do venture into the crazed world of conspiratorial fantasies that Julius accuses us of.

Nor can I deny that there is a grain of truth in some of the accusations and there are some faces to fit, but it is so over the top, so lacking in any critique of mainstream Zionist politics and perspectives and propaganda, that it is hard to take it seriously. He clearly regrets the way in which the Israel-Palestine conflict has increasingly come to be analysed in religious terms rather than secular issues of nationhood and rights to self-determination. So do I. But how can you talk about apparent leftist support for fundamentalist religious (Islamist) groups without any acknowledgement of the global context in which there has been religious intervention on Israel's side of fundamentalist Christian Zionists, bent on a 21st-century crusade, in the belly of Israel's chief backer, the USA? Julius knows I guess.

I also wonder who exactly was this book written for. If it's trying to address an intelligent socialist audience to tell them they have boarded the wrong train, it is hopelessly out of touch with reality. If it's not simply self-serving, it is certainly serving a narrow sector of former leftists in the Jewish community who are climbing the social ladder and looking for a justification for distancing themselves from the world they may once have inhabited.

At 811 pages that's a lot of trees. But what a missed opportunity. As socialists we do need to ask ourselves whether, in our mission to fight all oppression, we are attuned to the continued threat and real lived experience of antisemitism. The left does need to examine whether it is seriously addressing the concerns and vulnerabilities that Jewish people feel. And campaigning socialists need to be aware of the dangers of uncritically accepting any allies that present themselves, whatever their deeper agenda might be, who simply declare themselves "anti-Zionist". But believe me this is not the way to make that happen.

David Rosenberg

Above: Two state solution?
Left: Israel – no shortage of friends.



BARRICADES

DAN OZAROW reports from a ground-breaking anti-fascist mobilisation in East London

Boarding the 10.35 train from Fenchurch Street to Dagenham Dock on Saturday 17th April, I reflected upon the parallels between the battle that lay ahead and the battle my late grandfather had taken part in almost 75 years ago in another part of East London. I was on my way to take part in Hope Not Hate's day of action against the BNP in Barking & Dagenham. In 1936, my grandfather had stood at the barricades at the junction of Christian Street and Cable Street with a brick in his hand to prevent the physical advance of Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists; today, though, my weapon was a leaflet, my knuckle duster my strength of argument

and stopping the British National Party's electoral advance the objective.

The stakes were just as high. If thousands of Jews had not defied the advice of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and stayed in their homes on that day in 1936, or if they had not been joined by the Irish dockers, communists, anarchists, trade unionists and local people to cry "No pasarán!" on the streets of Whitechapel, then Mosley would have marched through the Jewish East End. This would have given the fascists an

injection of confidence to intimidate and attack immigrant communities around the country. In 2010 we were facing the possibility that the BNP might deliver the "political earthquake" they had promised, by going from the second biggest party on the council, with 12 seats, to taking control of the borough and gaining their first MP. Not only would it have had truly horrific consequences for community relations, but would also have given the BNP the legitimacy to

potentially win over millions more disillusioned working class voters around the country.

Hope Not Hate's campaign was the largest ever anti-fascist electoral mobilisation in British history. A thousand volunteers from all over southern England descended on Barking & Dagenham in the weeks leading up to the General Election on 6th May, to deliver 350,000 leaflets and newspapers to every home in the borough. The campaign was intelligent, hard-hitting and targeted. Voter profiling meant that separate material was specifically designed and distributed to women, black and minority ethnic, Christian, Muslim, pensioners and first time voters. And it paid off. Not only did the BNP lose every single one of their 12 councillors in the area, but Nick Griffin was booted into third place in Barking. This parliamentary constituency was won by Labour's Margaret Hodge, herself the daughter of German Jewish refugees. In other parts of the country the purge of the BNP was equally ruthless. In Stoke Central, their second highest target seat, voters deserted the BNP in large numbers, and across the country they lost all but two of their 28 councillors who were standing for re-election.

Most analysts believe that the BNP's collapse was due to a combination of the determined activism of its opponents, high voter turnout and the party's self-harming antics in the weeks leading up to the election. These antics included the BNP's publicity director Mark Collett being arrested on suspicion of threatening to kill party leader Nick Griffin. Then ex-soldier and "rising star" Simon Nicholson followed in the footsteps of a senior BNP councillor, Alby Walker, in quitting the party because he suddenly realised it was "full of racists and thugs". This was followed up by their website manager closing down the site just days before the election after a row with the leadership. Finally, the BNP's London organiser, Bob Bailey, was caught on camera beating up an Asian teenager on the eve of the election, an alleged assault for which he was arrested.

Perhaps the most pleasing thing for me was the huge number of volunteers I spoke to who had never been involved in any political activity before. For years I have been trying, unsuccessfully, to get my friends and family to help out, but this time half a dozen felt compelled to join me. Whether it was the shock of the BNP's electoral breakthrough last year when they won two MEPs and a GLA Assembly member, or Griffin's appearance on BBC television's Question Time appearance, or the frightening reality that they had a real chance of winning a borough council and control of a huge budget that stirred people to give up their time to stop them, something had changed.

The free curry lunch and Billy Bragg gig that Hope Not Hate laid on at a local church to thank

TO BALLOT BOX

volunteers for their hard work was another good move. I am pretty sure that many of the first-time activists will be back again, realising that political campaigning does not have to be completely serious but has a fun side too. It is certainly something that more seasoned activists need to be reminded of occasionally.

Paradoxically my worst moment of the campaign also turned out to provide me with the greatest hope that we were making an impact. At one point, as we trawled through Barking's decrepit and seemingly endless tower blocks and estates, a college student in my team called Ben dropped a leaflet through a letterbox and an irate woman rushed out the door, screaming: "Who are you calling 'stupid'?" – a reference was to the one-word title of the leaflet. When we encouraged her to read inside, she looked aghast at a full quote from Griffin himself, which criticised Barking and Dagenham's white working class for being too "stupid" to want to leave the borough. She paused for a moment, apologised and barked at us, "Well that's the last time I'm voting for that arsehole!"

I went back to campaign in Barking and Dagenham several times that week, including the Bank Holiday on Monday 3rd May. Several local rabbis had urged their congregations to turn out in force and on that day the Jewish presence was especially strong. I spoke to two middle-aged Jewish women who had never leafleted before, who had travelled down from Cambridge to help out. I also met a frummer [orthodox person] who had brought his children along to campaign alongside hundreds of other Muslims, Christians, trades unionists, socialists, members of political parties or simply people from the local community who detested the prospect of the BNP running their council.

Regular readers of *Jewish Socialist* will be familiar with the ongoing debate about whether antifascists should have a no platform policy for the BNP. I used to advocate this view but I have changed my mind. Like it or not, we have to face the harsh reality that Griffin and his cronies have already secured the media exposure that they crave and it is too late to change that. What's more, until the white working class become conscious that their class interests lie in attacking their real enemy – the forces of capital, not immigrants – they will continue to feel abandoned and angry and hundreds of thousands of them will continue to vote for the BNP.

This campaign showed me that by placing the BNP's arguments under a spotlight and dissecting them publicly, and by highlighting their deplorable behaviour as elected representatives, we can start to win people over. I also learned that whilst we should never abandon the mass anti-fascist demonstration as a symbolic act of public strength,

2010 elections . 2010



such actions are not enough. Anti-racist music festivals are all very well, but the resources of the thousands of people that they mobilise could surely be put to more effective use on the doorstep, getting our leaflets out and having conversations with people which expose the poverty of the BNP's claims to be a party that represents the interests of the white working class.

Certainly, there is much to celebrate. At the vote count in Barking a humiliated Nick Griffin said: "The place is finished. That's it. This part of London has gone, London has gone." However he added ominously, "Now we have to move on from areas like this."

Whilst we have destroyed the BNP's morale and forced them out of East London for the time being, we should also remember that they still polled over half a million votes nationally and that many of the underlying issues that fuel support for their "politics of hate" persist.

I was elated to have helped give the BNP a bloody nose on 6th May 2010 every bit as much as my grandfather socked one on the BUF all those years ago. We must come out in even greater numbers to stop them next time.

Some of the hundreds of volunteers who turned out for the Hope Not Hate campaign in Barking, east London



LOOKING FOR

Challenging arguments for "progressive patriotism" have emerged together with a new wave of politically engaged folk music in Britain. **PIERS MOSTYN** explores the potential this offers and the difficult questions it raises for the left about nationalism

Radio 2 is not the station it once was. Its target audience's tastes are now more post-1968 than post-1945, and many people are breaking lifelong taboos to see what's on offer. Recently I was pleasantly surprised, switching on to this year's Radio 2 Folk Awards, to find it steeped in rebel culture.

Opening with the Bad Shepherd's version of "I Fought the Law and the Law Won", this year's Best Folk Song was "Arrogance Ignorance and Greed" – a topical assault on finance capitalism by Show of Hands. The Lifetime Achievement Award went to Scottish socialist Dick Gaughan. Likely as not, all the musicians featured are active supporters of Folk Against Fascism.

Of course radical folk is nothing new. But the radicalism of the recent folk revival resonates well beyond its normal audience and ought to compel us to reconsider the progressive potential in the culture of English national identity.

A certain crisis of national identity has surfaced intermittently over the past century with Britain's decline from global empire to small island desperate to "punch above its weight". The debate this has triggered has been largely dominated by the right, best exemplified by Enoch Powell's racist English nationalism. But there has also been a left perspective, arguing that – with the shedding of empire and the prospect of Britain breaking up into its constituent nations – English identity can be

reconceptualised as inclusive, diverse and progressive. It has been claimed that this is essential if the Far Right's claimed "ownership" of national symbols is to be challenged.

Billy Bragg's engaging and autobiographical book, *The Progressive Patriot*, for instance, calls for St George's day to be celebrated, the flag to be waved and for an English national anthem. He has tapped into a tradition that is more sophisticated and radical than many might credit. George Orwell's patriotism, for example, was interwoven with a subtly powerful critique of class, state and empire. But Orwell has also been repeatedly co-opted by the Right and reveals the pitfalls inherent in any notion of a progressive patriotism (PP).

