

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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

Through this forum we aim to:

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

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

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

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JEWISH SOCIALIST

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THE NEW LOVERS OF ZION

Jewish Gaza boat ■ Armenian genocide ■ Diaspora survey

Inside the Palestinian movement ■ Attacks on Roma ■ Sam Lee interview

Jewish Socialist is 25 years old

In earlier times supporters of Zionism proclaimed that the Jewish state would be a 'light unto the nations' – that the redemptive story that brought Israel into being in 1948 would demonstrate a living example of humanity at its best. Perhaps it is a measure of how far Israel as a state has departed from that ideal that today those who wish to publicly demonstrate their affection for Israel are not humanitarians, anti-racists or lovers of freedom and justice but the collection of thugs, racists and fascists that comprise the English Defence League (EDL). Hundreds of them, including members of their 'Jewish Division', gathered to combine their George crosses with Israeli flags in a solidarity demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy in October, complete with a guest appearance by an American Rabbi who would like to strengthen connections between the EDL, Zionists and right wing populists from the American Tea Party.

Jewish establishment bodies here are mainly angered and embarrassed. Having been determined to sever long enduring links between Jews and the Left, and having uncritically courted right wing support, they are finding that their newest allies may not be quite to their taste. Both the Board of Deputies and the semi-private Jewish defence body, the CST (bankrolled by Gerald Ronson and friends), have been uncharacteristically outspoken in distancing themselves from Israel's newest fans. Even the Jewish Chronicle, whose editor publicly welcomed the support for Israel of Polish ultra-conservative Michal Kaminski – despite his reactionary statements about Jews, his homophobia, and his praise for Pinochet's fascist regime in Chile – has registered that those who claim to be friends of Israel might not be friends of the Jews or support a society that welcomes and respects minorities. The JC has stated: the EDL are 'not our friends'.

Those waiting for a similarly outspoken denunciation by Britain's leading Zionist body, the Zionist Federation (ZF), may have a longer wait. The ZF has added its name on paper to a list of a dozen or so Anglo-Jewish organisations under the umbrella of 'Jews Against the EDL', yet the Co-chair of the ZF was recently forced to issue a grovelling apology after falsely claiming that a photo of himself demonstrating alongside Roberta Moore of the EDL's 'Jewish Division', in support of an Israeli company targeted by pro-Palestinian activists, had been 'Photoshopped'. EDL spokespersons have tried to save the ZF's blushes by claiming that the ZF hadn't invited them, but nothing has been said to indicate that they were unwelcome.

Some regard the EDL just as a collection of ignorant or bone-headed thugs who are determined to stir up tensions with a series of provocative forays in multi-ethnic towns and cities. But the EDL deliberately courts this unflattering image to mask more calculated agendas. With the BNP imploding after the debacle of the last General Election, and the terrifying reality of the ConDem cuts about to hit home and create tensions between communities scrapping for jobs and resources, the EDL can look to a period of growth.

Some of the BNP's 12,000 members will be

disillusioned and drop out of activity but many others will look for a new outlet for their far right intentions. Supporting Israel ticks several boxes for the EDL: encouraging enmity between Jews and Muslims; identifying with narrow nationalism; harnessing Islamophobic prejudice, and celebrating those who back their hostility to Muslims with openly discriminatory policies. Any Jews who believe that only the first of these agenda is at play need to open their eyes now.

The EDL can officially join Nick Griffin, Jean Marie Le Pen, Silvio Berlusconi, Michal Kaminski, and hard-right evangelical Christian organisations in America in a rogue's gallery of those who profess strong support for Israel while loathing and disparaging gays and lesbians, and various minorities including Jews and Roma. Those Jews who are perplexed or embarrassed by the EDL's association with Israel might also ask themselves what it is about the Israeli government's policies, practices and attitudes, in a period where the likes of Lieberman and Netanyahu have the upper hand, that so appeals to these characters.

The rise of the EDL and the tactics they are pursuing demand a sophisticated reaction from progressives. Earlier this year the EDL threatened to march in London's East End and then in Wembley, ostensibly in opposition to Islamic fundamentalist speakers who had been invited to conferences. Of course this was only an excuse – no fundamentalist speakers had been invited to Bradford, Bolton, Stoke, Leicester or a host of other cities where the EDL have also taken their message of hate, but we don't have to hand them opportunities on a plate. Any socialists and anti-racists who do not simultaneously support the fight against fundamentalism are weakening and undermining our response.

The Jewish Socialists Group took part critically in the march through the East End against the EDL which, though held under the banner of 'United East End', was anything but. Our leaflet that day emphasised that 'confronting those who sow division and hatred in East London today means standing up not only to the EDL but also to fundamentalists within all communities who promote racism and antisemitism, homophobia and the oppression of women. Our stand against the EDL will be undermined and become meaningless if we do not also fully support and fight for equal rights and against bigotry within our own communities.'

Some fantasise about winning a decisive confrontation with the EDL on the streets. We may prevail sometimes and can certainly never surrender the streets to them when they demonstrate, but we need to do more than try to relive iconic moments like Cable Street in the '30s and Lewisham in the '70s. Those successful confrontations took place within wider campaigns of day-to-day work to challenge racist and fascist ideas. Today we need to build truly united and broad community campaigns that can divide and undermine our enemies, not ourselves. We must also go on the offensive about winning support for the fact that our society is founded on and has long been enriched by immigration and cultural diversity. And we need to link our fight

against racism with a fight for jobs, for homes, for public services and for a better environment for all communities. Without this, the disillusioned, disenfranchised, angry and resentful elements of society will continue to look to those offering simplistic racist and fascist and fundamentalist solutions. We urge all of our readers to recognise the urgency of this battle and act on it now.

25 YEARS

With this issue we mark 25 years of publishing our magazine *Jewish Socialist*. And we need to say thank you to several people – firstly to our readers whose support and encouragement makes this enterprise so rewarding, secondly to our writers, who give their time voluntarily because they know there is a sophisticated and critical readership out there ready to absorb and consider their ideas, thirdly to our printers past and present who have ensured that we have a high quality product to match the effort that goes into preparing material for it. If we have opened debates, sparked new ideas, influenced political actions, however small, then we know this has been worthwhile. For us as editors it has involved blood, sweat and tears but also a great deal of pleasure!

The world has changed a lot since 1985 when we first appeared – or has it? At that time we had a government bent on protecting privilege, redistributing wealth from the poor to the rich and facing down those trade unionists and community

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campaigners who have the temerity to fight back. In 1997 we elected a Labour Government with a thumping anti-Tory majority that could potentially reverse these priorities and open up new possibilities for progress. Now it seems we are back where we started, only this time round the Tories can count on support from 'Liberals' for their reactionary agenda. We face tough times, and the need for socialist ideas to circulate to support and bring struggles together in effective resistance is crucial.

Within the Jewish community it feels quite different. Back in the mid-'80s we were almost alone as a radical voice arguing for equality and justice for Palestinians, for active Jewish involvement alongside and in support of other minorities against racism, for diasporism, and for a critical view of fundamentalist tendencies within and beyond our community. Clearly we are not alone any more. The middle ground in our community has given way. Some have jumped to the right out of fear, racism, or to defend what they have, while others have jumped leftwards and have been willing to make a stand which they were not prepared to do earlier. The radical Jewish community is growing, here and in other countries. In this area we can look forward in hope.

For our part, we are committed to continuing to provide a platform for radical ideas that can take our community forward and link it with others striving for a better world. We hope you will continue to read and contribute to our magazine and please spread the word to others who may not know of us. We are counting on you!

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Cover photo: English Defence League demonstration September 2010/David Hoffman

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WISEWORDS

'I have never compared the Palestinian Nakba of 1948 with the Holocaust. My conviction has always been that there is no need for historical analogies and comparative martyrology. No one people has a monopoly on human suffering, and every ethnic tragedy stands on its own. If I were a Jew or a Gypsy, Nazi barbarity would be the most atrocious event in history. If I were a Black African, it would be slavery and apartheid. If I were a native American, it should be the discovery of the New World by European explorers and settlers that resulted in near-total extermination. If I were an Armenian it would be the Ottoman massacres. If I were a Palestinian, it would be the

Nakba/Catastrophe of 1948. Humanity should consider all the above morally repugnant and politically unacceptable. I do not consider it advisable to debate hierarchies of suffering. I do not know how to quantify pain or how to measure suffering but I do know that we are not children of a lesser God.' **Afif Safieh, from a speech in Trafalgar Square in October 2001. Reprinted in The Peace Process: From breakthrough to breakdown, Saqi books, 2010, £16.99.**

Afif Safieh is Roving Ambassador for Special Missions for the PLO. From 1990-2008 he served as Palestinian General Delegate in London, Washington and Moscow.



Afif Safieh with his wife Christl and Jimmy Carter, 2007

No swearing

Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel have united in protests against the Loyalty Oath Bill approved by Israel's Cabinet in October, which will require non-Jews seeking Israeli citizenship to swear allegiance to Israel as a 'Jewish and democratic state'. On 16th October, 10,000 demonstrators marched in the streets of Tel Aviv from the Likud headquarters to the Ministry of Defense, shouting 'Jews and Arabs – refuse to be enemies!', 'No allegiance to racism!', 'Democracy cannot be built on racist laws!', 'Wake up – Fascism

is already on the march!' A week earlier, intellectuals, public figures, and Israel Prize laureates gathered for a protest rally against the Bill on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard, in front of the museum building where David Ben Gurion had read the Declaration of Independence in 1948. Actress Hanna Meron read out from the Declaration: 'The State of Israel will be based on Liberty, Justice and Peace ... it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or gender.' At the

end of the rally, a 'Declaration of Independence from Fascism' was signed.

Following the protests Prime Minister Netanyahu changed the Bill to also include Jews who come to live in Israel and ask for citizenship via the 'Law of Return'. Beate Zilversmidt of Gush Shalom told *Jewish Socialist*: 'This is less overtly racist, but still rubs salt into the wounds of the Palestinians who are totally barred from entering and cannot even ask for citizenship. This revised version remains a provocation towards Israel's Arab citizens who cannot even bring in Palestinian partners through marriage, whereas quarter Jews

from the Soviet Union can come with their non-Jewish partners.'

Netanyahu's revision has inadvertently thrown the Bill into crisis because, now that it also requires Jews to sign up, the growing ultra-religious Jewish sector who support a theocracy don't want to recognise the 'democratic' element of the phrase 'Jewish and democratic state'!

For news of continuing resistance to racist laws in Israel, see the Gush Shalom website www.gush-shalom.org or contact Beate Zilversmidt, Sefi Rachlevsky and the Gush Shalom Team at info@gush-shalom.org

See Uri Avenry's article on p12.

CHANGE THE WORLD



Positive Action in Housing is a Scotland-wide charity working with communities, housing providers, voluntary organisations and faith groups to enable everyone to have an equal chance to live in good quality, affordable and safe homes, free from discrimination and the fear of racial harassment and violence. It offers advice, information and support to people from new migrant, refugee and minority ethnic communities and runs a free casework service for those facing poverty, homelessness, racism or poor housing. It also provides emergency shelter and practical resources for

destitute asylum seekers and their families. As a result of a recent campaign led by PAIH, the Immigration Minister Damien Green has cancelled a letter from the UK Border Agency, which threatened to turf 600 refugee families out of their council-provided homes at three days notice and relocate them in sub-standard housing at the mercy of private landlords. Robina Qureshi, Director of PAIH, commented: '...if any families are moved against their will or even one child is forced to move school then we, alongside our extensive networks of supporters, will publicly support and advocate for each and every family, and have

the resources ready to do so. The UK Border Agency has underestimated the strength of feeling about the agency's actions on Scottish soil. From the hundreds of emails and letters we are getting from the public, people are disgusted. Members within the Jewish community have also raised comparisons with what happened to Jews in Poland and Nazi Germany. Asylum policy in the UK remains a torture test for would-be refugees. The psychological torture lies in a UK asylum policy that claims to offer sanctuary then systematically treats vulnerable people like criminals and liars.' Further information from: www.paih.org

Settling in for the long haul

News that Israeli settlers have begun constructing more than 600 homes since the building freeze expired in September underlines earlier warnings that settlements are being established on private Palestinian land. The Israeli organisation Peace Now reported in October that the settlement construction rate had grown to four times the pace of building before the introduction of the ban on occupied West Bank territory.

Ghassan Khatib, a spokesperson for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said: 'This is another indicator that Israel is not serious about the peace process, which is supposed to be about ending the occupation. Nabil Shaath, a senior Palestinian negotiator, said peace talks would not resume until Israel halted settlement building and ended the blockade on Gaza. Peace Now spokesperson Hagit Ofra said the surge in construction was to meet immediate demand for some 2,000 housing units, as part of a longer term plan to build some 13,000 new homes, all of which had already been approved.

The alarm bells sounded only days after Israel approved plans for another 240

homes in the settlement neighbourhoods of Pissgat Ze'ev and Ramot. This move was condemned by Palestinians who accused Israel of being intent on 'killing' every opportunity to revive peace talks. Around half a million Israelis already live in more than 120 settlements across the West Bank, including annexed Arab east Jerusalem. Palestinians see the settlements as a major threat to the establishment of a viable state.

Peace Now's disturbing numbers follow a report in July from another Israeli group, B'Tselem, which analysed the mechanisms used to gain Israeli control over land in the West Bank in order to build settlements. For years Israel has claimed that settlements are only constructed on state land, rather than private Palestinian territory. But, cross-referencing civil administration data with aerial photos of the settlements taken last year, B'Tselem found over a fifth (21%) of the settlements' built-up areas lie on land that Israel accepts as private Palestinian territory. Some 66% of the settlements' built-up areas are 'state land'.

From 2004, when Israel agreed to freeze settlement construction under the Road

Map for peace, until 2009, the settler population grew from 235,263 to 301,200, excluding East Jerusalem. The growth rate in 2008 was almost three times greater than that of Israel's population – 5.1% against 1.8%. And the number of settlers has almost trebled from 110,900 to 301,200 since 1993, when the Oslo peace process started.

The report also examines the illegality of the settlements under international humanitarian law, and the violation of Palestinians human rights. B'Tselem is demanding that the Israeli government evacuate all the settlements in a manner that respects the settlers' human rights, including compensation. Until then, the group says, ministers should take interim action, including a real freeze on new and planned construction, an end to land seizures, and cancellation of the benefits and incentives to encourage migration to the settlements.