Post-war, the leftwing variant was rooted in a combination of welfarism and foreign policy bipartisanship. But an anxiety about Britain's position, caught between a hegemonic USA and European federalism through the EEC, became increasingly significant.

By the 1970s, a resurgence of Irish, Scottish and Welsh nationalism posed the question of whether the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" would survive in its existing form. This led to a greater focus on *English* national identity.

As economic crisis replaced post-war boom, a deeper malaise about what, if anything, "binds us together" was triggered, and a decline of deference undermined the popular status of national institutions like Monarchy, Church and Parliament.

The erosion of the welfare state, social solidarity, union strength and local government in a period of economic insecurity since the 1980s have combined with Labour's rightward lurch to breed political disillusionment and abstentionism.

The outcome, given Britain's first past the post electoral system, has been a growing "democratic deficit". Declining voter turn-out has resulted in governments being elected on 25% or less popular support.

Of course this process has been far from linear. It took over 30 years for Scottish and Welsh devolution to become a reality, and the union with the North of Ireland has been bolstered rather than undermined by the Good Friday Agreement. But this backcloth has provided an ideological vacuum in which there has been a limited growth of English nationalism.

Unlike the resurgent Scottish nationalism – largely rooted in progressive struggles (an assertion of democratic control by Scotland's anti-Tory majority and the popular anti-poll tax and anti-missiles movements) – the English version has material roots in what Paul Gilroy calls post-imperial melancholy.

Nationalist ideologies are often underpinned by "foundational myths" – shared stories about national origins and history – and the promotion of "English" identity is no exception.

A NEW ENGLAND

England's historical status as a separate country is questionable – unless you count a short period almost a millennium back when it was run by Normans, with French and Latin the official languages. Our contemporary culture of "Englishness" has more recent origins in the early 19th century, concocted to bolster a 20-year war against revolutionary France, central control over the newly minted union with Ireland and a nascent empire.

Whatever "England" was, from the outset its identity was forged in a seemingly permanent series of wars, annexations and pillaging expeditions – aimed at stabilising a strong state, accumulating wealth and expanding influence – to which the ruling elite remains addicted to this day.

The inhabitants of Wales and Ireland were early victims. Their forced subjugation alongside that of the Scottish Gaels creating what we now know as the "British Isles". And waves of immigrants – including Jews, diasporas from colonial adventure, freed slaves and more – combined with previously settled Celts, Romans, Normans and northern European tribes to create a rich and dynamic mix.

But that melange was never reflected in the officially promoted identity. As recently as 2002 according to Bragg, the Home Office issued a guide to new immigrants called *Life in the UK* claiming that "the English" are descended from the Saxons, Angles and Jutes who invaded in the "Dark Ages", pushing Celts and Britons back to the western fringes. This racist definition would exclude the majority of inhabitants, including many readers of this magazine.

British National Party deputy treasurer David Hannam – arguing that his party should ride the contemporary wave of *English* nationalism rather than seeing it as counter-posed to its favoured espousal of *British* nationalism – has described "Englishness" as now "the only refuge for the racially aware voter".

Is it possible to overcome this history and harness English nationalism to the progressive cause? To answer this, we need a more sophisticated debate than sometimes seems on offer.

Tom Nairn points out that nationalism is an ambiguous ideology that faces in two directions. And Michael Lowy argues that it is essential to distinguish the nationalism of the oppressed – the struggle against invasion, occupation, exploitation and racism – from that of the oppressor. We cannot simply denounce "nationalism" as inherently reactionary. Cultures of national identity have to be

interrogated to consider what they represent.

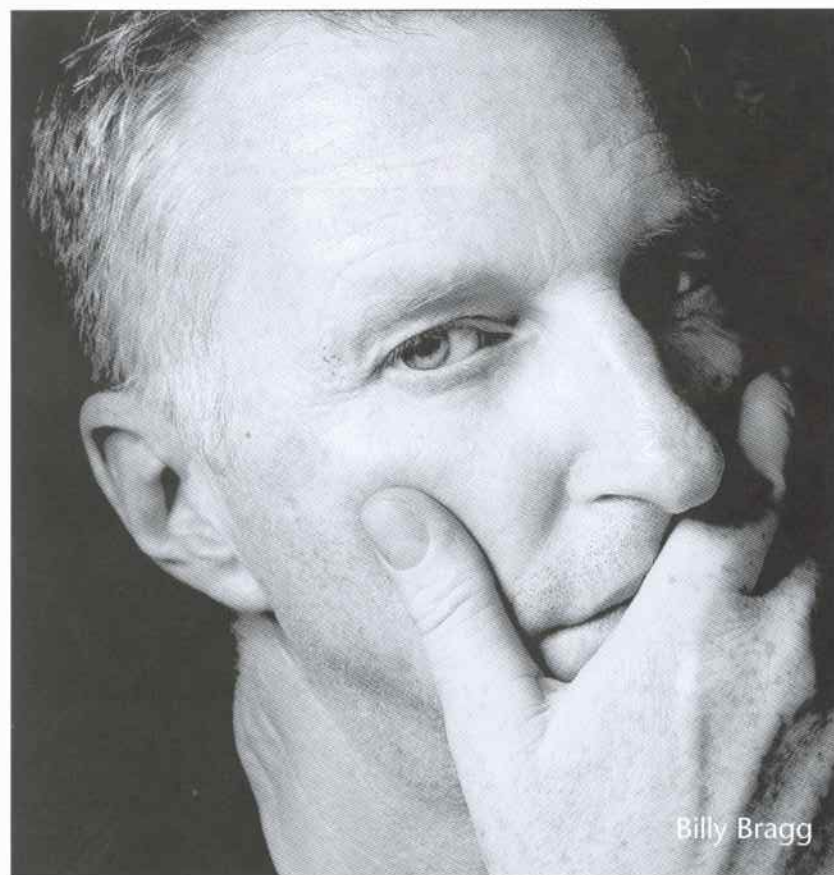
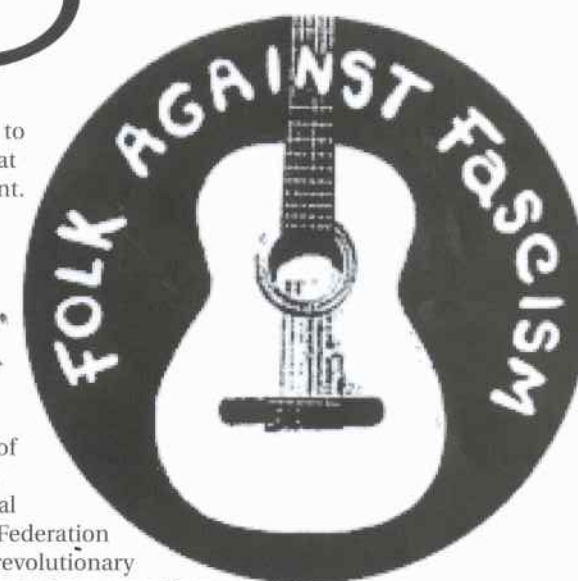
Besides, the English left has its own history of facing in two directions – from the chauvinism of the late 19th century Social Democratic Federation to the main revolutionary groups of recent times exporting their particular brand of civilisation through London-centred international groupings.

On the other side, Bragg and his like have an honourable record of anti-fascist campaigning. Counterposing their position to any notion of "coded racism", they favour a national identity that is inclusive, diverse and explicitly anti-racist. Mark Perryman argues that the recent growth in St George flag-waving by large numbers of English football fans – most of whom are not racists, despite the outrageous antics of xenophobes amongst them – suggests a change in its symbolic significance.

But does it follow that, if individuals promoting an English national identity do so with benign motives, this necessarily creates a progressive movement? There are some real contradictions wrapped up in the idea of PP.

At the heart is the problem that all nationalism is rooted in material conditions – history, social forces, relations between states etc. The English variant has been a product of deeply reactionary processes. Any change in identity or symbolic content would surely have to be the product of underlying change rather than the reverse. Attempts to circumvent this must run the risk of creating support for an agenda that is at best ambiguous and at worst co-opted by reaction.

The idea that we can confront the BNP by challenging their claimed ownership of the symbols of national pride, presumes that such symbols have progressive or at least neutral values that have simply been wrongly appropriated and need to be taken back. But as Mike Marqusee has pointed out, Englishness is a category wide and vague enough to accommodate radically opposed ideas. PP



Billy Bragg

WHATEVER "ENGLAND" WAS, FROM THE OUTSET ITS IDENTITY WAS FORGED IN A SEEMINGLY PERMANENT SERIES OF WARS, ANNEXATIONS AND PILLAGING EXPEDITIONS – AIMED AT STABILISING A STRONG STATE, ACCUMULATING WEALTH AND EXPANDING INFLUENCE – TO WHICH THE RULING ELITE REMAINS ADDICTED TO THIS DAY.

advocates have yet to demonstrate that it is possible to buy into it without getting a job lot.

This has been the problem with Labour's strategy on immigration and law and order, giving dangerous credence to anti-immigrant and authoritarian politics in the name of "stealing the BNP's clothes". To presume that English nationalism can be different is to underestimate its historical roots.

Against this, proponents of PP argue that not all politics has to be hidebound by the present and past. On the contrary by accepting such limitations we can never move on.

The role of prefigurative politics is important and often neglected – challenging perceived wisdoms and practices through utilising imagination and culture. But to be progressive, any future England of the socialist imagination would have to be one in which a blood-drenched imperialist and racist past has been confronted and defeated; which has fought and overcome divisions based on class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity; which is diverse, not homogenous, steeped in solidarity not acquisitiveness, eagerly internationalist not desiring to dominate.

This implies pretty substantial structural change, itself inconceivable without major struggles against deeply entrenched interests. Without such a process, any national identity will tend to exclude sections of the population that cannot or will not identify with the ruling interests it continues to reflect.

In short it would surely only be forged as part of a radical transformation of society. Otherwise any such prefigurative identity risks being framed by existing material conditions, lacking the necessary counterweight to overwhelm other forces. Culture, particularly national culture, is not formed in a vacuum.

At heart, the PP argument rests heavily on the intentions of those promoting it. But is national identity reducible to subjectively defined self-image? Isn't it as much about the perception of others?

PP advocates argue that England (unlike Britain), and the St George's Cross (unlike the Union Jack) is not associated with exploitation, war and racism. That, free of the same baggage, it can readily be dressed in radical garb. But is that really possible? Isn't "Great Britain" seen by most outsiders as a type of "greater England" – as much the seat of the empire of old? Isn't that in fact its history? Is it possible to wave the flag in a time of war without others, particularly from the global South, perceiving this as patriotism of a more traditional sort? The flag seen as

"butcher's apron", rather than symbol of friendship?

That's not to say we cannot dream. On a bad day socialists may have little else to fall back on.

We have the foundations for a progressive future English culture. There is a rich history of political, social and cultural resistance – from the Peasants Revolt, the Levellers, the Chartists, the Suffragettes and Cable Street through to Rock Against Racism, CND, the miners' strike and anti-war movements of more recent times. Minority radical cultures have thrived despite tremendous adversity. There is a rich seam of stories, ideas, songs, poems and theatre enriched from a variety of communities.

Which brings us back to a familiar question: where is the 21st-century culture with a critical eye on the contemporary world, which gives voice to today's revolts? Well, unlikely as it may seem, this year's Radio 2 Folk Awards are as good a place to start as any.

In the 1960s and '70s, Leon Rosselson and Roy Bailey made albums that combined songs about England's radical tradition – exemplified by the Diggers and Levellers – with more global contemporary concerns such as militarism and nuclear war, but Rosselson and Bailey were exceptions. The folk revival in England of these decades, invaluable though it was, tended to see itself as a "keeper of the tradition" – with an essentialist notion of "authentic" English culture when a vernacular medium ought to be in flux.

The more recent new wave has shed that, revelling instead in cultural interaction and in the process opening the door to a radicalism with a much broader potential appeal. From Martin Simpson's Louisiana blues-influenced slide guitar to Bellowhead's raucous dalliance with jazz and European cabaret; from the Unthanks' explorations of maritime tradition, gender and class to Imagined Village's collaboration with Transglobal Underground – there's nowhere better to find a critical take on England, its contradictions and its place in the world.

Chris Wood's "Hollow Point", about Jean-Charles De Menezes is an unparalleled portrait of the "war on terror" as a war on all of us – its opening line, "Awake arise you drowsy sleeper", a slap in the face for English complacency. Or his "Albion", about a father and son who witness a suicide as they walk in the park, its title a jarring counterpoint to the story told.

Shaking off its narrow reputation, this new wave folk is rooted in hybridity, dynamism and collaboration. Typified in the past year by the Darwin Project CD – a festival performance of specially penned songs to celebrate Darwin's anniversary, and another Radio 2 triumph, "The Ballad of the Miner's Strike".

There's material here to awaken and inspire as we build the struggles that will perhaps, one day, allow us to celebrate a new rich and open national identity.

Read on...

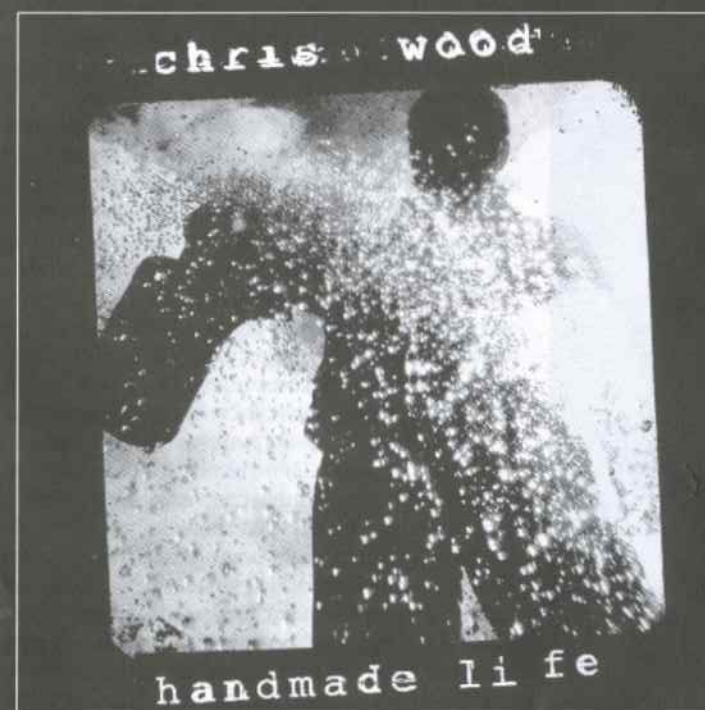
Imagined Communities by Benedict Anderson (Verso, £12.99)
Progressive Patriotism by Billy Bragg (Black Swan, £8.99)
After Empire by Paul Gilroy (Routledge, £15.99)
Citizens and Comrades by Gunter Minnerup and Brian Jenkins (Pluto Press)
Fatherland or Mother Earth? by Michael Lowy (Pluto Press)
The Break Up of Britain by Tom Nairn (Common Ground)
Imagined Nation by Mark Perryman (Lawrence & Wishart, £16.99)
www.folkagainstfascism.com

HOLLOW POINT

by Chris Wood

Awake arise you drowsy sleeper awake arise it's almost day
 No time to lie no time to slumber no time to dream your life away
 It was a gorgeous summer's morning it was a gorgeous summer's day
 His cotton jacket was all he carried as he walked out to face the day
 As he was walking he was wondering with a little dream as a young man will
 He never heard footsteps behind him by the bus stop at Tulse Hill
 But from his front door they'd had him covered they were right behind him
 from the start
 Though the video was bugged someone decided he looked the part
 Here comes the bus the front doors hiss he climbs aboard and so do they
 And how he swings down into his seat it's just another working day
 But there was something in the air that morning as they came down to
 Brixton town
 They sealed the station without warning there was something going down
 And so he journeyed on and onward he called his friend just to explain
 How he would be late and not to worry and so to Stockwell tube he came
 Now he's on their cameras he's on their radar he's on their crackling radio
 His Oyster Card is in his pocket at ten a.m. through the gates he goes
 And down and down drops the moving staircase and deeper down go the
 others too
 And through the hourglass the sand is falling there is nothing they can do
 When the train comes in they are right beside him some say three and some
 say four
 Some say the cameras they were not working as he sat down near the
 open door
 If he'd've stopped if he'd've listened commissioner said that it was no good
 He said they gave him no instruction an innocent man would've understood
 Just a Brazilian electrician Christ only knows what he came here for
 But hollow point was the ammunition it's our turn now for some "shock
 and awe"...

From the album *Handmade Life* (Rufcd12)



Leon Rosselson has released a new CD called *The Last Chance* presenting eight human stories about the Israel/Palestine conflict. The album is available by mail order. Send a cheque for £12 made out to Fuse Records to 28 Park Chase, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 8EH. All profits from the sale of this CD go to Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP).



A SIGN

EYDEL KNEYDEL finds unnerving parallels between a film that's sweeping the internet and some much older conspiracy theories

In Agatha Christie's classic crime novel *The ABC Murders*, the detective Hercule Poirot comes up with the following formulation: "When do you notice a pin least? When it is in a pin cushion. When do you notice a murder least? When it is one of a series of related murders." I would like to extend Poirot's thinking to ask: "When do you notice an extremely pernicious and dangerous conspiracy theory least? When it is set in a two-hour film amongst many other conspiracy theories."

Over the last year a number of people have advised me to watch *Zeitgeist: The Movie*. These people, from a wide range of backgrounds and ages, have included environmentalists, trade unionists, and socialists, some British, some American, and each one has told me that the film supplies a good exposé of power in the modern world. *Zeitgeist*'s viewing figures globally are massive – over 3 million people have watched it on YouTube, and many more on DVD or Google Video. And of all these people who have recommended the film to me, none has noticed how it relies on the old myth of the "world Jewish conspiracy", and how closely it is related to the old conspiracy theory

text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Zeitgeist: The Movie is split into three parts: the first focuses on the relationship between astrological symbology and the story of Jesus; the second on "the truth about 9/11"; and the third is about international finance. The first part is not very significant. It argues that Christianity is not original in its particular form of mythology, but instead reconfigures older myths focusing on sun gods. Whether or not we take this argument to be true has very little impact on how we understand modern society. The second section of the film expounds a theory that 9/11 was an inside job, committed by the American state. Many people do believe this, and much of the information is inaccessible, but these two conspiracy theories are in many ways inconsequential to the film's overall meaning. Rather they are used as a smokescreen to justify the dissemination of antisemitic material in the final section of the film.

It is easy to demonstrate a large cross-over of content between *Zeitgeist* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* by plucking a few choice quotes. For example, where *Zeitgeist* says, "International bankers now have a streamlined machine to expand their personal ambitions", *The Protocols* says "the wheels of the machine of all the states are moved by the force of the engine, which is in our [the Jews'] hands, and the engine of the machinery of our states is Gold." But this sort of critique does not go far enough. In fact the entire argument of the third section of the film has been lifted from *The Protocols*.

Zeitgeist: The Movie takes a number of arguments from *The Protocols*, and in doing so exists as a cultural reference to this early antisemitic text. While explicit references to Jews are omitted, the words of individuals widely accused of antisemitism, such as Lyndon LaRouche and Senator Louis McFadden are present.