B'Tselem's report, *By Hook and by Crook: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank*, can be downloaded from their website at: www.btselem.org/English/Publications/Index.asp

For a better future ... and past

The Jewish Socialists' Group and Jews for Justice for Palestinians have pledged their support to an excellent community-wide initiative led by the Union of Jewish Students to combat any attempts by the English Defence

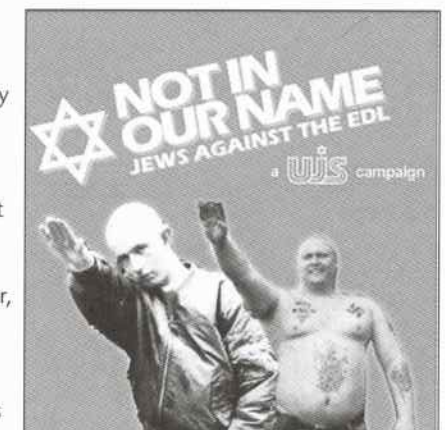
League to cosy up to the Jewish community and harness any anti-Muslim sentiment within it. Other signatories include the Israeli Embassy – recently the target of a pro-Israel demonstration by the EDL – the

Board of Deputies and the Community Security Trust. The statement reads:

'The Jewish community has always been at the forefront of anti-fascism. From Cable Street to defeating the BNP at the ballot box, we have been unafraid to speak out against those who seek to spread fear and hatred in our communities. Now our community faces a new threat. The English Defence

League claim to be our allies in the fight against extremism. In reality, they are violent racists with BNP members and Nazi sympathisers amongst their ranks. They have set up a Jewish Division and wave Israeli flags at their demonstrations. However, those who believe that the English Defence League are any better than the BNP or previous generations of fascists are fooling themselves. Racist chanting, violence and criminal damage are the norm at their demonstrations. It is time for the Jewish community to come together as one to expose the EDL as the racist thugs they are.'

Actions speak louder and hopefully this joint statement will herald united action by organisations across the Jewish community to combat the menace of the EDL. Nice to see the Board of Deputies signing up to a statement that celebrates the community's role in the defeat of the fascists at Cable



Street in 1936. As Mr Saloman, Board member, who was secretary of the committee co-ordinating the Board's Defence work at the time, told the *Evening Standard*: 'When the ... Blackshirt march was announced we distributed numerous bills and had messages read in every synagogue, urging Jews to keep off the streets on that Sunday.' Thankfully those messages were roundly ignored, and the community took to the streets alongside non-Jewish anti-fascists – as we must do again today.

HUNTED

The persecution of Roma communities in France and Italy is part of a wider pattern of discrimination and violence against a beleaguered minority across Europe, says Amnesty International activist **ULRIKE SCHMIDT**

The Roma are one of Europe's oldest ethnic minorities with an estimated population of 12 million across the continent. They have suffered prejudice, discrimination and persecution in Europe over centuries and were murdered in hundreds of thousands during the Holocaust. But the Roma and Sinti were never rehabilitated after the Holocaust. Prejudice against Sinti and Roma still runs deep within most European societies. Longstanding discrimination has led to severe social exclusion of millions of Roma across Europe.

In the early 1990s Roma were the targets of a number of attacks in former Eastern Bloc countries, which created a strong impetus for them to move westwards. But many Roma who sought refuge in the west met with similar threats there such as the attacks last June in Belfast and recent violent attacks against Roma in Italy. During the last two years violence against Roma people has intensified in a number of countries, particularly Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Italy, with the deliberate and organised use of hate speech and incitement to violence by right wing extremist political parties and organisations.

In Hungary there were 41 reported attacks between January and September 2009, amongst them the brutal murder of Robert Csorba and his five-year-old son, who were shot while trying to escape their burning house. Maria Balogh and her

largest Jewish organisation warned that this was 'the first occasion that a movement pursuing openly antisemitic policies has taken a step to power since the Nazi era'. The party has just recently called for all Roma to be incarcerated in guarded camps.

Jobbik has close links with the banned paramilitary group Magyar Garda whose insignia are modelled on the arrow cross of Hungary's wartime Nazis. Magyar Garda have staged a series of marches against 'Gypsy crime' through small countryside town and villages with Roma populations. The murder of Robert Csorba and his son took place in Tatarszentgyörgy; Magyar Garda had staged meetings and marches in Tatarszentgyörgy and neighbouring towns before the fatal attacks.

An article in the newsletter of Tettekesz, the trade union of Hungarian police officers, which has 5,300 members, called for 'war against Gypsies and Jews'. The writer warned that 'a crumbling country, torn apart by Hungarian-Gypsy civil war could easily be claimed by the rich Jews ... Given our current situation, antisemitism is not just our right but is the duty of every Hungarian homeland lover and we must prepare for armed battle against the Jews.' The General Secretary of Tettekesz was number four on the list of Jobbik candidates list in the last Euro elections: three Jobbik candidates were elected. Given these attitudes, it is not surprising that violent attacks, most often the firebombing of houses, and shooting the terrified inhabitants when they try to escape the flames, are largely unreported and uninvestigated.

In the Czech Republic a similar pattern of incitement and intimidation of Roma people by far-right groups such as the Workers Party has been accompanied by an increase in violent attacks, most notoriously the fire-bombing of a Romani household in Vitkov that injured both parents and left their two-year-old girl with 80% burns. This attack occurred on the same evening as a large neo-fascist demo in Usti Nad Lebem.

The Slovak National Party ran an advertisement for the European elections calling for a 'final solution to the gypsy question'. It won its first Euro seat in that election. In Kosice, Slovakia, abusive actions by police officers against Roma children were condemned by Slovakia's ombudsman. Ten police officers had been videoed forcing six Roma boys to strip and slap each other's faces. But a more common daily problem that Roma children face in Slovakia is in the education system where they are often segregated from other children in the classroom and in lunchtime canteens, and in some cases they are collected early from school so they do not encounter parents from the majority population. They are also very disproportionately concentrated in special schools for children with learning disabilities. Roma make up 10% of Slovakia's total population, but their children form 80% of the special school population.

Racist attacks against Roma people are not limited to a few east European countries. Anti-Roma prejudice runs deep in many European societies and is stoked up by far-right parties. The recent rise of the

BY HATE

far right across Europe and the increase in violent attacks against Roma people are no coincidence. In addition to mob violence there are acts of discrimination and forced evictions by governments.

In Italy, arson attacks and mob violence against Roma have been fuelled by anti-Roma rhetoric by senior politicians. In 2008, Berlusconi's campaign promised a clampdown on 'Roma, clandestine immigrants and criminals'. Umberto Bossi, head of the right-wing Northern League, defended the burning of a Roma camp in Naples where a mob of 100 people armed with sticks and Molotov cocktails set fire to the settlement, forcing 800 Roma to flee. Other arson attacks were reported from Naples, Novara, Pisa, Rome and Venice. Berlusconi refused to condemn an ally in Milan who proposed that seats and carriages on local transport be reserved for 'native Italians'.

There have been forced evictions in Italy. On 11th November 2009, the city authorities in Rome evicted a community of about 400 Roma people without provision of alternative accommodation, thereby breaking international law. Now thousands of Roma living in Rome face the threat of eviction as a result of the 'Nomad Plan', a new plan to close down many of the Roma camps in the city, with the forced eviction of at least 7,200 Roma and the resettlement of some new or expanded camps outside the city and others left homeless. There was next to no consultation with Roma people. They will only be offered accommodation in other camps and not in the ordinary housing that Roma aspire to live in. Many Roma are worried that employment prospects and children's schooling will be affected by the relocation.

On 16th June 2009 over 100 Roma people from Romania were forced to flee their homes in Belfast, in Northern Ireland when verbal attacks turned physical: bricks were thrown through windows, doors were kicked in, a little girl was threatened with a knife, all accompanied by Nazi slogans.

The most recent outbreaks of anti-Roma persecution have occurred in France: for weeks the authorities in France were shutting down informal camps where Roma live, and on 20th August this year France began expelling and deporting Roma. Up to now, 200 camps have been closed and over 1,000 Roma deported or bullied into leaving France, mostly back to Romania and Bulgaria where they had been trying to escape a vicious cycle of discrimination, evictions, poverty and hunger.

At least, this time, there was some protest, including demonstrations outside French embassies and across France. There were protests from churches, even the Vatican. One Catholic priest from Lille went as far as praying for a heart attack for Nicholas Sarkozy, because he sees no other way to end the war of the Government against the Roma.

There have been protests in the European Parliament: MEPs passed a motion accusing the Commission of failing to protect the Roma men, women and children. Viviane Reding, EU Justice Commissioner, branded Nicholas Sarkozy's Government a disgrace and recommended that the



French government be taken to the European Court of Justice. Even the Conservative MP Jean Pierre Grand called the action of the Government shocking and said it reminded him of actions against Roma by the Vichy regime during the Nazi occupation.

Amnesty International protested against the expulsions and the inflammatory statements by politicians who were linking an entire community to alleged crimes. At its last AGM Amnesty International UK decided to make campaigning for Roma rights a priority over the next two years. Current actions include petitions to the local authorities in Rome against the 'Nomad plan', petitions to the mayor of Belgrade protesting forced evictions of Roma communities in Belgrade and other locations in Serbia, and lobbying the local authorities in Miercurea Ciuc in Romania, where, after a forced eviction in 2004, around 100 Roma people were 'resettled' on a toxic waste plant.

Amnesty International are also lobbying the new Slovakian government to stop the segregation of Roma children into schools for children with mental disabilities and Roma-only schools with a substandard curriculum that only prepares students for manual labour and servitude, thereby excluding the next generation from any opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. The broad aim of Amnesty's Europe Roma strategy is to focus a campaign on selected countries for concrete improvements in access to economic, social and cultural rights, and to end violence against Roma people.



Top: members of the far right Workers Party who carry out a campaign of intimidation against Czech Gypsies
Above: the Magyar Garda, whose insignia are modelled on the arrow cross of Hungary's wartime Nazis



The funeral of Maria Balogh, shot by racists in her home.

13-year-old daughter Ketrin were shot in their home. Maria died of her injuries, Ketrin survived but her injuries are unlikely to fully heal. Jenő Koka was gunned down as he left home for the night shift. And there are many other incidents.

Hungary's fascist Jobbik Party, which mobilises against both Roma and Jews, won 16% of the vote at the last parliamentary elections, enough to give it a lever on power. Before the election, Hungary's

SAILING SKILLS AND

DIANA NESLEN describes why, in the wake of the Israeli military's lethal attack on the *Mavi Marmara*, a group of Jewish activists took to the high seas on the 10-metre catamaran *Irene*

Rosa Parks was a heroine of the Civil Rights movement. She chose to challenge segregation by taking her seat in the front of the bus. When she died, obituaries flourished. But one commentary stood out for me. The commentator said that Rosa was only the public face of a great movement. Her achievement was made possible by those behind the scenes. The same could be said of the Jewish boat to Gaza.

The idea developed in Germany, through our partners, Jüdische Stimme für Gerechten Frieden in Nahost (Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East). After the Israeli forces boarded the *Mavi Marmara*, part of the flotilla to Gaza, and killed nine passengers, a protest march was held in London. Glyn Secker, a member of the executive of Jews for Justice for Palestinians, told the assembled crowd that a Jewish boat would be sailing to Gaza. This statement went viral and within days international support was pouring in. There was no turning back.

Our goal was to reach Gaza with aid, and to show the world another face of Jews and Israelis. Too many people see the violent, brutal and aggressive face of Israel and hear the voices of mainstream Jewish organisations providing unqualified support for human rights abuses. They wonder what has happened to the Jewish tradition of identification with the oppressed and action against inhuman abuses. It was our goal to make this tradition visible to a world unused to alternative Jewish voices.

After discussion, we agreed with our German partners that it would make sense for the organisation to be based in London. We had skills here and the contacts that could be mobilised at short notice. Only dreamers could have imagined that with our limited human resources we could achieve such a historic breakthrough, but that is the nature of struggles. You fashion the rules as you go.

We were lucky that donations poured in to give us some ballast and, just as important, we had some skills available to give us a fighting chance to make a success of this. We had an experienced boat skipper, in the shape of Glyn Secker, a press strategist, accountants, administrators and managers. We could call on the assistance of press agencies. However, looking back, it was only the fact that we were inveterate dreamers that gave us the incentive to continue through the stormy seas that confronted us. We were mostly retired, or between engagements, which gave us the space to take on what was a huge undertaking for such a skeleton crew.

We knew our adversary, an organisation with no compunction about killing, theft, or sabotage. So security was our watchword. We met in anonymous cafés, took out our mobile phone batteries when we consulted one another, developed codes and secret means of communication. It felt like something out of a cold war thriller. Maybe it did make us feel self-important, but we would not have a second chance so this one had to work. Which meant that we had absolutely to prevent sabotage,

and information was strictly guarded. This was hard on our supporters who wondered whether anything would materialise. But even those of us involved were kept in the dark as to boat's location and sailing information.

If you stand on the banks of a river and watch a swan gliding regally by, you imagine everything is running smoothly, but underneath the swan's webbed feet are frantically moving. Thus it was with us. The boat, with its crew of four, was sailing from the Greek island on which the yacht was bought, from north of the Peloponnese through the Corinthian Canal, the Cycladic islands. They had to deal with ongoing misfortunes: the engines overheated and died; the wheel suddenly became detached; the anchor got stuck; the sail tore; there was a storm; and more. Each problem was overcome through the experienced engineer, Dave, who had to leave for family reasons, or through the knowledgeable crew. Contact with London was maintained through text messages – a not very effective means of communication.

In London, the problems were different and at times they seemed almost intractable. Media interest was vital. We had an excellent team working without rest to engage the world's media. Unfortunately, the media group to which we originally gave exclusive access pulled out on discovering that because the boat was so small, it was impossible to broadcast whilst on board. In the event, such was their commitment, that they broadcast nothing at all about the voyage or its outcome.

Tension mounted, and there were many occasions when we believed that our aspirations would be thwarted, not for want of trying, but perhaps because our ambitions were greater than the personal and professional resources at our disposal. However we could not surrender at this crucial juncture, and ploughed on regardless. It was a gamble. Either we would achieve our outcome, or we would end up in a heap somewhere in the Mediterranean, creating an opportunity for our adversaries to crow.

We gave much thought to the choice of our port of departure. Cyprus was the best option, but we understood that the Greek Cypriots had been pressured by Israel not to allow boats to leave for Gaza from their shores. So we had to find a place where our arrival would not attract much attention. Famagusta seemed a practical choice.

Over a period of four days our passengers and backroom stalwarts assembled. Each passenger had something unique to contribute. There was Edith, our German comrade, who was instrumental in building the idea of a Jewish boat to Gaza, and was a committed peace activist who saw her mission to build bridges not walls; Lilian, the American daughter of German Jewish refugees, poet, writer, activist, psychoanalyst; Reuven, Holocaust survivor and Israeli patriot, who wishes to see another Israel, one that believes in the ideas that have moved him throughout his long life, ideas of equality, of justice

HUMAN VALUES



and of peace between peoples; Rami, the peace campaigner, whose reserved exterior hides the pain of his daughter's death at the hand of a suicide bomber. Rather than letting vengeance destroy him, it has encouraged him to redouble efforts for justice and peace, so that no one else, Jewish or Palestinian, will suffer as his family has.

Our thoughts turned to our objective and this is a distillation of the ideas expressed. We talked about our views on peace, on justice and our sense that Israel and the larger Jewish communities throughout the world had lost touch with their common humanity and could no longer empathise with the people over whom Israel holds awesome power, and whom she treats with contempt and derision. We felt that our mission could act as a beacon to those Jews who felt alienated from this arrogant and aggressive state without a moral compass. We wanted to show the world that there are other Jews, who believe in equality and justice. We understand that peace can only come when the powerful accept the other as their equal, are sensitive to their needs and wishes and deal justly and with humility with their partners in this endeavour.

We also needed to say to the world that there is another Jewish tradition, one of commitment to human rights for all, one that encourages civil disobedience when the need arises and one which is at ease with its place in the firmament, as one among many, without demanding to be treated as a special case. Jewish history is alive with people who remember their own persecution, use this memory as a lodestar to challenge inhumanity wherever it is found, and refuse to be bound by tribal ties. Above all, we talked about the prisoners of Gaza, waiting with impatience for our arrival, and the Israeli

forces of occupation arraigned against them and against our tiny efforts to show solidarity. We knew we could not fight a Navy, but we could be a symbol of the human demand for freedom and of the desire of free people to make a difference. When you stand against the flow of bigoted opinion, you have made a different sort of journey, often solitary, but always emancipatory.

We waited around, engaged in conversation, slept fitfully and wondered anxiously when the boat would come in. Suddenly a taxi discharged young bearded, tall fair men. Our crew had arrived. Peace campaigners, Yonatan Shapiro, known as the instigator of the Pilots' Letter in 2003, and Itamar, his refusenik brother, Glyn long time activist, our skipper. Many extremists wrote to us afterwards, and in their puny efforts to insult us, stated that we were not true Jews. In response, the words of the Bundist cry returned hauntingly: 'Vos mir zaynen, zaynen mir, ober mentshen zaynen mir'. (What we are, we are, but we remain mentshen – human beings with moral values).

After a period of boredom, everything went into overdrive. There was little time for reflection; instructions for the voyage were handed out. The press-briefing would take place the following day, and immediately afterwards the boat would sail. Not plain sailing though. The press were one step ahead of us and asked the Turkish police for permission to film. That rather put paid to the idea that the boat could make a decent and quiet departure. It meant police intervention and serious negotiation. Preparation perhaps for what was to follow.

The boat left in a hurry, flying the flags of all the Jewish organisations that supported us, and carrying bunting etched with the names of those many

people who wanted to sail with us but who could not be accommodated. It was laden with symbolic cargo, children's toys, medicines, a water filter, books, musical instruments. Our mission was simple. Above all it was to show that Jews could try to build bridges rather than walls, come with an olive branch and not with a bulldozer to destroy olive trees, come in a simple frail catamaran, not an F16 bomber, to bring the gifts of life, not the instruments of death, to come as supplicants for peace, not as merchants of war. We knew that the next 48 hours would be crucial: 'If they are intelligent,' said Rami, 'they will let us through to Gaza.' But thugs need no intelligence; brute force is their method. Why not, as long as the world appeases them?

We kept in touch with the ship until the dread signals of engagement arrived. Fortunately we had people on board who could witness the violent attacks and give the lie to the Israeli army's self-serving account of a 'peaceful' capture.

Let us return to Rosa Parks. She sat at the front of the bus as a gesture of emancipation from oppression, discrimination and racism. It was also reclamation of her identity as a full human being. As Jews and Israelis we too need emancipation – from the arrogance of dominion, from the blindness to suffering, from an ersatz victimhood we have no right today to claim, and for the world from the misapprehension that all Jewish people support the oppression of the Palestinians. When

you can destroy another community's future and blame them for your actions (Golda Meir said: 'We do not blame them for what they do, but for what they make us do to them.'), then you have lost your humanity. Humans blind to the needs of the other are lesser beings.

We are symbolically acting for all the Jewish community in the hope that it will spur some to capture this moment and begin to turn towards humanity, towards justice and human rights, and against bigotry and human abuse. Only then will emancipation truly be accomplished.

It was once said that the birth of the Israeli state showed that the image of the passive ghetto Jew was now a thing of the past. Jews would now fight back and no one would in future lay a finger on them. Sometimes it seems that this is all the the Israeli Defense Forces do, preferably against defenceless civilians and with rules of engagement which place the safety of their armed forces above that of civilians. This they call 'courage'.

Real courage is shown by those who take a tiny catamaran into the seas of the Mediterranean in the hope of reaching a safe harbour, but aware that they could be targets for the overkill that only Israel knows how to produce. We salute and honour the brave sailors and passengers on that little boat and hope that their voyage will act as a beacon of valour for young Jews and Israelis in the future.

See testimonies at www.jewishboatogaza.org

MIXED FEELINGS

Although Jews in the Diaspora still feel an attachment to Israel, they no longer give it unconditional support, according to a recent survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. **TONY LERMAN** looks at the research and its implications

David Cameron recently described Gaza as a 'prison camp'. Further, in a speech to business leaders in Ankara, he strongly condemned Israel over the Turkish Gaza flotilla atrocity. These comments have angered some commentators and politicians, and pleased others. Among the displeased is Stuart Polak, Director of Conservative Friends of Israel, who criticised Cameron and laid all blame for Gaza's problems on Hamas. But if he and other reactionaries believe they are reflecting opinion among British Jews, recent survey evidence suggests otherwise. In a 2010 online poll conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) with advice from Ipsos MORI, a striking 52% of respondents agreed that Israel should negotiate with Hamas.

This statistic alone doesn't prove that most British Jews would agree with Cameron's 'prison camp' terminology. But taken together with other data from the poll, it's clear that there are, in the words of JPR Director Jonathan Boyd, 'signs of considerable disquiet' in the Jewish community over Israel's behaviour. Of those polled, 55% agreed that Israel is 'an occupying power in the West Bank', 47% said 'most Palestinians want peace' and 40% said Israeli control of the West Bank is not vital for normal civilian life.

Even on security and peace issues, there is no appetite for giving Israel carte blanche to do what it likes. Responding to the statement that Israel has little or no choice in military action it takes, 43%

disagreed. And 34% did not agree that Israel holds less responsibility for the recent failure of the peace process than its Middle East neighbours.

Some of the headline findings will provide reassurance for Zionist organisations and staunchly pro-Israel groups in the UK; they will take heart that there remains a close attachment of British Jews to Israel. According to the survey, 95% of respondents have visited Israel (78% in 1995), 90% see it as the 'ancestral homeland' of the Jewish people, 86% feel that Jews have a special responsibility for its survival and 72% categorise themselves as Zionists – and the Jewish Chronicle chose to interpret this as: 'UK Jewish bond with Israel as strong as ever'. In its desire to spin survey results, the JC pretends not to notice even the gently oppositional voices in the Diaspora.

Guardian writer Jonathan Freedland, a 'critical friend' within the Diaspora, warned of this trend in the United States (www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/jul/06/israel-losing-friends-netanyahu-obama). American Jews are regularly polled and so the changing curve of attitudes is plain.

However, as in 1995, the Jewish population today shows doveish tendencies: 67% agree that Israel should yield territory for peace (the figure was 69% in 1995, at the height of enthusiasm for the Oslo Accords), 78% favour a two-state solution and 74% oppose expansion of the settlements.

OVER HALF OF JEWS LIVING IN BRITAIN FEEL THAT THEY DO ... HAVE THE RIGHT TO JUDGE ISRAEL AND OVER A THIRD SAY THAT 'IF JEWISH PEOPLE CONSIDER CRITICISM OF ISRAEL TO BE JUSTIFIED, THEY SHOULD ALWAYS FEEL FREE TO SAY SO IN THE BRITISH MEDIA'.

Nevertheless, this doveishness is accompanied by continuing concern for Israel's safety: 72% say the wall is 'vital for Israel's security', 72% agree that the war on Gaza was a 'legitimate act of self-defence', and 87% agree that 'Iran represents a threat to Israel's existence'.

But when 67% say there's too much corruption in Israel's political system, almost 60% believe that both Jewish and non-Jewish minorities 'suffer from discrimination' and 75% think that orthodox Judaism has too much influence in Israeli society, British Jews are sending a strong signal to Israel's government. Moreover, they seem to want to be more open and assertive in expressing their views: 53% of respondents think that Jews living in Britain do have the right to judge Israel and 35% say that 'if Jewish people consider criticism of Israel to be justified, they should always feel free to say so in the British media'.

Do the opinions of British Jews matter? Nowhere near as much as the views of American Jews, of course. But support from Jews worldwide has always been vital for providing Israel with legitimacy. Israeli think tanks are in a panic today about left-wing 'delegitimisation' of the country. The Reut Institute even claims that this criticism is most effectively orchestrated from London. So hanging on to that support has become increasingly important. The JPR survey findings reinforce a broader picture that already shows how much more difficult the shoring-up of Jewish solidarity has become.

In America, a seminal *New York Review of Books* article by former *New Republic* editor Peter Beinart, who was well known for his staunch defence of Israeli government policies, slammed American Jewish leaders for supporting Israel at all costs and betraying the liberal values to which US Jews have always been so deeply attached. Controversy raged over the piece, but, against the background of growing support for the alternative 'pro-Israel, pro-peace' lobby J Street, it was a watershed moment for American Jewry.

For example, more than one-fifth of the MORI respondents say they are non-Zionists – a not insignificant figure in itself – yet most of these respondents see Israel as the Jewish 'ancestral home'. On the other hand, 62% of self-described Zionists agree to yield territory for peace and 48% agree that Israel is an occupying power in the West Bank – two key issues for many Zionists today, who tend to see no partner for peace. As the authors say, 'those who define themselves as "Zionists" are not always firm supporters of Israeli government policy.' Equally, there is no truth in the notion that those who call themselves "non-Zionist" want to dismantle the state of Israel.

This trend was echoed in Europe by the launch of JCall, an online petition critical of Israeli policy signed by thousands of Jewish intellectuals, but especially significant for being fronted by Bernard Henri Levy and Alain Finkielkraut, leading French media philosophes, who were previously indefatigable defenders of Israel and Zionism.

Make no mistake, this all matters to Prime Minister Netanyahu. Former senior members in the

Israeli security establishment I have spoken to say that these changes among Diaspora Jews are giving Israeli political leaders serious collywobles.

Jewish leadership in the UK can hardly say it wasn't warned. The last major sample survey of Jewish opinion on Israel was undertaken by the JPR in 1995 and I was the lead author of a report on the findings, published in 1997 (www.jpr.org.uk/Reports/IS_Reports/no_5_1997/index.htm). Signs of the emergence of a less ideological and more pragmatic attachment to Israel were clear back then. We predicted that if trends continued, we would see Israel appealing more to traditional and orthodox Jews; that attachment to that country was to be based more on experience than on ideology; that Zionism would be ideologically less relevant; that Israel would serve as a source of communal division rather than unity, and the Israeli state's centrality in Jewish life would diminish. All of these predictions have come true.

One factor possibly driving more recent change is the impact of the awareness of increased antisemitism. In the recent survey, among those who witnessed or experienced antisemitism, about half said it was prompted by the perpetrators' views on Israel. This suggests that more Jews might be making an equation between Israel's actions and increased anti-Jewish hostility. In turn this could be generating increased Diaspora Jewish demands that Israel moderate its behaviour and push far harder for a just end to the conflict.

I suspect that Cameron is on far more solid ground criticising Israel today than he was at the time of the 2006 Lebanon War, when prominent Jewish Conservative supporters rounded on William Hague, then Shadow Foreign Secretary, for daring to use the word 'disproportionate' about Israel's actions. Have Cameron's advisors alerted him to the results of the survey?

Certainly, if he wanted to contribute to a more sustained international effort to get Israel to comply with its international obligations, the existence of a critically-minded, substantial, mainstream Jewish peace camp in the UK would be of great value to him. These survey results show, for the first time, that there is a sufficiently solid body of opinion of this kind and that it's not just the preserve of minority 'radical' groups. What's now needed is a new Jewish leadership that can mobilise this sector and thereby contribute to the further undermining of Israel's ability to rely on lockstep support from the Jewish Diaspora. Increasingly, the Diaspora is attempting to see the Jewish state from a range of Palestinian perspectives too, as untidy as this bundle of viewpoints may be.

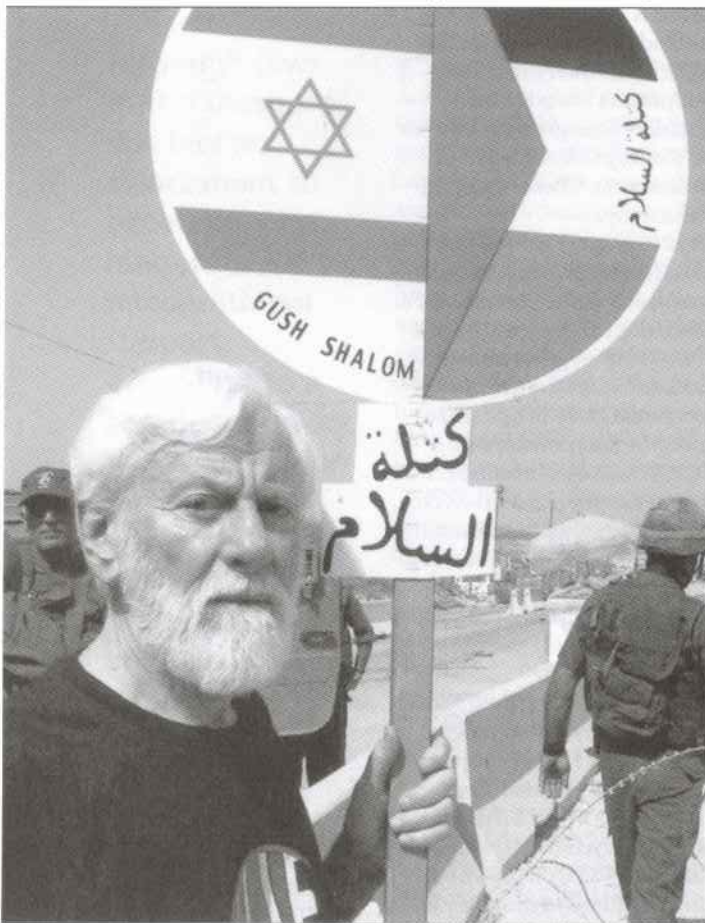
It's clear that over half of Jews living in Britain feel that they do indeed have the right to judge Israel and over a third say that 'if Jewish people consider criticism of Israel to be justified, they should always feel free to say so in the British media'. A broader, more assertive Jewish coalition can surely speak out to the UK. Only a bold and imaginative leadership is required to mobilise it.

This article is based on two pieces originally written for *Prospect* and *The Guardian's* Comment is Free.

WEIMAR^{IN}

Writing from Israel, **URI AVNERY** invokes some ominous memories from the past to ask: is fascism in Israel a real threat?

Tireless campaigner,
Uri Avnery



In Berlin, an exhibition entitled Hitler and the Germans has just opened. It examines the factors that caused the German people to bring Adolf Hitler to power and follow him to the very end.

I am too busy with the problems of Israeli democracy to fly to Berlin. Pity, because since my childhood, this precise question has been troubling me. How did it happen that a civilised nation, which saw itself as the 'people of poets and thinkers', followed this man, much as the children of Hamelin followed the Pied Piper to their doom.