One of the great fears of the conspiracy theorists is a one-world government. This point is made explicitly towards the end of *Zeitgeist* in a discussion of a North American Union, an Asian Union, the European Union, and an African Union. And finally, they say "when the time is right they will merge together forming the final stages of a plan these men have been working on for over 60 years: a one world government... One bank, one army, one centre of power." This argument is particularly related to the opening of Protocol 3, which reads, "Today I may tell you that our [the Jews'] goal is now only a few steps off. There remains but a small space to cross of the long path we have trodden before the cycle of the Symbolic Snake, by which we symbolise our people, will be completed. When this ring closes, all the States of Europe will be locked into its coil as in a powerful vice." Protocol 5 adds, "by all these means we shall so wear down the goyim (non-Jews) that they will be compelled to offer us international power of a nature that will enable us to absorb all the State forces of the world and to form a Super-Government."

This mode of thinking about international

OF THE TIMES?

relations is closely related to *Zeitgeist*'s critique of war in the 20th and 21st centuries, which argues that world wars were orchestrated by "men behind the government". The film claims that both sides of conflicts have been funded by the same "international bankers."

Another aspect of *Zeitgeist*'s argument that relates closely to classic Jewish conspiracy theory is the idea the people are made stupid and swindled by a media controlled by a small group of powerful men. Protocol 12 states, "Not a single announcement will reach the public without our control. Even now this is being attained by us inasmuch as all news items are received by a few agencies in whose offices they are focused from all parts of the world. These agencies will then be already entirely ours and will give publicity only to what we dictate to them." And in Protocol 13, "We further distract them [the non-Jews] with amusements, games, pastimes, passions, people's palaces... Soon we shall begin through the press to propose competitions in art, in sport of all kinds. These interests will finally distract their minds from questions in which we should find ourselves compelled to oppose them." In *Zeitgeist* identical issues are covered throughout but, in particular, there is discussion of a "culture entirely saturated by mass media entertainments". We are told that the same people behind the planned takeover of society are "behind the mainstream media".

Finally, the film makes an economic argument: *Zeitgeist* focuses heavily on issues regarding money or gold, theorising that the problems of society are caused by money and systems of money being controlled by a small group of people of questionable morals. What is important here is the focus is on money rather than on capital or production. Instead of offering critical perspectives on structures within society that cause oppression and poverty, the general view is that society as it stands is benevolent and this benevolence is subverted by problems in the sphere of circulation. As far back as the expulsion of the Jews from Britain in 1290, the charge of usury has been levelled against the Jews for antisemitic purposes.

All conspiracy theories insist that someone or some group of people is personally responsible for all of the ills of the world, and this is very much related to antisemitism throughout modernity. For hundreds of years Jews have been the officially sanctioned scapegoat of capitalism. Where systems of production have impoverished people, the Jews have been blamed; where people have felt taxes are unfair, the Jews have been blamed; where people have felt alienated by the structures of society, they have been told that they are alienated because they are not part of secret meetings of Jews. Ultimately these theories lead us away from a critique of capitalism. Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek makes exactly this point with reference to Wagner's antisemitism when he writes: "He needs a Jew: so that, first, modernity – this abstract impersonal process – is given a human face, is identified with a concrete, palpable feature; then, in a second move,

by rejecting the Jew which gives full body to all that is disintegrated in modernity, we can retain its advantages. In short, antisemitism does not stand for anti-modernism as such, but an attempt at combining modernity with social corporatism which is characteristic of conservative revolutionaries."

What is in many ways most unsettling about this film is the fact that it purports to be left-wing or liberal. The film ends with images of three men fading in and out: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther-King, and John Lennon. Throughout the film we have quotations from left wing comedian Bill Hicks and a section is given to British Labour politician Michael Meacher. It is asserted that the film aims at affirming the unity of humanity and doing away with difference, whether it be class, race, or sex. We are made to think that the film is offering a radical left critique of power; instead it is indulging in the sort of theories that are more at home with right wing libertarians. I do not know entirely why the *Zeitgeist* group are particularly targeting the left as an audience. Perhaps it is a divisive measure, but also possibly it is just an arena where they feel they can convert people to their way of thinking. What is clear, though, is that the suggestion that the ideas expressed are left wing or liberal, and the deployment of quotations from well known lefties and liberals, is utterly cynical.

There is one particular reason that these conspiracies may seem compatible with left wing modes of thought, and that relates to the philosophical problem of positivism. This holds that ideas about transforming a society cannot be easily expressed in the language or accepted modes of thought of the society that they wish to transform. This issue is common to all transformative theories of society. Probably the most influential branch of this type of thinking stemmed from Hegel to Marx, and was developed by 20th and 21st century Marxists. Hegel and Marx's solution is to talk in terms of a dialectic, by comparing the consciousness of a society to the material reality and showing that a person's consciousness of society's material reality is made false by pervasive ideology.

Conspiracy theorists address this question in a different way. They say that if our consciousness of society is always false, it is made to be false by a small number of powerful people who make it false. They believe that we are consistently duped by an all-knowing cabal who control every aspect of our lives. And the solutions differ too. For Marxists and socialists, the problem is that society produces a consciousness that doesn't allow us to fully understand our immiseration in work, in unemployment, or in powerlessness, and the solution is the radical transformation of society to a fairer, less exploitative world. For the conspiracy theorists, the answer is the elimination of a small powerful elite. They do not believe that society needs any more transformation than this.

This is difficult philosophical ground to tread. We run a huge risk if we are to criticise the conspiracy theorists for not being positivists, not

ZEITGEIST The Movie



working within accepted modes of thought, in reaffirming a society which we as socialists believe must be transformed. Instead, we must say that their particular critical mode of thought does not propose a correct solution for solving society's problems, and furthermore it relies on division not unity. We must show that inequality in society is structural rather than being based on the wishes of a small group of Jews.

Zeitgeist: The Movie is growing in popularity, and the people behind it are building a movement. More and more people are being influenced by what the film has to say, without realising quite where it is coming from. In targeting the ideas presented by *Zeitgeist*, it is not enough to just quibble over details, rather we must try to understand the politics that this film overall is

trying to portray. We need to read through the many layers of conspiracy theories here, and understand that there is one in particular that they want us to believe, and that this one is the most dangerous and pernicious.

There are very good arguments to show that capitalism and imperialism are extremely dangerous. There are very good arguments from a left or liberal perspective to say that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq should never have been fought. We cannot afford to support any cause that simply claims it is anti-capitalist, or any cause that is simply anti-war, otherwise we run the risk of getting into bed with fascists. Our positions on capitalism and on war must arise from thoroughgoing critique, rather than a rehashing and rebranding of old antisemitic narratives.

PROTEST AND SURVIVE

ANDY SIMONS
discovers
treasures in The
People's History
Museum in
Manchester

The People's History Museum in Manchester was newly reopened in February, thanks to a multi-million pound redevelopment scheme. It derives its origin from the Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative History Society, established in the 1960s by Terry McCarthy. He and the Society ran this as a museum in Limehouse Town Hall, London, between 1975 and 1986. McCarthy was a historian of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, and the Great Dock Strike.

These important labour collections were then in storage until Michael Ward secured a funding offer from the Greater Manchester authorities. Ward had written *Municipal Socialism? The London Labour Party at County Hall, 1934-1981*, published by the Wandsworth History Workshop in 1992. A new trust was created and the museum reopened in 1990, initially at 103 Princess Street.

In May 1994, new museum galleries were opened in the Pump House on Bridge Street. This is the only surviving Edwardian hydraulic pumping station in the city and it used to supply power to the warehouses; it even wound the Town Hall clock and raised the curtain at the Opera House!

The museum was known as both the National Museum of Labour History and the Pump House People's History Museum. In 2001 the museum decided to use a single name to embrace the whole organisation: The People's History Museum. In October 2007 the museum closed to the public to allow for the start of the redevelopment and an impressive People's History Museum is the result.

The facility has a small set of exhibition areas, considering the site's footprint, but it's worthwhile as an archive as well. The current exhibition, "Carried Away", is like what Bose audio speakers are always claiming to be. All the images are large but lose no clarity for that, perhaps because they were blown up from large negatives. One scene, from the

1934 Hyde Park anti-fascist rally, has what appears to be an unconscious child wrapped in a blanket being carried away.

From there it's a generational jump to an early 1958 CND protest of the then secret American arsenal at Swaffham, Norfolk, where the aeroplanes look utterly ancient today. From then we jump three governments to the Free Pauline Jones movement of 1971. In 1972 the exhibit documents London schoolchildren protesting against caning and compulsory school uniforms as part of the Schools Action Union; at least they won one of those battles. Another unexpected slice of protest history is the National Front's 1974 "Repatriation" rally, held in Red Lion Square in London.

After that, we're reminded of the failed 1977 strike at the Grunwick film plant, back when South Asian immigrant communities were smaller. There's also the Greenham Common campaign in 1983, which eventually turned successful in 2000 when the missiles simply left town. The most recent photos, however, are of Arthur Scargill and the NUM's last stand and a 1984 anti-capitalist rally, but nothing more recent. Was this distanced stance, a seeming embargo of the last 25 years, based on the cost of borrowing more expensive materials or a timidity about criticising the New Labour era?

The archive holds hundreds of images documenting the 1984-1985 miners' actions. Even more, they hold the photographic collections of the Communist Party and the Labour Party. But the sources on display are mainly from outside: *Sheffield Star*, *Chiswick Times*, *Votes for Women*, *Newbury Weekly News*, *Lancashire Evening Post*, International Freelance Library, *Daily Telegraph*, Getty, The Report Archive, and the National Archives (formerly the Public Records Office).

Almost all of the protesters being escorted out of

the frame are the Lefties – not one image of the uniformed agents of the government getting hands-on with Rightists. It's not entirely still images either. There are two 1978 Grunwick documentaries on video. And we see a damaged police riot helmet and a youth's donkey jacket adorned with badges (remember them?). "Carried Away" brings back memories, but it's the permanent galleries that will moisten the eyes.