This troubles me not only as a historical phenomenon, but as a warning for the future. If this happened to the Germans, can it happen to any people? Can it happen here?

As a 9-year old boy I was an eye-witness to the collapse of German democracy and the ascent of the Nazis to power. The pictures are engraved in my memory – the election campaigns following each other, the uniforms in the street, the debates around the table, the teacher who greeted us for the first time with 'Heil Hitler'. I resurrected these memories in a book I wrote (in Hebrew) during the Eichmann trial, and which ended with a chapter entitled: 'Can it happen here?' I am returning to them these days, as I write my memoirs.

I don't know if the Berlin exhibition tries to answer these questions. Perhaps not. Even now, 77 years later, there is no final answer to the question: Why did the German republic collapse?

This is an all-important question, because now people in Israel are asking, with growing concern: is the Israeli republic collapsing?

For the first time, this question is being asked in all seriousness. Throughout the years, we were careful not to mention the word 'fascism' in public discourse. It raises memories which are too monstrous. Now this taboo has been broken.

Yitzhak Herzog, the Minister of Welfare in the Netanyahu Government, a member of the Labour Party, the grandson of a Chief Rabbi and the son of a President, said a

few days ago that 'fascism is touching the margins of our society'. He was wrong: fascism is not only touching the margins, it is touching the Government in which he is serving, and the Knesset, of which he is a member.

Not a day – quite literally – passes without a group of Knesset members tabling a new racist bill. The country is still divided by the amendment to the Law of Citizenship, which will compel applicants to swear allegiance to 'Israel as a Jewish and democratic state'. Now the ministers are discussing whether this will be demanded only of non-Jews (which doesn't sound nice) or of Jews, too – as if this would change the racist content one bit.

This week, a new Bill was tabled. It would prohibit non-citizens from acting as tourist guides in East Jerusalem. Non-citizens in this case means Arabs. Because, when East Jerusalem was annexed by force to Israel after the 1967 war, its Arab inhabitants were not granted citizenship. They were accorded only the status of 'permanent residents', as if they were recent newcomers and not scions of families that have lived in the city for centuries.

The Bill is intended to deprive Arab Jerusalemites of the right to serve as tourist guides at their holy places in their city, since they are apt to deviate from the official propaganda line. Shocking? Incredible? Not in the eyes of the proponents, which include members of the Kadima party. A Knesset member of the Meretz party also signed, but retracted, claiming that he was confused.

This proposal comes after dozens of bills of this kind that have been tabled recently, and before dozens of others which are already on their way. The Knesset members act like sharks in a feeding frenzy. There is a wild competition between them to see who can devise the most racist Bill.

It pays. After each such Bill, the initiators are invited to TV studios to 'explain' their purpose. Their pictures appear in the papers. For obscure MKs, whose names we have never heard of, that poses an irresistible temptation. The media are collaborating.

This is not a uniquely Israeli phenomenon. All over Europe and America, overt fascists are raising their heads. The purveyors of hate who, until now, have been spreading their poison at the margins of the political system, are now arriving at the centre.

In almost every country there are demagogues who build their careers on incitement against the weak and helpless, who advocate the expulsion of 'foreigners' and the persecution of minorities. In the past they were easy to dismiss, as was Hitler at the beginning of his career. Now they must be taken seriously.

Only a few years ago, the world was shocked when Jörg Haider's party was allowed into the Austrian government coalition. Haider praised Hitler's achievements. The Israeli Government furiously recalled its ambassador from Vienna. Now the new Dutch Government is dependent on the support of a declared racist, and fascist parties achieve impressive election gains in many countries.

JERUSALEM

The Tea Party movement, which is blooming in the US, has some clearly fascist aspects. One of its candidates likes to go around wearing the uniform of the murderous Nazi Waffen-SS.

So we are in good company. We are no worse than the others. If they can do it, why not us?

But there is a big difference: Israel is not in the same situation as Holland or Sweden. Unlike these countries, Israel's very existence is threatened by fascism. It can lead our state to destruction.

Years ago, I believed that two miracles had occurred in Israel: the revival of the Hebrew language and Israeli democracy.

The resurrection of a 'dead' language has never succeeded anywhere else. Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, once asked contemptuously: 'Will people ask for a railway ticket in Hebrew?' (He wanted us to speak German.) Today, the Hebrew language fares better than the Israeli railway.

But Israeli democracy is an even greater miracle. It did not grow from below, as in Europe. The Jewish people never had a democracy. The Jewish religion, like almost all religions, is totalitarian. The immigrants who flowed to the country had also never experienced democracy before. They came from Czarist or Bolshevik Russia, from Josef Pilsudski's authoritarian Poland, from tyrannical Morocco and Iraq. Only an infinitesimal part came from democratic countries. And yet: from its earliest beginnings, the Zionist movement fostered an exemplary democracy in its ranks, and the State of Israel continued this tradition (with one limitation: a full democracy for Jews, a limited democracy for Arab citizens.)

I was always worried that this democracy was hanging by a thin thread, that we must be on our guard every hour, every minute. Now it is facing an unprecedented test.

The German republic carried the name of Weimar, the town where the constituent assembly adopted its constitution after World War I. The Weimar of Bach and Goethe was one of the cradles of German culture. It was a shiningly democratic constitution. Under its wings, Germany saw an unprecedented intellectual and artistic bloom. So why did the republic collapse?

Generally, two causes are identified: humiliation and unemployment. When the republic was still in its infancy, it was forced to sign the Versailles peace treaty with the victors of the First World War, a treaty that was but a humiliating act of surrender. When the republic fell behind with the payment of the huge indemnities levied on it, the French army invaded the industrial heartland of Germany in 1923, precipitating a galloping inflation – a trauma Germany has not recovered from to this day.

When the world economic crisis broke out in 1929, the German economy broke down. Millions of despairing, unemployed people sank into abject poverty and cried out for salvation. Hitler promised to wipe out both the humiliation of defeat and the unemployment, and fulfilled both promises: he

gave work to the unemployed in the new arms industry and in public works, like the new autobahns, in preparation for war.

And there was a third reason for the collapse of the republic: the growing apathy of the democratic public. The political system of the republic just became loathsome. While the people were sinking into misery, the politicians went on playing their games. The public was longing for a strong leader, to impose order. The Nazis did not overthrow the republic. The republic imploded, the Nazis only filled the void.

«In Israel there is no economic crisis. On the contrary, the economy is flourishing. Israel did not sign any humiliating agreement, like the Treaty of Versailles. On the contrary, it won all its wars. True, our fascists speak about the 'Oslo criminals', much as Hitler ranted against the 'November criminals', but the Oslo agreement was the opposite of the Versailles treaty, signed in November 1919.

So what does the profound crisis of Israeli society stem from? What causes millions of citizens to regard with complete apathy the doings of their leaders, contenting themselves with shaking their heads in front of the TV set? What causes them to ignore what's happening in the Occupied Territories, half an hour's drive from their home? Why do so many declare that they do not listen to the news or read newspapers anymore? What is the origin of the depression and despair that leave open the road to fascism?

The state has arrived at a crossroads: peace or eternal war. Peace means the foundation of the Palestinian state and the evacuation of the settlements. But the genetic code of the Zionist movement is pushing towards the annexation of the whole of the historical country up to the Jordan River, and – directly or indirectly – the transfer of the Arab population. The majority of the people are evading a decision by claiming that 'we have no partner for peace' anyhow. We are condemned to eternal war.

Democracy is suffering from a growing paralysis, because the different sectors of the people live in different worlds. The secular, the national-religious and the orthodox receive totally different educations. Common ground between them is shrinking. Other rifts are gaping between the old Ashkenazi community, the Oriental Jews, the immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and the Arab citizens, whose separation from the rest is increasing all the time.

For the second time in my life, I may have to witness the collapse of a republic. But that is not predestined. Israel is not the goose-stepping Germany of those days, 2010 is not 1933. The Israeli society can yet sober up in time and mobilize the democratic forces within itself.

But for that to happen, it must awake from the coma, understand what is happening and where it is leading to, protest and struggle by all available means (as long as that is still possible), in order to arrest the fascist wave that is threatening to engulf us.

This article was first published by Gush Shalom on 23rd October 2010.

HOPE^{THAT} STALIN COULDN'T KILL

KAREL SCHLING
celebrates the
life of his
mother, whose
support for
refugees and
marriage to a
Czech Jewish
communist had
dramatic
consequences

Marian Rose Fagan, who died on 22nd June 2010, was an independent, strong-minded person who campaigned tirelessly for a world that would be a better place for the many, not just the privileged few. She was a peace campaigner, a member of CND, Amnesty International, the Alliance for Green Socialism and a former member of the Communist Party.

Mum was born in Gisbourne, New Zealand, in 1913 but returned to England with her widowed mother as a toddler after her father's death and the outbreak of the First World War. During Mum's formative years, three remarkable people influenced her: my grandmother, a very liberal and non-conformist person; mum's aunt Rose; and her uncle Peter. Peter Osborne, a Labour supporter since his time at Oxford University, was a contemporary of socialist figures such as Harold Laski and GDH Cole. Aunt Rose was as independent as my grandmother, making life decisions contrary to the wishes of her very Victorian father. It was Peter and Rose who recommended that Marian should be educated at Headington School for Girls in Oxford.

My widowed grandmother was not content with a purely domestic and social life. As it was unusual at that time for a woman of her social standing to hold paid employment, she did voluntary work, helping to set up and run an infant welfare centre and later a 'birth control' clinic (for married couples only). Elements like these in Mum's upbringing helped establish her as a progressive and freedom loving person.

The 1926 General Strike was the first political event she was aware of. Her close family's instinctive feeling was to support the strikers. Mum reminisced that, at this time, students at universities, especially at Oxford and Cambridge, were an elite, not interested in the life of the 'underclass'. But some students supported the strikers, and among them were some of Uncle Peter's former pupils.

With a rebellious nature inherited from her mother, Mum first became involved in left-wing politics at university. She studied botany at Somerville College, Oxford, during the 1930s, as left-wing ideas were entering that sphere. It was a time of intense politicisation throughout society, with the great depression bringing mass unemployment and poverty, the rise of fascism and the threat of a new war so soon after the Great War.

Mum was involved in the peace movement, and in 1937 joined the Communist Party. The following year she was a delegate to the Second World Youth Congress in New York. Before and after the outbreak of the Second World War she helped refugees coming to Britain. One of them was my father, Otto Sling, a young Jewish Czech, and also a committed communist. They married and, as Otto was a foreigner, Marian lost her British citizenship (it was returned after the war when the law was changed). During the war, Marian worked for the Czechoslovak resistance in Britain.

In 1946 we joined our father in Czechoslovakia at a time of great hope. Mum believed that a new and better society was being built. But everything changed after the 1948 Communist Party takeover of Czechoslovakia. In 1950 both of our parents, my brother Honza and I were arrested. Mum spent 28 months in prison, most of it in solitary confinement, without being charged. She was held as a private



prisoner of the Czechoslovak state secret police. My father was executed in December 1952 following an antisemitic public show trial – the Slansky Trials – in which he, alongside 13 other prominent Party leaders or bureaucrats, were accused of anti-state 'Zionist' conspiracy and spying. Mum was released from prison in January 1953, reunited with me and my brother and sent into internal exile in the Eastern Bohemian mountains, where she worked in a bicycle factory. After Stalin's death the Czechoslovak regime became less oppressive, and we were allowed to move to Prague in 1956. Whilst the Communist Party admitted that dad's execution was a miscarriage of justice, Mum never received any formal recognition or apology from them for her own imprisonment.

Even after these terrible years Mum did not lose her faith in socialism. She strongly believed that Stalin's way had nothing to do with socialism. In the 1960s there was great hope that the Czechoslovak Communist Party could be reformed, and mum was one of many ordinary party members pushing for reform. The Prague Spring arrived but all hopes were crushed by tanks when the Warsaw Pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968. As the tanks rolled into Prague, Mum rushed to finish her book, *The Truth Will Prevail*, a biographical account of her and Dad's experiences during the Slansky Trials and its aftermath.

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Mum returned to Britain and continued her activism. She campaigned against the new hardline regime in Czechoslovakia, and the regime's response was to strip her of her Czechoslovak citizenship. In Prague and in London she worked on translations, bringing important works of dissenting Czech literature and research to an English-reading public. These included Ludvik Vaculik's *The Axe*, Professor Ota Sik's and Radovan Selucky's economics, and literature by Bohumil Hrabal. She contributed to *Voices of Czechoslovak Socialists*, published in 1977, an account of Czech dissent during the 1970s period of 'normalisation'.

She was also a keen gardener, her love of botany never left her, and after moving to Mary Feilding, cultivated a beautiful balcony garden. Mum was also a keen hiker, taking regular trips with her close circle of pre-war female friends. Her dream of a just world without oppression and hunger has not yet been achieved. But Mum gave us, and her memory will continue to give, great hope that this dream can one day be achieved.

LOST^{IN} ANOTHER
DIMENSION

Nowadays, when Palestinian activists in their 20s and 30s meet up with veterans of the Palestinian struggle, they show an unexpected thoughtfulness towards the older, revolutionary generation, to which I belong. This is nothing like the courtesy extended as a matter of course to older people in our part of the world: it is more intimate and more poignant. What brings us together is always the need to discuss the options before us, and to see if a plan can be made. Everyone argues, laughs, shouts and tells black jokes. But whenever a proper discussion begins, the suddenly lowered voices of our frustrated young people, many of them at the heart of the fierce protests on university campuses and in rights campaigns elsewhere, have the same tone I used to hear in the voices of our young ambulance workers in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s: an elegiac gentleness towards the hopelessly wounded, towards those who were already beyond repair.

The way Palestinians see things, the fragmentation of the body politic – externally engineered, and increasingly internally driven – has now been achieved. This summer, even the liberal Israeli press began to notice that the key people in Ramallah, the Palestinian Authority's capital in the West Bank, no longer discuss strategies of liberation but rather the huge business deals that prey on the public imagination. Every institution or overarching structure that once united Palestinians has now crumbled and been swept away. The gulf between Gaza and the West Bank, between Hamas and Fatah, between Palestinians inside Palestine and the millions of refugees outside it, between city and village, town and refugee camp, now seems unbridgeable. The elites are tiny and the numbers of the dispossessed and the disenfranchised increase every day. There is, at this moment, no single body able to claim legitimately to represent all Palestinians; no body able to set out a collective policy or national programme of liberation. There is no plan.

The feeling of paralysis doesn't only affect the Palestinians. It is found too among the hundreds of international institutions and less formal groups involved in the thriving carpet-bagging industry of the Middle East Peace Process. The US, the UN, the EU, their special envoys and fact-finding commissions, their human rights monitors, lawyers and NGOs, the policy think tanks, the growing legion of international humanitarian agencies, the dialogue groups and peace groups, all came to the same conclusion shortly after the start of the second Intifada in the autumn of 2000. Over the last decade, these bodies have produced thousands of institutional memos, governmental reports, official démarches, human rights briefings, summaries, analyses, legal inquiries into war crimes and human rights abuses, academic books and articles. And they have pretty much nailed it: Palestinians are enduring the entrenched effects not only of a

military occupation, but of a colonial regime that practises apartheid.

The predicament is understood and widely accepted, yet Palestinians and non-Palestinians appear equally baffled. Protest and denunciation have achieved very little. How are we to respond in a way that will allow us to prevail? The vocabulary required to form a policy is entirely absent both nationally and internationally. Palestinians are currently trapped in a historical moment that – as the contemporary world sees it – belongs to the past. The language the situation demands had life only inside an ideology which has now disappeared.

Everyone else has moved on. In a world whose intellectual framework is derived from university courses in postcolonial or cultural studies, from the discourse of post-nationalism, or human rights, or global governance, from post-conflict and security literature, the Palestinians are stuck fast in historical amber. They can't move on, and the language that could assist them to do so is as extinct as Aramaic. No one cares any longer for talk of liberation: in fact, people flinch at the sound of it – it is unfashionable, embarrassing, reactionary even to speak of revolution today. Twenty-first-century eyes read revolutionary engagement as the first stage on the road to the guillotine or the Gulag. Advanced now well beyond the epic and heroic stages of its history, the West views its own revolutionary roots through the decadent backward gaze of Carl Schmitt. Seen through that prism, Palestinians remain stubbornly – one could almost say, wilfully – in the anti-colonial, revolutionary phase of their history.

So the questions debated by Palestinians are the same now as they ever were: how to organise, how to mobilise, how to unify? There remains a constant sense of emergency, but Palestinians with long memories agree that we are at a nadir in our history of resistance. The only sign of forward movement lies in the tide of revulsion at Israel's belligerent policies, which Palestinian civil society organisations have channelled into a vivid and well-organised campaign of solidarity through boycotts, divestment and sanctions.

Exactly 50 years ago, Palestinians were at a similar stage of social and political fragmentation brought about by defeat and dispossession and the anomie that followed the Nakba of 1948. Without a country or the protection of a sovereign state, they were confronting, on the one hand, Israel, and on the other, sundry Arab regimes: between them they controlled every aspect of Palestinians' social and civic lives as well as their physical space. They lived deep in the dust and disease of tent cities, without personal papers or property. In 1955, a young Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafani, moved to Kuwait from Syria, where he had been a teacher at a school set up for refugees by the UN, after himself being expelled from Palestine with his family in 1948. One of his people's most perceptive chroniclers, he described their mood in his diary:

Sandwiched between the despair of dispossession in 1948 and the and atomisation of the Palestinians today, was a revolutionary moment that was pluralist, secular and progressive. Are the lessons embedded in that experience out of reach of the present generation? asks KARMA NABULSI

PALESTINIANS ARE CURRENTLY TRAPPED IN A HISTORICAL MOMENT THAT – AS THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD SEES IT – BELONGS TO THE PAST. THE LANGUAGE THE SITUATION DEMANDS HAD LIFE ONLY INSIDE AN IDEOLOGY WHICH HAS NOW DISAPPEARED

'The only thing we know is that tomorrow will be no better than today, and that we are waiting on the shore, yearning, for a boat that will not come. We are sentenced to be separated from everything – except from our own destruction.'

But what appeared to Kanafani to be the collective end was in fact its extraordinary beginning. By the end of the decade, the revolution had found a language and a form. For the first time in a century of rebellions and uprisings against foreign rule, Palestinians could mount a collective challenge to international, Israeli and Arab coercion, and unify sufficiently to represent themselves. Even a cursory study of the history of revolutions over the last 300 years reveals three elements essential to their origins. First, a plethora of revolutionary pamphlets, declarations and discussions issuing from different factions together begin to shape a shared understanding of the injustices that have to be overturned. A call to arms requires a convincing appraisal of the balance of forces if enough people are to be persuaded to embark on such a risky enterprise. The history of Palestinian attempts to achieve freedom would give anyone pause: two generations who tried lie buried in the cemeteries of more than two dozen countries.

Second, it is revolutionaries who make revolutions, and not the other way around. During the national mobilisation of the 1960s and 1970s, some joined the party, others the movement, but most simply joined the Palestinian revolution. It was taken for granted that one belonged to one of the parties, which were themselves embedded in the broader national liberation movement under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, a formal institution set up in 1964 by Arab states, which was captured from the Palestinian elite by the resistance groups a few years later. Empowered by becoming part of a fast-moving popular revolution, Palestinians – exiled, scattered and defeated as they were – achieved the two elusive things they have constantly sought: representation and unity.

If you raise the painful subject of this earlier time among Palestinians today, the usual effect is to revive the over-theoretical debate about when exactly the revolution died. (A discussion of its strengths and weaknesses would be more useful.) Some say it ended after Black September in Jordan in 1970; others that it ended in 1975 at the start of the Lebanese civil war. The majority see Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which brought about the comprehensive destruction of the PLO's infrastructure, as having killed it off. The communiqués and declarations issued during the first Intifada, which took place in the occupied Palestinian territories between 1987 and 1993, were expressed in the language of revolution, but everyone agrees that it was all over by 1991, when the Madrid peace process was accepted on such unequal terms. That entire period of Palestinian history has fallen into disrepute for a number of reasons – not least having to watch its ghoulish remains driving around in official cars in Ramallah

or posing at the White House – so the benefits are never assessed, or potentially useful lessons drawn.

Unity and representation are the common goods Palestinians must realise in order to advance their cause, and these clearly can't be achieved via any of the options currently being suggested to us: not the distribution of the PA's power between Hamas and Fatah (since the only representative institutional structure for all Palestinians is the Palestinian National Council, the parliament-in-exile of the PLO); not a US-sponsored peace process; and not the plan for Palestinian statehood proposed by the prime minister, Salam Fayyad, according to which the institutions of an independent state will be built in the face of a still expanding military occupation. Already by the 1970s, thanks to its fluid institutional architecture, the revolution was able to overcome national borders, protect its independence from the Arab regimes and convey its demands to the solidarity movements who supported it and exerted pressure on its behalf. Other national liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s – the FLN, ANC, Swapo, the Sandinistas – had to operate with their leaders underground and in exile, developing their strategy outside the country while the population remained rooted in the land they hoped to liberate. For Palestinians, whose national politics were undone in an instant over a single year in 1948, it took the concerted actions of tens of thousands of cadres across the region to hold the people together while at the same time putting sufficient pressure on those governments, both Western and Arab, that would have preferred to see us capitulate to Israel. The mood of that short period, as I remember it, was profoundly popular and democratic: pluralist, multi-party, universalist, secular and highly progressive. Palestinians who dared not join in – businessmen, academics, the money-grubbing classes – were carried along in its wake, and obeyed its mandate. Today we could not be further from that fleeting moment of unity the revolution once afforded.

The experience of revolutionary life is difficult to describe. It is as much metaphysical as imaginative, combining urgency, purposefulness, seriousness and hard work, with a near celebratory sense of adventure and overriding optimism – a sort of carnival atmosphere of citizens' rule. Key to its success is that this heightened state is consciously and collectively maintained by tens of thousands of people at the same time. If you get tired for a few hours or days, you know others are holding the ring.

The third, counterintuitive feature of revolutions is that they are usually launched by astonishingly small groups of individuals. The Palestinian revolution was no exception. Young Palestinians today, caught in the grind of their daily struggle, feel unable to make contact with their own past: its stories are like fairytales, out of their reach. The appropriate model for the emergence of the Palestinian movement of the 1960s and 1970s isn't the Leninist vanguard party but the revolutions that established democracies in 19th-century Europe, where the acts of a few were matched, and then

rapidly overtaken, by an entire nation, all of whose members considered themselves leaders. No one here waits around for instructions.

What usually goes unmentioned in the history books is the dangerous and seemingly interminable slog that is required to build up to any revolution's launch: it may take years, even decades, once the match is lit, for it to ignite a mobilisation large enough to create a truly national initiative.

One of the individuals who still keeps the revolutionary spirit alive in these bleak times phoned me this week, and this time I rang him back. (Often I can't face talking to him because his situation is so terrible.) Ziyad was a key activist in the first Intifada when he was a student at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank, and for the last 20 years he has dedicated his life in Gaza to what is commonly known as 'mobilising from below'. Ziyad is, or was, head of the Rafah refugee camp's popular committee, the local elected body, legendary now for its history of civic resistance to Israeli rule. Ziyad is like an artist, restlessly exploring ways to preserve people's humanity amid the oppression and misery of southern Gaza. His cool eye and steady nerve, together with a seemingly inexhaustible affection for others, have kept him from turning away in despair at the things he has seen. At the height of the war on Gaza, he managed to create and sustain the only committee that included all the factions, with Fatah members working alongside Hamas, or vice versa. Members of other committees that had previously tried this (including his own) had been kneecapped for their pains.

Ziyad spent much of last year in prison in Gaza, and, as it turned out when I returned his call, some of this year's Ramadan as well. 'Oh no!' I said, 'What happened this time?' He said that he'd been trying to organise in the elementary schools. This struck me as one of the funniest things I had heard in a long time: Ziyad laughed, too, when he began telling me about it. He had tried to organise a prize-giving in the camp for some of the students, but the current administration in Gaza didn't like the idea at all. 'I am not selecting children from Hamas families or Fatah families,' he said, 'just those who had done well in school. I had to try something!'

What the administration in Gaza does not like, Ziyad said, is the idea of movement, of freedom, of opening things up from below, of bringing people together for any common purpose at all. I told him I had spoken to Adnan in Beirut only that morning, and that the story was no different there: Adnan has been forced to stay at home for months now, unable to move. Until last year, he had worked closely with another old friend of mine, Kamal Medhat, a child of the revolution who was not so different from Ziyad in his determination to go it alone while carrying everyone with him.

Just over a year ago Kamal was assassinated by a car bomb in south Lebanon. He had been trying to urge people forward towards national unity, and to attack the political corruption then entrenched in the refugee camps: these two objectives, it soon became clear, were intertwined. He was making a very successful job of it, for he brought formidable experience to the task. Already a legend as a young man, Kamal was responsible for, among many other things, the security of the leadership when the revolution was centred in Beirut, and attempts

against it took place on an almost daily basis. An obituary in the Arab press noted that 'he constantly criticised Arafat, who would laugh.' This was true: Kamal could be brutally honest, but he made everyone in the room feel happy, taking and giving endless orders, joking, and being especially encouraging to young cadres, though also quite tough. I witnessed at least a dozen acts of bravery by Kamal in the 1970s and early 1980s. After the PLO leadership was evacuated to Tunis in 1982, he returned to Lebanon to help lift the military siege of the Palestinian refugee camps by the Syrians and their proxies. In the 1990s, in disagreement with the leadership's negotiating strategy, he absented himself from public life, studying for a doctorate in international law, staying very quiet. We lost track of each other until a few years ago, when he burst back onto the scene in Lebanon, unchanged and undefeated, now the second in command at the PLO embassy that had finally been re-established there.

I went to his funeral; we all walked the familiar path to the Palestinian cemetery, accompanied by thousands of refugees, clapping and singing and shouting revolutionary slogans. After the 40 days of mourning I returned to Beirut, where the traditional memorial meeting was convened at the Unesco palace. The hall was packed with Palestinians from the refugee camps across Lebanon, and black and white images of the handsome Kamal at different stages of his life succeeded one another on a screen behind the stage. Most of the Palestinian leaders were at an urgent meeting in Amman, and couldn't attend. The eerie pockets of silence at various moments throughout the ceremony were bound up, it seemed to me, with the implications of his death (don't organise, don't push, don't try to change things for the better). Something felt as if it was about to give.

His family, with whom I was staying, had asked me to speak about him, as Kamal had been an early teacher of mine. Afterwards, in the foyer, a stream of young people came up to me. They wanted me to know exactly what he had meant to them: 'Kamal was the only one who spoke up for us'; 'Kamal listened to us, he stood with us'; 'He fought for us'; 'He encouraged us.' One after another, they told me stories of what he did. Each had recognised his revolutionary spirit, I thought, as I watched them wander away afterwards into the streets of Beirut.



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LINKS IN THE CHAIN

DAVID ROSENBERG explores the connections that were made across East End communities in common struggles for a better life

David Rosenberg has just launched a guided walk called 'The Spark of Rebellion in Bow and Mile End'. Further details and online booking: www.eastendwalks.com

When 1,400 young, non-unionised, female workers spontaneously went on strike at the Bryant and May match factory in East London on 5th July 1888, in support of colleagues who had been summarily sacked, a new spirit of defiance amongst the lowest grade workers was born, whose ramifications extended well beyond the East End. After she attended a Fabian Society lecture on female labour in London, the left wing journalist and freethinking activist, Annie Besant, interviewed workers as they left their shift and exposed their appalling working conditions and the draconian system of fines in this Quaker-founded 'model-factory' in her publication *The Link*. The factory bosses responded by threatening a libel action, which they never pursued, and by demanding that their long-suffering employees sign a statement that the working conditions were perfectly fine. Many refused, and those believed to be the refuseniks' ringleaders were given their marching orders.

The following day an arrest was made outside the factory gates where a leading local trade unionist was addressing the striking workers, who, as yet, had not formed a union. He was expressing solidarity with these self-organised women workers and explaining the importance of establishing a union to fight for their demands. In the course of the three-week dispute, a militant union of female match workers was born which won most of its demands: the reinstatement of the sacked workers; an end to the system of petty fines for taking toilet breaks, dropping matchboxes or for talking, which was reducing already low rates of pay; and a

commitment to setting up a dedicated eating space for workers. Up to that point they were having to eat their breakfast and lunch at their workstations where their food could easily be contaminated by the dangerous chemical substances such as white phosphorus that they were routinely using. Many Bryant and May workers fell victim to 'phossy jaw', a painful, disfiguring and life-threatening disease.

The trade unionist who was arrested by the factory gates was Lewis Lyons, child of German Jewish immigrants, leader of the Jewish East End branch of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors, and an activist in the Marxist-inspired Social Democratic Federation (SDF). He was to lead a militant strike of 6,000 Jewish tailors in more than 120 workshops a year later, fighting to reduce working hours to just 12 per day (including a lunch break off the premises). It was not his first arrest. He had been sentenced to two months hard labour for obstructing the police in 1885, arising out of his activities for the SDF in Dod Street, East London, where activists were engaged in a bitter struggle to defend and maintain an outdoor platform for free political speech. Lyons was singled out for harsher treatment than many of his comrades in these incidents, and the court proceedings revealed the arresting officer's antisemitic prejudices. The renowned socialist thinker and writer William Morris was instrumental in helping to get Lyons' sentence quashed – although immediately after his arrest Lyons had already benefited from a legal and bail defence initiative supporting socialists and trade unionists that had been formed by Annie

Besant, who subsequently aided the matchgirls in their dispute.

The tailors' strike, led by Lewis Lyons in 1889, coincided with the dock strike that brought the Port of London to a standstill for a month. As well as drawing inspiration from the matchgirls as an example of largely unskilled workers fighting for their rights, there were more intimate connections. Many of the dockworkers were fathers, brothers, cousins or partners of the strikers at Bryant and May's factory. Many of them lived in the same close-knit Irish communities of the East End, centred round the streets that became known collectively as the 'Knockfergus' and 'Fenian Barracks' neighbourhoods. The connections with the East End's Jewish workers are less well known.