The Peterloo protest and resulting massacre of men and women by the police was almost 200 years ago, in 1819, but the exhibition includes a memorial handkerchief, which shows the event along with suggested subversive concepts, such as *Suffrage!* Jewish tailors are represented, as are the Jewish tin plate workers (1901) and the Federation of East London Labour Unions, established 1889 by William Wess. He edited the *Worker's Friend*, a Yiddish periodical, and a reproduction front page of this is in the exhibition. The display galleries also feature football and temperance, legitimate people's movements even if they have no appeal to me. Truly, every major aspect of our working history is represented, although manual skills of "real men" are to the fore, at the expense of office work.

Workers' literature was sadly not in the exhibition's brief but there's musical propaganda in the form of sheet music. "The Man that Waters the Workers' Beer", fortunately attributed to "Trad". The contentious 1929 general election is represented by "The Labour Song" and the Tories' "Stanley Boy", a 1929 Baldwin campaign variant on the huge Al Jolson hit of the day, "Sonny Boy". Someone in the Tory ranks revived this publicity tack in a 1964 single, *Songs for Swinging Voters*. And for serious relief we get to see the *Spitting Image* puppets, the size of 10-year-olds, of Harold Wilson and Michael Foot. Alas, according to the *Independent*, the Margaret Thatcher puppet fetched £1,400 at Sotheby's back in 2000.

The People's History Museum is noted for its vast collection of banners, from which, if they had the money, we'd no doubt be offered a book. There isn't a general one, or even a commemorative NUM tea towel, in the museum shop. So you'll have to appreciate these treasures the way people did 100 years ago. The British Library's 2009 exhibition, "Taking Liberties", paid little attention to the labour struggles of recent generations, but the People's History Museum certainly makes up for it.

Fortunately, the People's History Museum's Labour History Archive and Study Centre doesn't refer to itself as a library. While the bulk of its riches were indeed published items, many of them were ephemera. It hugely benefits from having the photo and pamphlet collections of the Communist Party and the Labour Party, the latter alone amounting to around 16,000 pieces.

An annotated draft of the Beveridge Report is a highlight, with the future National Health Service taking just two sentences, but that's because it was a dead cert that we'd soon get medical care. As you would expect, Labour generated countless political tracts and campaign flyers, from general to local elections, and they were careful to collect Tory literature too. The heyday of self-generated party print only braked sharply when Peter Mandelson took hold in the 1980s, yet this was *before* the internet era. New Labour's archive, to the extent that they maintain one, is staffed by agency workers.

Their pamphlet holdings include unusual topics, including press censorship, anti-Communist Party literature, special needs education, and Christian socialism, which splays out to temperance, humanism, working class religion and religious intolerance.

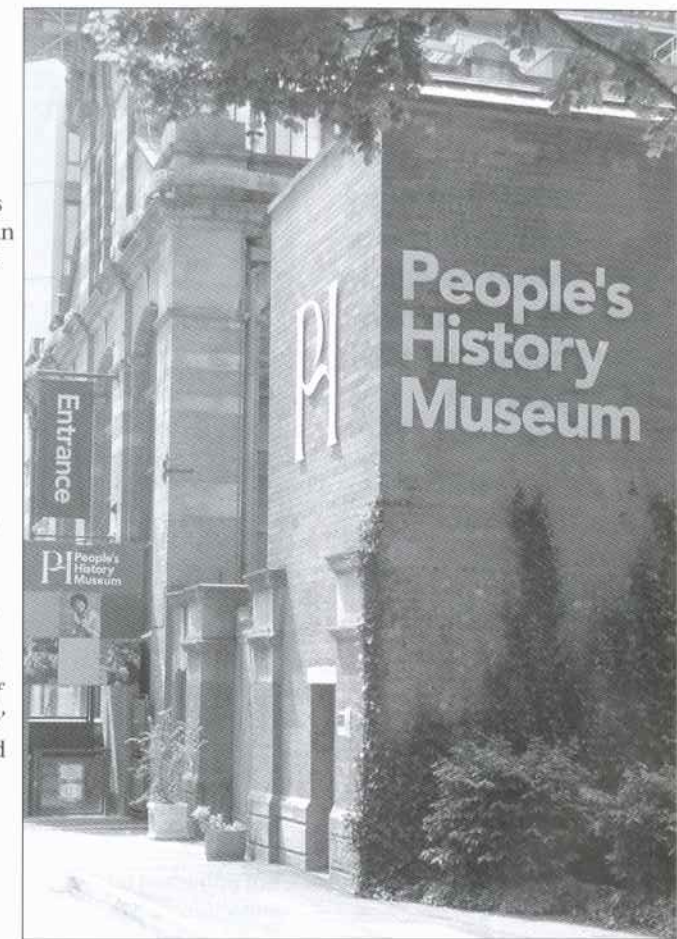
Other treasures include the Economic Advisory Bureau's 1934 report on how Mosley's movement would affect the nation's economy, *Memorandum on Fascism*; a 1936 booklet, *They Did NOT Pass – 300,000 Workers Say NO to Mosley – A Souvenir of the East London Workers' Victory over Fascism*, and Lionel S Rose MBE's *Survey of Open-Air Meetings Held by Pro-Fascist Organisations, 1947*, which was probably a helpful resource to some in the well known 43 Group.

One curious, well illustrated 1942 pamphlet, also held by The British Library, is from the Hechalutz movement in England. This was established in 1935 by British Jews who were preparing to be pioneers in Palestine by forming the Anglo-Baltic Kibbutz. The majority of the English members were from Habonim, the Zionist Youth Movement. This publication mainly shows off the David Eder Farm, in Sussex, "a Palestine Collective in miniature". There were, however, groups of other youth doing the same in Worcestershire, Surrey, Buckinghamshire and Devon.

One fascinating title, from January 1945, is *The Jewish Question: Statement by the National Jewish Committee of the Communist Party*. In this rare pamphlet that's not held by any other UK repository that I can see, the CP supports rights of Jews everywhere, but refrains from mentioning a Jewish homeland. Curiously, the party line seems to oppose secularism: "The situation in which Jewish Communists and progressive elements are largely isolated from Jewish life and Jewish organisations, from which they have broken away in their transition from the ties of religious traditions, towards a progressive outlook and Party membership, must be rectified." I rather think this is the International's lament that Jewish lefties were almost disowned by the religious Jews.

Another rare publication, seemingly held nowhere else, is the Rt Hon. Richard Crossman's speech, addressed to Poale Zion and Labour Friends of Israel at the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Balfour Declaration in 1967.

These and many more historical ironies are waiting for you at the People's History Museum.



People's History Museum
Left Bank
Manchester M3 3ER
Website: www.phm.org.uk
Tel: 0161 228 7212

Lost souls trapped in history

HELDENPLATZ
BY THOMAS
BERNHARD
directed by
Annabel Arden
and Annie
Castledine
Arcola Theatre,
London

Heldenplatz or "Heroes' Square", scene of Hitler's rapturous welcome in Vienna in March 1938, provides both the setting for this play and the symbol of the continuing presence of Nazis in positions of power in Austria a half-century later.

Having fled Austria for Oxford in 1938 and recently returned to a flat overlooking the Heldenplatz, Professor Joseph Schuster has taken his own life by throwing himself out of the window. Finding meaning in this act of desperation is the mainspring of playwright Thomas Bernhard's drama.

In an opening scene reminiscent of Pinter's *The Servant*, Schuster's housekeeper, Frau Zittel and maid Herta enthuse interminably about life with the fastidious professor. Frenetically scurrying about the flat as they prepare for the funeral, they ruminate over his wife, Frau Professor, a woman so haunted by memories of the Anschluss that she seeks refuge in a hinterland called Neuplatz, waiting to die.

Their reveries are broken by the arrival of his older daughter, Anna, and irascible brother, Robert. In turn monosyllabic, contemptuous and ranting, Robert castigates the festering corruption of Austrian public life. His response has been to disengage, observing the political landscape from afar.

Following an agonisingly long first section, the play ratchets up to a tour de force finale. Masterminded by Frau Zittel, the Schuster family gathers for a post-funeral meal. This tense Last Supper is broken by Robert's furious outburst against Austria's church, state, press and theatre, as he likens the Austrian people to an audience passively waiting for a director.

In a *coup de theatre*, the long-awaited arrival of Schuster's wife, Frau Professor is abruptly shattered. She hallucinates, hearing the frenzied masses welcoming Hitler in the Heldenplatz, chanting "Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!" – an original recording. Having struggled for a lifetime to



obliterate such painful memories, she collapses.

Heldenplatz was first performed in Vienna on the 50th anniversary of the Anschluss to a bitterly hostile reception. The then Austrian president, Kurt Waldheim, who had airbrushed his own SS past, branded the play an insult to the Austrian people. Given this reaction, Bernhard left instructions in his will that his play should never again be performed on Austrian soil.

Whilst the ghostlike presence of Professor Schuster elicits conflicting passions from all who knew him, the play hinges not on the reasons for his suicide but on the unreconstructed nature of post-war Austrian society. The authorities have been tardy in acknowledging their part in the destruction of the Jews. Antisemitism remains endemic, soon to be embodied in the bravura of Jorge Haider. The scars of persecution and displacement leave few options for Bernhard's Jewish characters. Depicting lost souls trapped in history, whose only options are suicide, detachment or collapse, this profoundly pessimistic play warns of the easy slide into accommodating not only antisemitism but all forms of discrimination. It posits the value of civic duty, vigilance and political engagement as opposed to passive acceptance.

Director Annabel Arden and Annie Castledine's crystalline, ritualistic production – a first in the UK – evokes a world of creaking emptiness. Clive Mendus as the disaffected brother, Petra Markham as the haunted wife and Jane Maud as the forceful elder daughter highlight a disturbing, provocative evening.

Norma Cohen and Susan Egert

Robert Workman



Flawed feminism

In the early 1980s, at the height of the women's movement, the SWAPO women's solidarity campaign published an iconic poster of a young woman with a gun and a baby on her back. The image is very powerful and also disquieting, juxtaposing two apparently incompatible ideas of nurturing and aggression. Alternatively it can be seen as demonstrating that women have passions, ideals and lives that transcend their reproductive roles.

The SWAPO women were called to mind by Ingrid Strobl's book *Partisanas*, which deals with women in armed resistance against fascism and German occupation in Spain, France, Slovenia and the Netherlands, and Jewish women, particularly, in eastern Europe before and during World War Two. This book first appeared in German in 1989, but an English translation was only published in 2008. Its aim is to reclaim the history and stories of women active in these resistance movements, who have been excluded "from the research and historiography of resistance against German policies of occupation and extermination".

Underlying this goal is, perhaps, a stronger desire, to use the interviews and research that the author has carried out, to demonstrate, with rather tedious repetition, that women can shoot, and that Jews did not all go, as the myths tell us, "like lambs to the slaughter". To do this Strobl presents summaries of interviews which she carried out with some of the women who took part in the armed resistance, and where, as in eastern Europe, most of them were killed, she draws on generalist histories and the few memoirs that have been produced by some of those who survived. The women's stories are juxtaposed with descriptions of the drama of the situations in which they participated.

The strength of the book lies in its stories, particularly the accounts of individual women's lives, but also of less well known partisan campaigns such as that of the Slovene minority in Carinthia in Austria. There are also fascinating details from all the regions covered of what it meant to be a woman in mixed-sex underground fighting units. For example, women in several countries described the problems they faced of dealing with menstruation. Julia, one of many antifascist women in the Spanish republican militia, told of how she had to have an abortion after getting pregnant, as pregnancy was incompatible with life at the front. Frustratingly, the decriminalisation of abortion under the Popular Front is only mentioned in passing.

Other striking vignettes include descriptions of how Dutch women, carrying weapons or illegal documents had to respond to German soldiers' flirting on buses or trams, so as not to annoy them, meanwhile incurring the contempt of fellow passengers. Hostility against women partisans was often expressed in sexual terms: "Red whore, partisan whore", were epithets reported by a Slovene "partisana", and Spanish women fighters said that even in their own party they were looked upon as prostitutes. The youth of the women described was also extraordinary, many were 16 or 17 when they

took up arms. Since most of them were killed within a short time it also makes their stories very moving.

What is largely missing from the book is a more textured social context which explores in more detail the position of women in the places and communities described in the period, in order to give a picture of the kinds of backgrounds from which women partisans were drawn. This is especially frustrating in the long section of the book devoted to ghetto uprisings in eastern Europe. Here one can feel that the author has a deeper knowledge of her subject matter – she had already published a book on Jewish women in anti-Nazi resistance. But despite this, what you get is lots of references to the political background of the women partisans, whether they were in the Communist Party, in Hashomer Hatzair, (the Zionist Youth Movement), the Bund, or some other organisation. But nowhere is the different social composition of these groups, or the changing social structure and position of women in eastern European Jewry at the time examined. Nor is there any exploration of the societal differences between the countries, and there is little discussion about attitudes to women in the political groupings involved in anti-fascist resistance.

Given this lack of context, the merging of historical narrative with individual women's memoirs is not entirely successful. The stories of a few "heroic" women fighters thus has a somewhat crass quality and is perhaps at the root of my dissatisfaction with the book – do we have to keep proving that women are heroes too? There are inevitably splits between feminists who see women as essentially peaceable and those who think, as the SWAPO poster makes me think, that women's lives are multifaceted. But there is a problem for me in a "feminist" glorification of women's military heroism *per se*, particularly when, as Strobl insists, it is seen as motivated by "a burning lust for vengeance". This view, especially of the Jewish resistance fighters, stands in stark contrast to that of Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, who, as suggested in the last issue of *Jewish Socialist* (No 59, Winter 2009-10), "always rejected the narrative of heroism," preferring instead to stress other kinds of resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto, as well as universalist goals of dignity and freedom. It's a pity that Strobl's zeal to reclaim the history of women in the resistance, has led her to an uncritical acceptance of the military hero as an ideal, and in doing so, to ignore its more dangerous implications.

Rayah Feldman



Yugoslavian women partisans

**PARTISANAS:
WOMEN IN
THE ARMED
RESISTANCE
TO FASCISM
AND GERMAN
OCCUPATION
(1936-1945)**

Ingrid Strobl,
transl Paul
Sharkey
AK Press, £13

Designs on power

STATE OF DECEPTION: THE POWER OF NAZI PROPAGANDA

Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, US\$30

This is a Nazi graphics greatest hits – a coffee table tome to give shocked gallery-goers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC an explanation of what they've seen. Although there is an attempt to see the efforts of the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture) in the context of state propaganda since the Great War, the text is brief, aimed at a general public and not real students of this Holocaust (they will want to read Robert Edwin Herzstein's *The War That Hitler Won: Nazi Propaganda*, Hamish Hamilton, 1979).

My copy was misprinted, with eight unprinted pages but it's still worth having for such important graphic and photographic images reproduced in one volume. The book features full graphics, so familiar images like *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), show the edges of the original paper too. The graphics are shown in sharp, high quality colour.

From the first European mass slaughter of civilians and soldiers, we get some obscene anti-German poster art from the USA, as well as a full page version of wartime poster, *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?*, which enticed latecomers to the British forces.

In the inter-war years there was much visual documentation of the Nazi movement that's rarely

been anthologised in print. Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's favourite photographer, snapped 3.5 million images, and some of the earlier ones are here.

In the 1920s, the National Socialists were rising in the country that had arguably the best modern design sense in the world. So it's the poster and periodical art that we reluctantly appreciate. Oh yes, there are awful Jewish caricatures of bent figures hiding behind hats and Aryan fists, that is, when they stand higher than Nazi knees. But quite a bit of the public art is, while not as sophisticated as the famous anti-fascist works by John Heartfield, still rather good and,



more importantly for the time, much better propaganda in the form of public art than was produced by the communists.

The curators missed a few main propaganda points. There's no mention of *Signal*, the colour news magazine published in several countries and languages, that was more advanced than the weeklies in either Britain or America. In fact, *Life* magazine hoovered up several of the staff after the fall and division of Berlin.

The editors haven't included Zara Leander, the Swedish equivalent of Marlene Dietrich, who was the highest paid and perhaps most watched film star under the Reich. And for a Holocaust Museum to miss the Comedian Harmonists' jazz influenced vocal group is really odd. Goebbels replaced the leader and half the popular "Jewish" band members with so-called "real Aryans" in an attempt at musical propaganda.

This museum generally gets the balance right in acknowledging some other victims, including Rwanda, 1994, but not Palestine. There is, though, a reproduction of the 1936 board game, *Juden Raus!*, in which the winner is the first to remove Jews to... Palestine.

This work shows us how clever the Nazis really were in their use of advertising. Hopefully their campaigns will make people today recognise that mental stench when the ultra-right start packaging their politics in sellable slogans.

Andy Simons

The exhibition in Washington DC will continue until October 2011.

Is the Jewish state too Jewish?

Israel seeks to be a Jewish and a democratic state at the same time, two conditions that are difficult to reconcile. In this remarkable compilation of the history of Zionism in all its forms, Marius Schattner, an Israeli of Francophone origin who considers himself a "post-Zionist", sets out in a comprehensive way all the movements and tendencies which have struggled, come together and fought each other in the worldwide Jewish community over the last 150 years or more, and which have resulted in the State of Israel as we know it today.

Starting with the different movements dividing the Jewish community, particularly in Eastern Europe, at the end of the 19th century, he discusses the Haskalah (Enlightenment) movement, and the contrasting Haredim (God-fearers), the influence of external forces such as antisemitism, and internal ones including nationalism, religion and tradition. He stresses the significance given to the Hebrew language.

As early as the 18th century, with the Emancipation in Austria, the French Revolution and the rise of the Haskalah movement in Germany, led by men like Moses Mendelssohn, Jews had begun to look again at the Bible and debate the relationship between Judaism and logic. But for many orthodox groupings, the idea of a return to the Holy Land, of an independent Jewish State (let alone the reconstruction of the Temple) was out of the question before the arrival of the Messiah. By Talmudic times there was the Midrash of the Three Oaths, imposed by God on the Jewish people, one of which was not to try to escape the Exile by "climbing the Wall in the Land of Israel." For Maimonides too, a collective return to the Land of Israel could not be considered before the arrival of the Messiah.

The poet Yehuda Lev Gordon championed the enlightened view in his poem *Ha'Kitzza Ami* (Awake my people): if Jews would live as Jews at home, but as men outside, and good subjects of the Czar, they would cease to be considered as strangers in a foreign land, and "this land of Eden" would open up for them. Christian writers began to think in these terms as well, and "Christian Zionists" emerged, who visited the Holy Land and spoke of a return there of the Jews.

Lord Palmerston wrote in 1840 that there was a strong feeling among the Jews in Europe that the time for their return to Palestine was approaching. The sharp increase in antisemitism in the last quarter of the 19th century gave a further impulse to the movement to resettle the Land of Israel. In Russia in 1881, the Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion) movement was set up, and held its first Congress at Katowice in Poland in 1884. By that time such questions as respect for the Sabbath in a future Jewish state were being discussed.

Around this time Theodore Herzl began to pose some of the problems. For Herzl, Zionism was to be a return to Judaism, not just a home for Jews. He accepted that rabbis should have a role as guides and advisors, but was categorical that the new state should not be a theocracy. His fascination with technical and scientific solutions set out in *Der*

Judenstaat (The Jewish State) won many followers – as did his more questionable idea of "a wall against Asia and a vanguard of civilisation against barbarianism"! However this did not convince people like Barons Rothschild and Hirsch, who visited the Middle East together.