When the matchgirls were on strike they regularly marched to the City of London and the West End to tell people of their plight and seek financial support for their struggle. On the way, and on their return, they would frequently stop at the International Workingmen's Club in Berner street, established by Jewish anarchists, for sustenance – bread and butter, cake and tea – and solidarity.

Although the Docks Strike Committee were struggling to maintain the strikers and their families who suffered terrible hardship, they nevertheless contributed £100 to the strike fund of the Jewish tailors – the biggest single contribution they received – and it helped them maintain their strike for six weeks to a successful conclusion. In later trade union disputes in 1912, Jewish tailors repaid the debt by establishing a support

committee which looked after 300 dockers' children during their long dispute that year. The radicalisation of workplaces and communities in east London through these

years took on new manifestations in the period before the First World War when the radical East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) established its first headquarters a stone's throw away from the Bryant and May factory. Expelled from the more West End oriented Women's Social and Political Union, the ELFS explicitly combined their campaigning for women's equality with class-struggle socialist demands. Among its leading activists was Minnie Glassman – born to Jewish immigrants in 1889, the year of the Dock Strike. She married Edgar Lansbury, one of the sons of Labour politician George Lansbury, and was one of the ringleaders of the rates rebellion of 1921, in which she became one of 30 local councillors from Poplar Council in East London sent to prison for refusing to levy what they considered unfair rates on their hard-pressed constituents.



Matchworkers and their supporters marching on Parliament in 1888.

CONTINUING

If the Irish and Jewish communities were key players in the East End in the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, the Bengali community is

particularly identified with the area from the 1950s and '60s. Today the largest community among Britain's 350,000 strong Bengali community is still based in the East End, but a new and beautifully illustrated book called *Bengalis in London's East End*, produced by the Swadhinata Trust – a secular

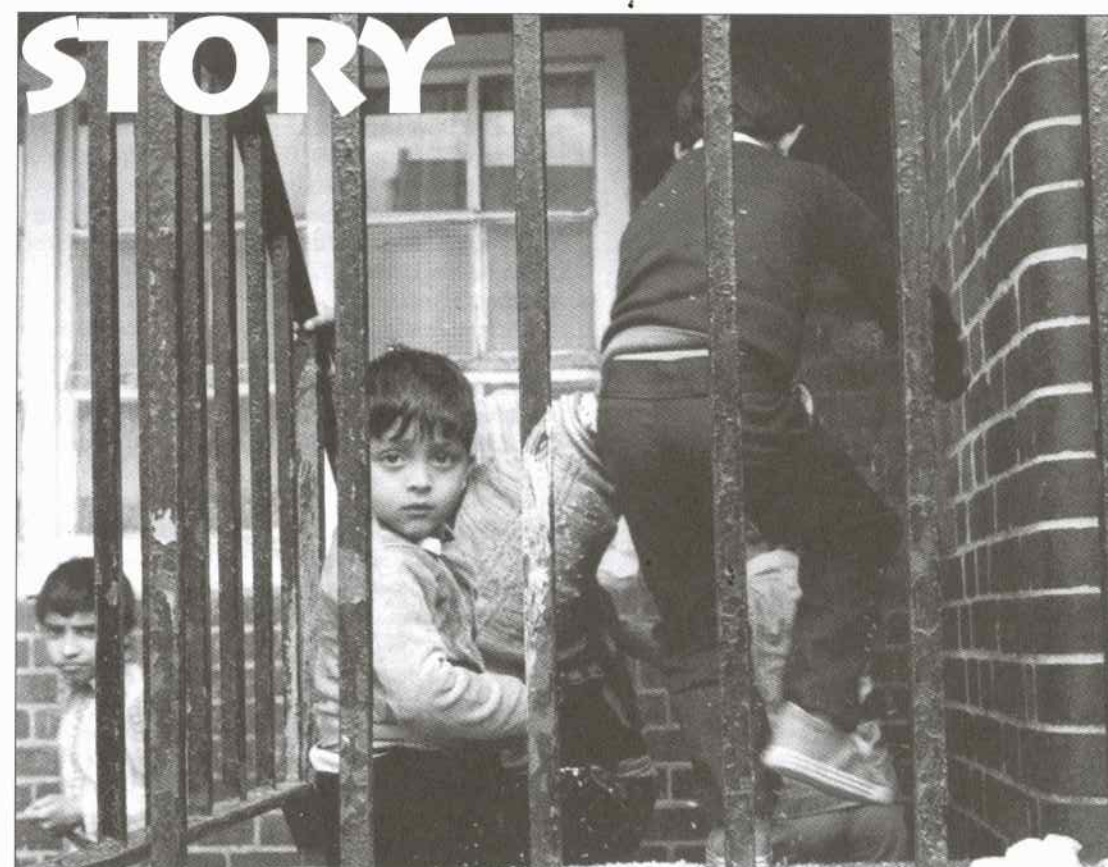
Bengali community organisation rooted in the East End – reveals a longer history of Bengali engagement with the area going back to the 17th century and Britain's first involvement in India.

The first Bengalis arrived as workers on ships and as servants. Some jumped ship to seek a better life, others were abandoned here by unscrupulous employers. The post-Second World War story is that of a community based mainly, like previous immigrants, within the clothing trade but also with a substantial section in catering, fighting for better working conditions and tackling racism in education, housing and social services, as well as the street-fighters of the National Front.

It is also a story of how they worked to establish cultural and welfare organisations from the grassroots, to cement their presence in what was originally conceived by many as a temporary stay in Britain. As well as being a mine of information, the book, researched and written by Ansar Ahmed Ullah and John Eversley – both of whom have written for Jewish Socialist – draws many parallels with previous waves of immigration to the East End.

Bengalis in London's East End is available from Swadhinata Trust: www.swadhinata.org.uk

STORY



Far left: Indian seamen in 1942 on shore leave pass the time by playing cards. Left: Children playing in the streets and external stairwells outside their homes in the East End in the 1980s.

NOT JUST A

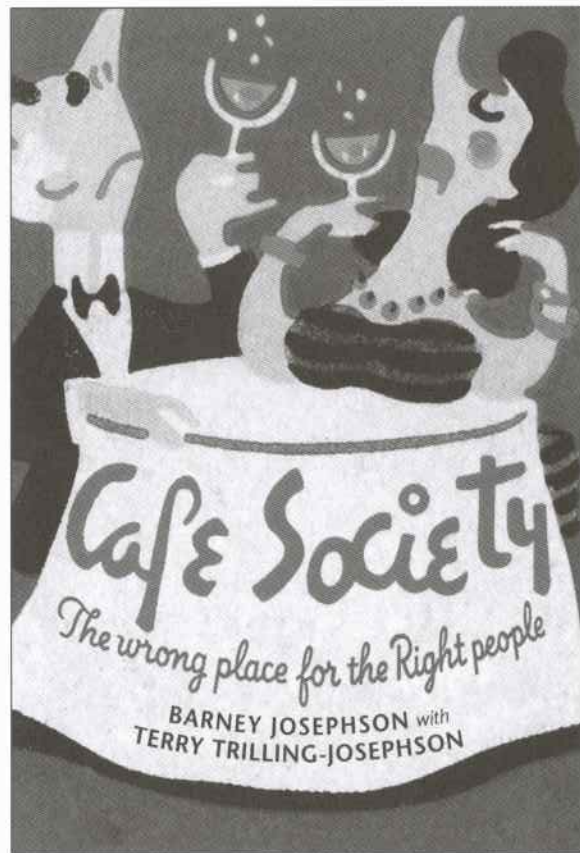
MIKE GERBER
pays tribute to
Barney
Josephson's
life, and the
role his club
played in
breaking down
racism

The Wrong Place for the Right People – that was how the jazz/cabaret nightclub Café Society was billed. Yet the club, which operated in downtown New York between 1938 and 1949, could equally well have been tagged The Right Place for the Left People. As could Café Society Uptown, which was run on the same lofty principles, encouraging black patrons to attend shows on an equal footing to whites. These venerable institutions were founded by a socialist Jew, Barney Josephson, in defiance of the racist line current in the United States before blacks won their struggle for civil rights.

Josephson died in 1988, so the publication of a new book, *Café Society*, which recounts the fascinating story of his life and his clubs, an autobiography written in collaboration with his wife Terry Trilling-Josephson, is a welcome and long overdue development.

The original Café Society opened its doors in December 1938 in a basement at 2 Sheridan Square, Greenwich Village in downtown Manhattan. Josephson 'wanted a club where blacks and whites worked together behind the footlights and sat together out front. There wasn't, so far as I know, a place like it in New York or in the whole country'.

At the Cotton Club in Harlem, for instance, famously associated with such black American artists as Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, racial mixing in the audience was frowned upon. A black celebrity



Café Society: The Wrong Place for the Right People by Barney Josephson with Terry Trilling-Josephson, University Of Illinois Press, £20.99.

might be permitted to view a show from an obscure table, but the club's core patrons were whites on slumming excursions uptown.

Similarly, the midtown jazz clubs clustered in 52nd Street regularly featured top black musicians but, as Dan Morgenstern, director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, says: 'Most of the clubs would not refuse black people coming in, but they would certainly not be particularly excited about it or interested in encouraging them. Café Society wanted black people to come and wanted an integrated audience. Everybody was welcome, they made sure that that was understood. That was the difference.'

Overwhelmingly, the musicians Josephson employed were black. They included such jazz legends as Billie Holiday, Teddy Wilson, Lester Young, Sarah Vaughan, Buck Clayton, Sid Catlett, and Mary Lou Williams. Also boogie-woogie pianists Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, gospel performers the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, jazz-blues singer Big Joe Turner, folk-blues singer/guitarist Josh White, and jazzy pop vocalist Lena Horne.

Musicians were offered the security of long-term residencies at non-exploitative rates, a boon for artistic development. 'Most nightclubs engaged an artist at most two, three weeks ... I wanted to give my artists steady employment. Hazel Scott [jazz pianist/singer] was with me for seven and a half years, Mary Lou Williams [jazz arranger, composer and one of the most dazzling pianists in jazz history] for over five,' Josephson said.

Billie Holiday performed at Café Society for two years, and it was at the downtown club that she first performed 'Strange Fruit'. This anti-lynching song was composed by Jewish left-wing teacher and poet Lewis Allan, real name Abel Meeropol. At first Billie was not keen on the song but Josephson persuaded her to sing it, and it became a regular feature of her act.

Her engagement at Café Society, and that of many other musicians, came about through Josephson's connections with John Hammond, scion of the patrician Vanderbilt family whose love of black music spurred him to adopt noble principles on racial matters.

A Hammond protégé, the Jewish swing bandleader/clarinetist Benny Goodman, was an investor in Café Society. During a visit to the club, notes David W Stowe in his essay *The Politics of Café Society*, Goodman 'reportedly made a point of conspicuously popping into his mouth the instrument being played by the African American clarinetist Edmund Hall'. This gesture, going by the context of Stowe's essay, was in reaction to a racial slur. Any such patron would be firmly informed of the club's policies and, if necessary, ejected.

Barney Josephson was way ahead of his time in his insistence that black artists should not demean

JAZZ CLUB

themselves by conforming to stereotyped conventions. When he engaged the North Carolina spiritual ensemble, the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet, he bought them new stage outfits because the old ones 'looked like they belonged in a minstrel show'. He was concerned too about their material, the way the quartet 'slapped their four pairs of hands, as if they were running, you got the picture common in movie cartoons, where a Negro gets scared ... He runs so fast because of the myth then that Negroes were scared of ghosts and animals'. At Josephson's behest, the quartet amended its act.

His clubs were far more than just music venues. Josephson had been heavily influenced by the cabaret tradition witnessed on trips to Europe in the early 1930s, including the Berlin revues of Jewish composer Friedrich Hollander. So he hired left-leaning artists to paint the distinctive murals that adorned the Café Society clubs. 'If it was the Cotton Club or Smalls Paradise in Harlem, the décor's themes would reflect their version of exotic "primitive" African jungles ... I would have none of that. I wanted a place with art,' Josephson explained. In the foyer of Café Society downtown, records Stowe, 'a simian-looking Adolf Hitler hung suspended from the ceiling along with papier-mâché send-ups of well-known Manhattan society icons'.

And Josephson employed comedian MCs such as Jack Gilford and Sam 'Zero' Mostel: 'I was always seeking for political satire. I didn't want the typical vaudevillian burlesque.' Mostel, who like Gilford was Jewish, would lampoon America First who were lobbying to keep the US out of the Second World War, 'a disparate group of isolationists, Nazi sympathizers, antisemites' as Josephson described them.

The roots of Josephson's stance on race – he even refused to hire black waiters as he did not want to put blacks in service positions – stemmed from his schooldays in Trenton, New Jersey. In an interview for a television documentary about Billie Holiday, Josephson remembered stepping into the classroom when he joined junior high school: '... there was a black youngster sitting at his desk in the direct centre of the classroom ... you had the boys sitting all the way round the periphery ... and this poor little kid was on a little island all by himself. I don't know what prompted me ... I said, "Er, do you mind if I sit next to you?" He looked surprised and said, "Sure, go right ahead" ... There were all these white students like myself and you could feel the resentment ... a month or two later in the gymnasium ... five or six of these boys worked me into a corner ... they said "only a Jew would love a Nigger" ... and began pummeling me.'

Josephson was also influenced by his older brother Leon, who became a left-wing lawyer.



Leon's activities included defending communist trade union organisers, and in 1935 he was arrested in Denmark for involvement in an alleged Soviet spy ring suspected of plotting to assassinate Hitler. During the McCarthyite 'red scare' in the late 1940s, Leon was convicted by the US Congress for refusing to answer questions before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Barney was himself under FBI scrutiny because of the principles on which he ran his clubs, and his support for progressive causes, including the Abraham Lincoln Brigade of volunteers that fought alongside Spanish Republicans against Franco's fascist-backed forces, the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, and tenant groups.

'There was no let up for me,' Barney recalled. He was blacklisted and, by the late 1940s, both of his clubs had shut down. 'Bloody but unbowed', in 1955 he set up a new club/restaurant in Greenwich Village, The Cookery, which enabled him to give regular work to such musicians as R&B and jazz singer/pianist Nellie Lutcher and veteran blues singer Alberta Hunter during the difficult years for such performers that followed the advent of rock and roll.

The Cookery closed its doors on 6th May 1984 after 31 years of continuous business, and Josephson died four years later.

The new *Café Society* book will help ensure that what he achieved is not forgotten. The book quotes Art D'Lugoff, the late Jewish founder of the Village Gate jazz club: 'I guess we all owe a great debt to Barney, the life we live today, the music, the ideas, the thoughts. His was not just a jazz club. I learned from him very early. It was jazz, it was comedy, it was folk, it was ethnic, it was people, it was taste.'

Alberta Hunter with Barney Josephson.

PLAY IT AGAIN

Following our discussion of progressive folk music (JS60), **ALISON HARMAN** talked to **Sam Lee**, a young performer, animateur, teacher and curator of inspiring and radical folk events

How did a young Jewish man from North London get so immersed in the English folk tradition? I was lucky as a kid to be sent to Forest School Camps (FSC) each summer. My parents had the foresight and trust to kick me out with nothing but a rucksack for two weeks to an organisation that focused on living outdoors in a respectful non-aggressive way and learning about the environment and community. Being Jewish meant I also had a sense of being part of an outsider community. In FSC we were all outsiders, a mongrel group who had two weeks to create a community, and it was done through adventure and music.

Community building was the focus, but the glue was the evenings spent round the campfire with a hotchpotch repertoire that included '60s pop hits, American and English folk songs, folk songs of no known origin, and lots of rhymes and ditties. The songs became the anthems of the summer. When we were chopping vegetables we'd sing and adapt the songs that we knew. There was a real playfulness and a freedom, this was our music.

Come my 20s I thought more about this music, where it came from and why it was so important, the community that it came from and how that keeps it alive as much as the love of the songs. Folk music was there in an indigenous form in our culture; it had existed and evolved for hundreds of years. It all made sense very quickly and I fell in love with it.

I also went into wilderness survival and bushcraft and living off the land. I studied anthropology and was very interested into tapping into the root of culture and that point where humans and land come into contact. I became fascinated with indigenous cultures, and through folk music I identified with gypsy culture and the old traditional ways, and people whose customs and songs fit into the same

mythological pattern and framework as myths and tales in other cultures.

I grew up in London's Kentish Town, in this melting pot, which I never questioned; that's the way it was, but at the same time I was aware of being an outsider. So I don't see folk music as 'my tradition'; I'm part of it but I'm still an outsider but because it's outsiders' music I also feel as though I belong.

At the Magpie's Nest, you use the mantra 'new folk, old folk, no folk'. Is there any clash with some of the traditionalists?

I know a lot of hard line traditionalists, and they are some of the most liberal people. I've just been to the Festival at the Edge, a storytelling festival, with some really heartfelt roots-based storytellers and singers. I was there with the band which is funky and completely untraditional in its style, so I was a bit worried, but they all loved it. They know that I've gone to the source, so I'm going to do things respectfully. Like with any tradition, I feel that there has to be an understanding of those who have gone before and the skills that have informed that journey; you have to understand the technique and what drove the emotions.

You have been inspired by gypsy and traveller music. How did you get involved with those communities?

It came initially from having listened to recordings in the Vaughan Williams Library when I worked at the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). This was the singing that was most powerful, most soulful; in a way they were singing for their lives. The gypsy singing had an edge and that grabbed me musically; I didn't know a huge amount about the culture, but it was like, wow, here's a people I identify with, a traveller community who've lived off the land, whose music existed round the campfire at night-time, who understand the natural environment and who have strange kosher-like traditions! The more I found out, the more I felt I understood these people. I also don't understand them in the ways that I don't understand my own culture. They carry the same sort of mystery and contradictions, as well as, most importantly, a history of persecution.

I came across field recordings made in the 1970s when the singers were in their 30s and I realised they would most likely still be alive, so I tried to find out who they were. I met the Scottish traveller Stanley Robertson, a storyteller and folk singer who chronicled Scots Traveller history, who took me on as his apprentice. I was adopted through a ceremony into the family and that tribe's life, music, religion, culture and language, and spent nearly four years being tutored in the Scottish traveller way of life.

Running away with the gypsies?

It was a council estate in Aberdeen! The first time I drove up there and parked, when I went back to my car there were scratches all along it. I've still got them and I wear them with pride!

You're also part of the LGBT community, and you recently curated a folk event, *Nowt As Queer As Folk*. How did that happen, and how did the purists respond?

Ah, there's a can of worms! When Folk Against Fascism met to discuss ideas for shows, I said I'd like to do two concerts: Club Periphereque, outsiders working in folk music, at the South Bank, and *Nowt As Queer As Folk*, which took place at EFDSS. There are so many LGBTs working in the

SAM

folk world, and we got very excited about it.

I created a poster for the event which I'm really proud of (right), but within two weeks all hell broke loose. The Morris dancing community in particular didn't like the poster. And the Morris Ring (who are against having women in Morris sides) got involved and asked everybody to complain to EFDSS. So we got this barrage – a massive email campaign, and the internet forums were just hot with some absolutely outrageous homophobic narrow-minded ugliness of thought. It was the poster that triggered it.

I thought the folk movement came out of radical left liberal '60s anger against that sort of attitude? Maybe this reaction was more to do with the Morris dancing community – there are people doing great work to make Morris dancing cool but the old order are a bit set in their ways. But anyway, it was the most moving and important event I have ever done and it opened up a lot of debate.

People like Roy Bailey and Gina Le Faux were inspired. Everybody had this real soul baring – Tim Van Eyken was beautiful in what he said on stage and really set the tone. It was an incredible concert and I was privileged to have been part of it and to have helped make it happen. This is a group and an idea that needs to have wings; we want it to be a project that develops and goes places.

What else is next for you?

Finishing the album that I'm making with the band, Sam Lee and the Gillie Boys, which has finally gelled; that is so exciting. I want to be gigging and making music, redefining it. I love finding and promoting people who do things that I like, but it's also important to me to step up and say, ok, this is my interpretation. Magpie's Nest put on 50 gigs in the first half of this year alone. I've been busy helping put this wave of folk forward. So many exciting things have happened but an artist has to practice, so I've got to put some time into that.

While promoting, teaching and performing, you even ran a marathon to raise money for the Haiti earthquake. How do you manage to do so much? I can't say no. It's not ambition, it's just enthusiasm. The folk world is not massive – I can see the potential and there doesn't seem to be anyone else doing it. I may not be the best for the job but I came along at the right time which is lucky for me. Then the hordes will turn up, so I'd better get practising and get it happening before some younger sexier better instrumentalist turns up with better vocal skills!

To get back to 'old folk', people who like folk songs often don't connect with all that stuff about ploughmen. It doesn't seem relevant to them. I don't connect with it either, in some ways. Folk is an intensely visual medium, and uses a lot of metaphor – but I relate it to contemporary pictures. The listener needs to put a bit of effort into finding the contemporary relevance. In the band I've been singing a song about the Irish famine and emigration, and the final verse says: 'And with the devil I do say curse America because I think I've had enough of

their hard fighting.' These are universal songs. For urban people, divorced from the natural world, some of it sounds a bit twee but there's something romantic about hearing birdsong in the dusk, for example, and we miss out by not having the time and space to experience these things. Folk song is the next best thing to birdsong in some ways. I've used birdsong on the record. The nightingales, swifts and nightjars represent a certain timbre and atmosphere – it's the soundtrack to the beautiful summer evenings of our memory; it can be heartbreaking, it can be beautiful, and will always be there.

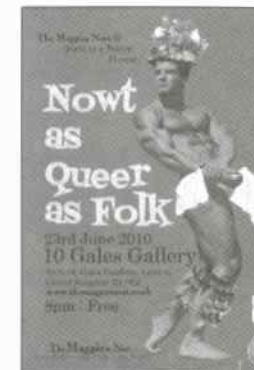
You were involved in an extraordinary event, the *Willesden Green Wassail*, which brought an old rural tradition to a contemporary urban setting. And made it inclusive. Standing outside the Red Pig Polish delicatessen with the owner on an orange box, blessing his shop, telling stories and tree planting. It was storyteller Rachel Rose Reid's idea to celebrate the hard work that people put in to the small things that we need so much.

One more event I have to ask you about. What happened on St George's Day with David Cameron?

Oh shit! The Magpie's Nest was asked to do a show every lunchtime for a week at Leadenhall Market last year, and we were invited back to do it again this year. One of the days fell on St George's Day. I knew there would be a media circus as Boris Johnson was making a speech and Joanna Lumley was coming to talk about the Ghurkas. We had the stage set and the drill of what would happen, and then there was a call to say that Joanna Lumley had been pulled because David Cameron had decided to come. It was during the election campaign, so this was a good opportunity for him.

I'd booked the Belles of London City who had done their first live gig the previous year, and had been caught up in this massive Boris frenzy. I'd also booked Simon Care and Roger Watson to play melodeons, and suddenly David Cameron was coming along. Boris did the same crowdpleasing speech as the previous year, which was utter tripe about what Englishness is, and David Cameron talked about his party wresting the English flag from the BNP whose manifesto had just been launched. And The Belles ended up on the front page of the *Evening Standard* along with Cameron and my folk club banner. I was just a bit embarrassed. We got a lot of disappointed emails as a result of the *Evening Standard* photo, but hey, we'll live and wear it.

Then there was an amazing photograph which spread as far afield as the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*. One of the Belles put a top hat on Cameron's head, reinforcing his Eton posh boy image, so there was small poetic justice. Much as I loathe this government, it'll be interesting to see how their talk about devolving control back on to the community will work. But communities need to be listened to. What I love about folk music is that it provides so many examples of what wrongs have been done in the past, and it has a great future.



Sam Lee's folk club, Magpie's Nest, won the BBC Radio 2 Folk Club of the Year Award 2010. Further information at: www.themagpiesnest.co.uk Sam Lee's website is at: www.samleesong.co.uk



Sam, clutching his BBC Radio 2 Folk Club of the Year Award 2010

FROM WHERE I'M STANDING

Visiting Israel earlier this year with my family, we wanted to spend at least some of our time just being tourists, albeit critical ones. We tried to see what we could of the effects of the occupation, and visited historic sites and unique places like the Dead Sea. We also went to Yad Vashem, Israel's showpiece Holocaust memorial, founded in 1953 following Knesset legislation to establish a memorial in Jerusalem to the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis. It was also intended to serve as a monument to the Jewish communities which had been destroyed in the Holocaust, to Jewish resistance fighters, and to recognise the 'Righteous Among the Nations', those non-Jews who had risked their lives to save Jews from extermination.

Yad Vashem was built on the slope of Mount Herzl, to the west of Jerusalem. In 2005 a completely new complex was opened on the site, consisting of a spectacular new Holocaust history museum, archives, a library, an education centre, as well as memorial gardens and monuments, all

secluded from the main road.

We approached our visit to Yad Vashem with enthusiasm. The monumental scale of destruction of Jews under the Nazis, as well as of other groups, notably socialists and communists, gypsies, and homosexuals, is a story that needs to be remembered and retold. I am also intensely drawn to historical memorabilia of the lost Jewish communities of central Europe, with which I have a strong personal identification. We expected, rightly, that the museum would be spectacular, but wondered how it would tell its story.

We visited the public centerpiece of the site, the Holocaust history museum. It is an extraordinary structure, built as a prism mainly underground, with only one entry point from which the visitor is directed in somewhat zigzag fashion via chronologically and thematically arranged galleries towards a single exit. It is crowded with a mass of exhibits, using contemporaneous film, videos of personal testimony, photos, artefacts such as diaries and letters, and personal belongings, as well as

maps, documents and explanatory panels. The exhibits are, at times, unbearably moving. There can be no quarrel with a project of remembrance of these atrocities, nor indeed with the brilliant form of its presentation at Yad Vashem.

Why then did this wonderful museum leave me feeling uneasy? One problem is that we found only one section which mentions the Nazi persecution of non-Jews. Why only one? The explicit focus of this museum is on Jewish victims but should a museum of Holocaust history, even if located in Israel, really focus only on Jews?

This may be related to my primary discomfort with the museum's narrative. The underground prism takes us deliberately on a journey. 'The prism is ... a longitudinal axis of historical memory, crossed by the visitors as they move from one gallery to the next and from one subject to another,' says the museum's website. Curiously, though, this brilliant, claustrophobic architecture is not really about the past at all, but about the future. Where is the museum taking us? The story is an explicitly Zionist one. With the military defeats of the Germans and their allies, and the evacuation of the Concentration Camps, the end of the story can only be the Promised Land. We emerge from the dystopia of the underground prism to a huge plate glass window through which we see a scene of immense beauty: the hills around Jerusalem with the city in the distance – a view, incidentally, which includes the site of the village of Deir Yassin where over 100 Palestinians were massacred in Israel's independence war.

It is not difficult to read the exit from the museum as symbolising Israel's founding myth, that Jews can only be safe in this land because it is their state. In this narrative, the State of Israel marks the end of the oppression of the Jews. It is this particularism, as well as the simplistic Zionist 'solution' that the museum appears to present, that leaves one with a sense of disquiet. Had it adopted a more universalist stance from the outset, it might have come up with more open-ended and inclusive conclusions.

Rayah Feldman

MASSACRING THE TRUTH

GENOCIDE

'Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?' Thus Adolf Hitler is alleged to have assured his senior military commanders of impunity, in a speech on 22nd August 1939, a week before the invasion of Poland, when he urged them to ruthlessly wipe out civilians, to create *lebensraum* for Germans.

Whatever Hitler said, he was wrong. His speech itself, said to have been recorded in unofficial notes by Admiral Canaris, is the subject of denial. Turkish officials claim the remark was invented by Armenian propagandists. Almost a century after the events in May 1915, which led to the death of over a million Armenians and spurred the flight of refugees to form the bulk of today's Armenian diaspora, the Armenian tragedy remains the subject of fierce controversy.

In the United States, leading Jewish organisations lobbied against official recognition of the Armenian genocide, it was said because of threats to Turkey's Jewish community. More likely they were taking a lead from Israel, which valued Turkey as a Middle East ally, as did the US of course. It may be a coincidence, but only since the Mavi Marmara incident has the Congress Foreign Affairs Committee been persuaded to describe the 1915 massacre as genocide.

Many Armenian refugees settled in Iran, now home to 100,000 Armenians. The former Soviet Armenia and Iran have important trading relations, including a pipeline, supplying Iranian natural gas. The Islamic Republic has supported Armenia in its conflict with Azerbaijan. But remarks by Iranian Vice President Hamid Baghaei, that the Turkish deportation of Armenians in 1915 amounted to genocide, upset the Turkish Government, and caused strains in Iran itself. President Ahmadinejad needed to reassure Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, and other MPs, anxious to maintain and build on good relations with Turkey. While it suits Ahmadinejad to play tension with the West to counter unrest within Iran, his regime presumably feels safer if it can count on Turkey not to be the bridgehead for a threatened attack. Both governments share an interest in suppressing the Kurdish people in between.

It was Winston Churchill, at that time making war on Turkey, who used the Greek word 'Holocaust' – originally meaning a sacrifice by fire – to refer to reported burning of Armenians in a pit, giving the word its modern meaning of genocide.

In Cardiff's Garden of Peace, a memorial to the Armenians was vandalised on the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2008. In November the previous year, some 300 Turks had been bussed in to protest at the inauguration of the monument.

On 21st September 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Turkish authorities had failed to protect journalist Hrant Dink, a Turkish citizen of Armenian descent, murdered outside his newspaper's office in Istanbul in 2007. The Court found that the authorities violated Dink's rights in 2005 when they prosecuted him for 'denigration of

Turkishness', because he raised the Armenian issue. The journalist was subjected to a hate campaign by the nationalist right, but the Court says that the authorities failed both to act on information they received that could have prevented his murder, and to investigate the role of state officials in his death.