The struggle continued up to the formation of the State in 1948, with the contest between the sacred and the hiloni (secular or profane) as to what references to God and religion should be put in the Basic Law (Israel has no constitution). Secular Jews refused to allow the state to sink into religious fundamentalism but had to allow certain roads to be closed on the Sabbath, while the ultra-Orthodox have had to accept a Gay Pride demonstration in Jerusalem.

This continued with the debate as to the power of the religious authorities over personal law (such as marriage and succession) where the orthodox clearly won. Schattner sheds light on the political stalemate produced by an over-complex electoral system and the intransigence of the orthodox groupings, but does not see the problems – nor the obstacles to peace – diminishing any time soon. Indeed, he regards the ultra-

orthodox attitude to non-Jews and to the state of Israel as militating against a peaceful solution. Finally, discussing the current attitudes of the ultra-orthodox groupings, he contrasts the intransigent refusal of all compromise by the Ashkenazi (especially Agudat Israel) with the (equally intransigent) Sephardim and the Shas movement – clearly deploring the rise in power of both.

His hope for now is that his grandchildren may be able to read the stories of Babar the Elephant in Hebrew (they are currently banned as human representations of animals!).

This is a serious academic study, thoroughly researched, but at the same time fascinating and extremely readable, and a serious contribution to the debate about Israel's identity and purpose currently raging in Israel and the Diaspora. It is to be hoped it will be translated and published in English before long.

Michael Ellman

ISRAEL, L'AUTRE CONFLIT: LAICS CONTRE RELIGIEUX (ISRAEL'S OTHER CONFLICT: THE SECULAR AGAINST THE RELIGIOUS)

Marius Schattner
Andre Versaille,
€22.90



Cold comfort farming

JERUSALEM ON THE AMUR: BIROBIDZHAN AND THE CANADIAN JEWISH COMMUNIST MOVEMENT, 1924-1951

Henry Felix Srebrnik
McGill-Queens University Press,
£56

The Canadian Jewish academic Henry Srebrnik has long been an astute observer of the Jewish left. His earlier 1995 study of the Jewish communist movement in Britain – published as *London Jews and British Communism 1935-45* – provided a rich insight into the blending of Jewish and communist concerns. Here Srebrnik extends his analysis to the Canadian Jewish communist movement, and particularly their support for the strange Soviet plan to establish a Jewish national homeland in the isolated far eastern region of Birobidzhan.

The actual history of the Birobidzhan project has been covered extensively by other authors such as Robert Steinberg in his 1998 study, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion*. Srebrnik's major focus is rather on the North American Jewish communists, organised in groups such as the Association for Jewish Colonisation in Russia (known as ICOR) and the Canadian Ambijan Committee, who provided political and financial backing to the project from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Srebrnik emphasises that these mainly working class Yiddish-speaking Jews were not self-hating or assimilated Jews alienated from their Jewish background. On the contrary, they developed a specifically Jewish left subculture which formed part of the larger Jewish socialist movement that included the Jewish Labour Bund and socialist Zionist groups. Canadian Jewish communists viewed themselves as promoting Jewish interests via participation in a worldwide movement for the liberation of Jews. Their commitment to the formation of a Jewish homeland in the Soviet Union reflected this alignment of non-

Zionist ethnic identity and internationalist class politics.

Srebrnik situates the Birobidzhan project within the broader context of territorialism, the proto-Zionist doctrine that emanated from the so-called Uganda Plan of 1903, which was ultimately rejected by Herzl and the Zionist movement. Other varied proposals for alternatives to Jewish settlement in Palestine followed, including Steinberg's famous but unsuccessful plan to settle Jewish refugees in the Australian Kimberleys.

A number of similar plans emerged in the Soviet Union with a particular emphasis on re-establishing Jewish ties with farming and

productive manual labour so that the old ghetto Jew, the *luftmensch* or non-productive middleman or trader, would be replaced by a regenerated "new Jew" working the land. These plans culminated in the 1928 Soviet approval of Birobidzhan as a Jewish national district. By 1932, 25,000 Jews lived there. Two years later it was declared a Jewish Autonomous Region, and it was promised that when the Jewish population reached 100,000 or formed a majority that it would be declared an official Soviet republic. But this was not to happen.

The majority of this book details the activities and strategies of the various Jewish communist support groups. Their key argument in favour of Birobidzhan was that the Soviet Union had eliminated antisemitism, and provided complete equality for its Jewish population. Not only that, but Birobidzhan offered a potential sanctuary for Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and other European countries. These beliefs persisted in the post-war period, and were extended to the newly conquered eastern European countries which were supposed to be copying the Soviet model of equality for Jews. In addition, numerous statistics were cited documenting the alleged cultural and industrial achievements taking place in Birobidzhan. Prominent supporters included Albert Einstein, journalist B Z Goldberg, and Gina Medem, widow of the famous Bund leader Vladimir Medem.

Srebrnik notes their ongoing hostility to Zionism, including particularly their implicit approval of the 1929 Arab pogroms in Palestine, which cost them much Jewish support. Much of their propaganda compared the alleged progress of the Birobidzhan project with the apparent failures of the Zionist movement in Palestine. To be sure, the Jewish communists modified their position from 1945 onwards as the Soviet position switched from anti-Zionism to support for Jewish migration to Palestine and finally to formal endorsement of a Jewish state. They then denied that there was any necessary conflict between Birobidzhan and Palestine. Rather both projects merited support.

The Canadian Jewish communists formed an important if not majority component of the Canadian Communist Party. They reached the apex of their support in the period from approximately 1941-1947 when the Soviet Union was viewed favourably by most Jews. The visit of the two famous Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee leaders Itzik Fefer and Shloime Mikhoels to Canada in 1943 gave them enormous traction. They later attained significant electoral success, including the election of Fred Rose to the national parliament, J B Salsberg to the provincial parliament, and other activists to local government. Most of these candidates ran in heavily Jewish-populated districts, and emphasised their Jewish credentials. But the Cold War brought an end to these successes. It also saw the conviction of Rose and other Jewish communists on charges of spying for the Soviet Union, which provoked fear in the



Jewish community members in Birobidzhan

Canadian Jewish community. The Communist organisation, the United Jewish People's Order, was quickly expelled from the Canadian Jewish Congress, and would not be readmitted until 1995.

Sadly, much of the Jewish communist support for Birobidzhan was based on delusions and gullibility. The first Stalinist purges of 1936-38 decimated the political and cultural leadership of the Jewish Autonomous Region. And later Stalin destroyed the entire Soviet Jewish intelligentsia between 1948 and 1953 including Fefer and

Mikhoels. Other victims included two former American ICOR activists who had immigrated to the USSR in the early 1930s. These facts were revealed beyond any reasonable doubt by Khrushchev's 1956 revelations. Many Jewish communists realised that they had actually supported a regime which, far from being philosemitic, demonstrated murderous antisemitism. The nexus between Jews and communism had come to an end.

Philip Mendes

Choice cuts

Despite the unpromising title, this may be the best contemporary novel I'll read all year, in a typographically-comfortable paperback edition too. Peter Manseau, like his fictional narrator, is an outsider to Jewish spheres, who hops that fence nonetheless.

This epic is an unpacking of several lives by a Catholic student working his summer break in a Yiddish book warehouse. He reads the autobiographical journals of Itzik Malpesh, a nonagenarian poet. Mainly, it's the old man's story of his life's love, Sasha Bimko, who redeems this book by being a woman of exceptional courage and good, heartfelt sense. Malpesh, almost Yiddish for "monkey piss", swaps Russian pogroms for Ellis Island hospitality, but not necessarily while conscious. I was at first fooled by the "Translator's Note", but it's just a clever device to stir together two tales.

It is humour that keeps folks sane in Moldova, Odessa, and New York City. Manseau can inject irony, such as inventing a pre-World War One goose-plucking machine, metaphorically in the

manner of Nazi death camps some decades later. Yet, when urban immigrants in the New World's Lower East Side banter, it's obvious he's observed some of the quickest wits in town and the circumcision joke, to my ears, is freshly sliced.

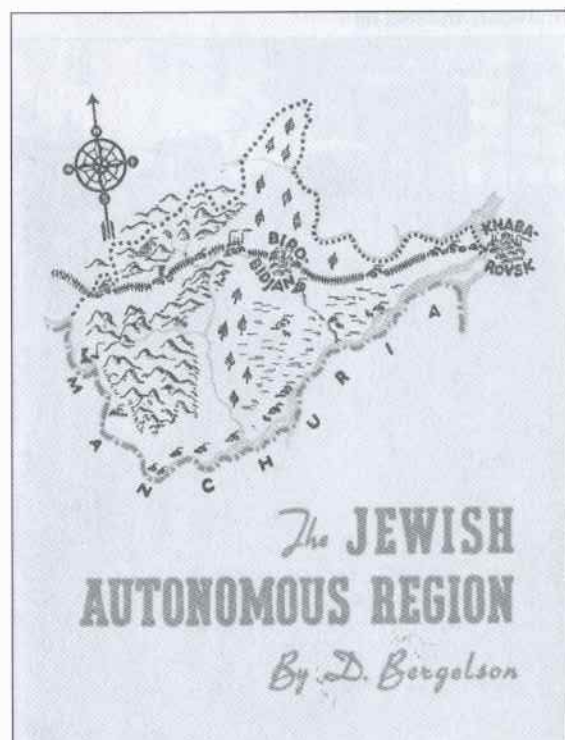
If profound associations float your boat, the writer's insights are endless. Yiddish, the dying language, becomes literally unsinkable in the Hudson River. Yet the book never veers into obliqueness as the characters stumble around faith and politics.

The variety of personalities, locales and insights keeps this book ticking over, with both running gags and running sores. As the actors age, they get smarter, more nuanced and forgiving of others, and themselves. But the *schmaltzifications* of sentiment are skilfully brief, as are the deep horrors, for Peter Manseau's management of such scenes is professional and prudent.

Songs for the Butcher's Daughter is evidence of what happens when religion and romance each pull the wool over the other's eyes.

Andy Simons

SONGS FOR THE BUTCHER'S DAUGHTER
Peter Manseau
Pocket Books,
£7.99



Associate Professor Philip Mendes teaches social policy and community development in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, and has written widely on the history of the Jewish left. He is the author or co-author of six books including *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War, 1965-72* (1993) and *Jews and Australian Politics* (2004).

Raf Salkie looks from a new angle at what could be done about the Settlers

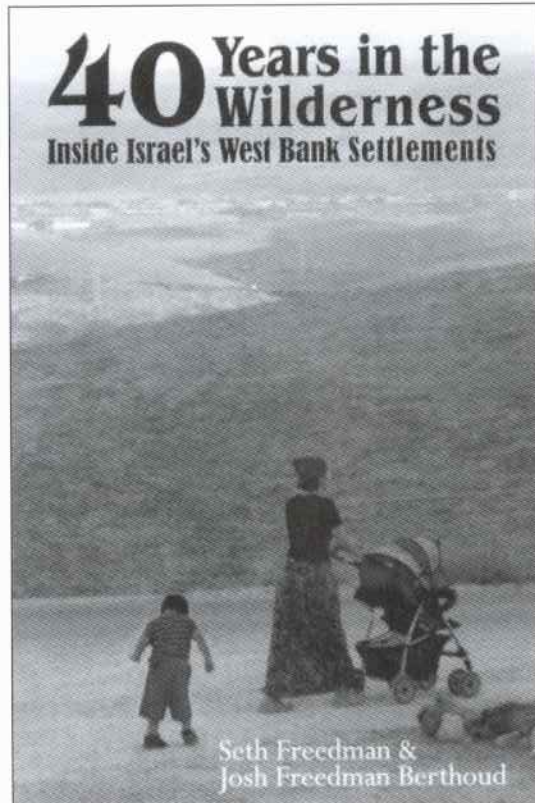
OK, let's talk about the Middle East for a change. The biggest obstacle to real peace between Israel and the Palestinians is obviously the United States. If Uncle Sam wanted to impose a two state solution on Israel (in line with the international consensus, the Saudi peace plan, the Geneva Initiative, the Jewish Socialists' Group, most diaspora Jews, most of the rest of humanity et al), it would happen tomorrow. I can't help you with that, sadly, though Noam Chomsky's recent article can: 'A Middle East Peace That Could Happen (But Won't)' at www.chomsky.info/articles/20100427.htm

The second biggest obstacle is the Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Here I do have some brilliant and convincing proposals, based largely on reading an important book about the settlers called *40 Years in the Wilderness* by Seth Freedman and Josh Freedman Berthoud (Five Leaves, £9.99). The number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is, astonishingly, about half a million. As the book shows clearly, most of them are heavily armed, racist, nationalist, religious zealots. They also, however, have one other feature which gives rise to optimism: they are greedy. Not especially greedy – no different from most other people. They just want to preserve a standard of living similar to the top 50% of people in countries like Britain.

Several things follow from this. Firstly, it reminds those of us in the West who take this standard of living for granted that it is based on mistreatment and plunder of the poor majority of the world. Because they aren't on our doorstep, we can usually avoid thinking about them. On the West Bank, though, the lifestyle of the settlers is fantastically privileged compared to most of the Palestinians around them, and the exploitation is stark and repugnant. But all Westerners exploit the wretched of the earth, and we compromise our right to criticise other people for wanting a similar life in hostile circumstances if we fail to acknowledge our own exploitation of other people and their resources.

Secondly, all the nasty stuff – including the religious fanaticism and the racism – can be made to disappear rapidly as long as (a) the economics continues to benefit the settlers and (b) one other condition is met (see below). You don't believe me? Look at Ian Paisley, who changed from the worst kind of arrogant, nationalist, religious zealot to a benevolent grandfather figure in a few brief years. This was largely because (a) the people he represented have gained economically from the peace dividend in Northern Ireland, and (b) he became a close friend of his previous sworn enemy, Martin McGuinness. If Paisley can change, anyone can.

As I read *40 years in the Wilderness* I shuddered at the horrible things that the settlers said. Then I decided that I can hate them and despair for the future, or I can look for ways to solve the problem of which they are part. The settlers are competing with the local Palestinians for resources, and at the moment they are winning: they have water, good roads, cars, electricity, fridges and laptops. Their Arab neighbours mostly have poverty and hopelessness. The two communities barely mix,



and they hate each other.

The settlers feel insecure not just because they are surrounded by hostile Arabs but also, ironically, because they mostly live outside Israel's Separation Wall. Many of them have no ideological commitment to Greater Israel, and, as the book shows, would move inside the Green Line tomorrow if they could afford it. Even many of the ultra-orthodox fanatics would move out if the price was right: the lure of a comfortable, secure future for oneself and one's children will trump free access to the tomb of the Patriarchs most of the time (trust me).

A Geneva-style peace agreement can work if it gets the economics right. The agreement needs to force the two communities to trade with each other. Foreign investment would – after waiting to make sure that no one is killing each other – pour into the region. A UN-administered development body could ensure that every new enterprise employs equal numbers of Jewish and Arab workers at all pay grades, with on-the-job training mandatory for everyone and trades unions represented on the board of every company (as they are in Germany, which is hardly an economic basket case).

You can't force Arabs to buy in Jewish-owned shops, but you can force every shop to include Jewish and Arab employees. A system of financial inducements and penalties can ensure that the two communities learn each other's language. As the two communities mix regularly, the hate and fear will start to melt away. Combine this with money to fund resettlement of Jews who don't want to stay, and you have a formula which will work.

My plan combines vulgar-Marxist economic determinism with a naïve faith in the power of brotherly love. How can it possibly fail?



PRAISE THE DOLLARS AND PASTOR AMMUNITION

Announcing 1,600 new homes for settlers in occupied East Jerusalem may not have seemed the most diplomatic way of greeting US vice president Joe Biden, but the day before, Israel Premier Netanyahu had showed his welcoming side to another American visitor. Appearing onstage with Pastor John Hagee, at his Night To Honor Israel, Netanyahu welcomed Hagee and his 1,000 American evangelicals to Jerusalem, "the undivided, eternal capital of the Jewish people", telling them: "I salute you! The Jewish people salute you!" before going on to call for "tough, biting sanctions" against Iran.

Pastor Hagee, dropped from Republican John McCain's entourage as too right wing, is famous for saying that Adolf Hitler was the hunter, sent by God, to get the Jews out of every nook and cranny, so they had to go to Israel. So it was a tad confusing to hear him call Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad "the Hitler of the Middle East", but hell, I'm no theologian.

The Texan preacher denounced the Goldstone Report as "character assassination by an unbiased and uninformed committee". If that is not enough to make him kosher, his organisation has raised \$58 million since 2001 for causes in Israel – notably right wing settler groups, including one that wants to resettle the Gaza strip. A film about these beneficiaries included a student representative from Im Tirzu, the organisation that has denounced the New Israel Fund and peace and civil rights groups for... receiving funds from foreign donors. Im Tirzu's spokesperson thanked Pastor Hagee for "help[ing] us to ensure that students in Israel are on the right path, the path of Zionism, the love of Israel, the path of solidarity." The far right path, some would say.

SAFE HANDS

So, President Obama has got through a health care bill in the United States, despite opponents variously labelling public health care as "socialism", "communism", or "Nazism", according to the ignorance of their audience. Lyndon LaRouche said it is a British plot to reconquer the former colonies. (Is that why protesters harked back to the anti-tax Boston tea party?) One of the health bill's firmest opponents, Republican vice-presidential hopeful Sarah Palin, momentarily forgot her terror of government interference and "death panel" rationing in countries like Britain and Canada when, on her first Canadian appearance since stepping down as governor of Alaska, she was encouraged to reminisce about her

childhood, and how the family coped in rural Alaska.

"We used to hustle over the border for health care we received in Canada," Palin said, perhaps forgetting that her remarks were also being picked up by US media. "And I think now, isn't that ironic?" Yeah, but not quite the word that comes to mind, Sarah.

Campaigners against public health care on both sides of the Atlantic may have used a 2004 pamphlet sponsored by private health firm Axa insurance. Claiming plans for the Welfare State were found in Hitler's bunker, it was co-authored by Tim Evans and Stephen Pollard. The same Stephen Pollard who now edits the Jewish Chronicle. I guess the many Jewish people working in the NHS will feel a warm glow at hearing their dedicated work compared to Nazism. "Is it nice to know 'the organ of British Jewry' is in safe hands?" I asked a surgeon. "It could have been worse," she mused. "He might have taken up medicine".

HOFEMAN CURTAILED?

What has happened to Zionist Federation co-Chair Jonathan Hoffman's publicity slot at the BBC? In 2005 he made his debut protesting outside the Hackney Empire against The Skies Are Weeping concert, which premiered a cantata in honour of Rachel Corrie, killed under an Israeli bulldozer. BBC news, broadcast the following night, edited out concert organiser and singer Debbie Fink, who referred to the concert's Jewish support, giving space instead, and the last word, to Hoffman.

In December last year the BBC carried a report that Mr Hoffman had been barracked with cries of "Jew!" after revealing his name when accusing a South African speaker at London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of being an antisemite. The Beeb dropped this story after other Jewish people who had been present said it was untrue. A video of the meeting showed a woman being applauded when she said she was Jewish, and Hoffman making his point without being shouted down, or any antisemitic heckling. Still, the Jewish Chronicle kept the story going, with readers commenting on how courageous Hoffman is.

On Holocaust Memorial Day, the heroic Hoffman was escorted out of an anti-Zionist meeting in the House of Commons after persistently heckling the speaker, octogenarian Auschwitz survivor Hajo Meyer. A man who kept making Hitler salutes was bundled out with him. Anxious that the incident should not go unrecorded, at least two people phoned the BBC with the story. But nothing was broadcast. Has fickle "Auntie" lost interest in her favourite's deeds of derring do? Or did someone else have a word?