Writer Orhan Pamuk, who won the Nobel prize for literature in 2005, and the first Turkish citizen to win a Nobel Laureate, brought a storm down on his head when he told a Swiss interviewer: 'Thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians. And almost nobody dares to mention that. So I do.' Pamuk's books were burned at right-wing rallies and the Government brought in a new law, Article 301, stating: 'A person who, being a Turk, explicitly insults the Republic or Turkish Grand National Assembly, shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months to three years.'

When the attempt to prosecute Pamuk retroactively failed, partly because of international reaction, the far right plotted to assassinate him and other enemies. Orhan Pamuk has not retracted anything, but he no longer resides in his homeland.

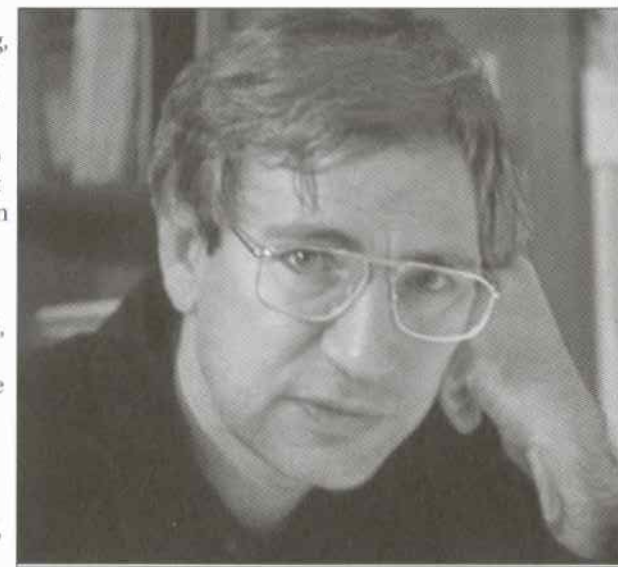
Turkish governments and their apologists contend that the May 1915 deportations and killings were just part of the war in which Armenians sided with Russia against Turkish rule, and atrocities were committed on both sides; that the numbers of Armenian dead have been exaggerated; and that Armenians today just raise the issue for gain, or from malice against Turkey. Why they should do so, or why Turkish people today should feel responsible for deeds of a long gone regime, is not obvious.

Armenians had lived under Ottoman Turkish rule for centuries but the 1915 catastrophe was not the first massacre. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Turkish empire had lost most of its Balkan lands to national freedom struggles backed by Czarist Russia and marked by massacres of Muslims, while Christians were slaughtered in turn when the empire unleashed its irregular *bashi bazouks*. Faced with the expanding Russian Empire taking Armenia under its wing, and Armenians within Turkey demanding civil rights, Sultan Abdul Hamid II declared that the Christian world was out to destroy his empire. He did not distinguish between Armenian militants and Armenian citizens in general. In eastern Turkey an armed band – the *Hamidiye* – was set up in 1890, formed of Kurdish irregulars who were told to 'deal with the Armenians as they wished'.

While some coveted the Armenians' land or assumed wealth, the authorities levied heavy taxes provoking unrest, which brought a military

The struggle against denial of crimes committed on a mass scale against the Armenian people is still being waged, says **CHARLIE POTTINS**

Nobel Laureate, Orhan Pamuk, who faced death threats for refusing to be silent about the Armenian genocide



response. In some places the Armenians fought off the forces sent against them and in 1895 they brought their plight to the attention of the Great Powers who were interested in Ottoman affairs. The Sultan authorised reforms but his police broke up an Armenian rally, and he unleashed pogroms and massacres in which at least 100,000 Armenians were killed. In some places, Muslim Turks defended their neighbours but, at Urfa, Ottoman troops set fire to the cathedral in which 3,000 people had sought sanctuary. In Istanbul, where Jews had sheltered Armenians in their homes, the mob stormed a synagogue on Yom Kippur in 1897.

In 1908, Abdul Hamid was forced to step down when part of the Army threatened to march on the capital, and the 'Young Turks', or Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), took over the country. The new leaders were secularists, including men of Jewish background. Their government was committed to modernising the state, and it was welcomed by Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Arabs alike, who were all glad to see the back of the Sultan. A counter-coup by more reactionary military officers, supported by Islamic theological students who wanted Sharia law, led to new attacks on Armenians. Thousands were killed in Adana. But the CUP suppressed the rising, and court-martialled its leaders. In 1912 the Sultan, self-proclaimed Defender of the Faith, was exiled to Salonika.

That year the opposition Liberal Union took office, with support from Armenian and other minority parties opposed to the CUP's centralised power. But the CUP came back with a vengeance in 1913, executing or exiling its opponents. By 1914, when Turkey entered the First World War, and the following year when its government launched its onslaught on the Armenians, it was run by a triumvirate – War Minister Enver, Interior Minister Talat, and Navy Minister Cemal – 'The Three Pashas'. Western investment and influence had been growing for some decades, and these three were allied to one particular European power.

Mass killings are as old as the hills, mentioned and even exhorted in the Bible, and we need only think of those who suffered and died in the Atlantic slave crossing to put other ordeals in perspective. But it was in supposedly enlightened, modern times that states gave themselves the right to deport entire populations, and acquired the means to organise mass slaughter, even turn it into an industry.

Neither Jews nor Armenians were the first victims of 20th-century genocide. That honour belongs to the Herero and Namaqua peoples of what is now called Namibia. In 1904 they rose up against German colonisation of their country, where they faced the loss of their land and cattle, being forced into reservations or working in bondage to the settlers. Herero leader Chief Samuel Maharero told his warriors to avoid killing English and Boer people, or women and children in general. In contrast, before the battle of Waterburg against the Herero, German commander General Trotha wrote: 'I believe that the nation as such should be annihilated, or ... be expelled from the country ... This will be possible if the water-holes from Grootfontein to Gobabis are occupied. The constant movement of our troops will enable us to find the small groups of nation who have moved backwards and destroy them gradually.'

A guide for the German troops, Jan Cloete, witnessed what happened. 'After the battle all men, women, and children who fell into German hands, wounded or otherwise, were mercilessly put to death. Then the Germans set off in pursuit of the rest, and all those found by the wayside and in the sandveld were shot down and bayoneted to death. The mass of the Herero men were unarmed and thus unable to offer resistance. They were just trying to get away with their cattle.'

Some Herero managed to cross the desert and reach Botswana. But General Trotha deployed his troops to prevent Herero in the desert from reaching wells, and even poisoned some well water. Up to 100,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama were killed. Many were also herded into concentration camps where, without adequate food, they were worked to death, and some were used in medical experiments. Skulls were sent to German universities, displayed in scientific lectures on the supposed superiority of the white race.

Namibia wrested its independence from South Africa in 1990. In 2001 Hereros filed a lawsuit in the United States demanding reparations from the German government and the Deutsche Bank, which financed the German Government and companies in Southern Africa. In August 2004, on the 100th anniversary of the start of the genocide, German Minister Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, officially apologised, accepting 'moral responsibility and the guilt incurred by Germans at that time'.

Having come late to the table, Imperial Germany obtained only scraps in the struggle for overseas colonies. But without overcoming British naval supremacy it could turn elsewhere, expanding its domain without necessarily having to raise its flag. At the 1878 Congress of Berlin the Powers sought to limit Russian expansion but to extend their influence over Turkey. Within four years the first German military mission arrived in Constantinople, with then Major, later Field Marshall, Von der Goetz as instructor to reform the Turkish army and Krupp to supply the hardware.

At Heidelberg, Professor Aloys Sprenger, who had travelled widely in the East, including India, and written on The History of Military Science among the Muslim Peoples, produced a new tract in 1886: Babylonia, the Richest Land of the Past, and Most Remunerative Field of Colonisation in the Present. Later an artillery officer, Kannenberg, wrote on Asia Minor's Natural Riches.

The importance of Middle East oil was just dawning. Russia had opened the Baku oilfields for exploration in 1872, and in 1901 an Englishman called D'Arcy started prospecting in Iran. But German geo-strategists had a bigger picture. In 1878, Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in 1882 Germany and Austria-Hungary became allies. It only remained to bring Turkey onside. In 1888 the Sultan awarded a railway contract to a German company. In 1898, discussions began on the Baghdad railway. With finance arranged by the Deutsche Bank, this would run from Berlin to Baghdad, enabling oil and mineral ores to be sent back to Germany, while a spur extended to Basra would bring German power and manufactured goods to the Gulf. The British in India, still playing the Great Game of spying and intrigue against their Russian rivals in Asia, began

to realise they might face a common foe, one that could both sidestep and threaten the Suez canal.

In 1889 and again in 1898 Kaiser Wilhelm II paid visits to Turkey. In Germany some protested against the pogroms against Armenians in Turkey, but they had no influence on foreign policy. Bismarck dismissed the 'hypocrisy' of Russia and Britain in raising the issue. A theologian accompanying the Kaiser on his trips, Friedrich Naumann, observed that German interests required 'our political indifference to the suffering of Christians in the Turkish Empire, painful as these must be to our private feelings'.

In 1898, in both Istanbul and Jerusalem, a Viennese journalist called Theodor Herzl visited the Kaiser, soliciting support for the Zionist project. Nothing came of the meetings, though Herzl used them to boost his prestige. In Damascus the Kaiser proclaimed himself the champion of the world's 200 million Muslims.

In 1901 Herzl received an audience with the Sultan. The founder of political Zionism promised that Jewish finance would pay Turkey's national debt if the Sultan blessed the Zionist project in Palestine. Abdul Hamid told him: 'If one day the Islamic State falls apart then you can have Palestine for free, but as long as I am alive I would rather my flesh be cut up than cut out Palestine from the Muslim land.'

Kaiser Wilhelm called Abdul Hamid 'a blessing for his subjects – except for a handful of Armenians', and later complained that the Young Turks 'dethroned my friend the sultan'. It was said that a secret wireless link had been set up from the Sultan's Yildiz palace to Berlin. Abdul Hamid was allowed to send his agents to Berlin to counter reports of massacres. German embassies in Russia, Britain and France collected information on Armenian nationalist activities so the Ottoman authorities could be informed. When the Sultan was deposed, the links remained.

On 3rd August 1914 Enver Pasha signed the secret treaty allying Turkey with Germany. On the Mediterranean, early on 4th August, Rear-Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, commanding the German warships Goeben and Breslau, which had been assigned to attack French transports from Algiers, received orders from Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz: 'Alliance with government of CUP concluded August 3. Proceed at once to Istanbul.'

On 16th August, having slipped past the Royal Navy ships which had orders to tail but not attack, the Goeben and Breslau reached Constantinople. The Turkish government was still bound by official neutrality not to allow belligerents through the Straits. In a small ceremony, the German crews donned Turkish fezzes, and their ships were transferred to the Turkish flag, becoming the Yavuz Sultan Selim and the Midilli. Admiral Souchon remained in command, and on 23rd September he was appointed Commander in Chief of the Ottoman Navy.

At the end of October the Goeben, Breslau and a squadron of Turkish warships sailed to attack the Russian Black Sea ports of Novorossiysk, Odessa and Sevastopol. At Novorossiysk the Breslau's guns sank 14 steamers in the harbour, and set 40 oil tanks on fire, sending streams of burning petroleum through the streets. Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 2nd November, and France and Britain followed on 5th November. Thus two ships

began the war that would topple the Ottoman empire, along with its Russian enemy, and entirely change the map of the Middle East.

Before the war, the Russian government had been preparing an international conference on Armenia, and urged the Armenian nationalists to show restraint, so they would appear as victims rather than revolutionaries. But in summer 1914, as well as sending Armenian conscripts to its western front, the Russian imperial army set up Armenian volunteer units to fight in the Caucasus. The Armenian national liberation movement also formed partisan units. In December, Czar Nicholas II visited the Caucasus and was received by the head of the Armenian Church and Armenian nationalists in Tiflis (now Tbilisi), the Georgian capital. There he proclaimed: 'From all countries Armenians are hurrying to enter the ranks of the glorious Russian Army ... Let the Russian flag wave freely over the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, Let ... the peoples [Armenian] remaining under the Turkish yoke receive freedom. Let the Armenian people of Turkey who have suffered for the faith of Christ receive resurrection for a new free life....'

Many Armenians must have felt a wry contempt for this glorious 'Christian' liberator annexing their freedom-struggle just as his regime had annexed their land. In 1905-7 the Czarist regime had responded to strikes and unrest in the Baku oilfields with its usual divide and rule methods, encouraging Muslim Azeri pogroms against the Armenians, just as in Odessa its mob targeted the Jews.

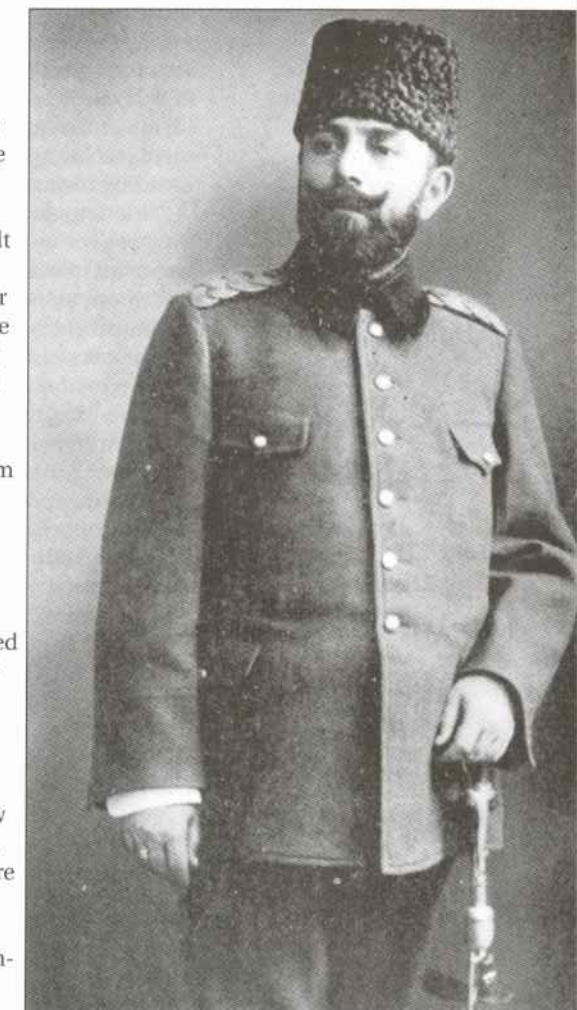
The top German agent in the Middle East, Max Freiherr von Oppenheim, who may have inspired the Kaiser's speech as 'protector of Islam', had also urged that in the event of war the Turkish government must proclaim jihad. The CUP had been materialists, with little time for religion, but now Enver Pasha persuaded the Sultan, still head of the Caliphate, to declare jihad. The aim was to stir Muslim revolt against Britain and its allies, but there were implications for non-Muslim minorities within Turkey. Some religious Muslims resented the use of their religion to cloak political aims.

Enver Pasha blamed Armenian resistance and sabotage for the defeat of Turkish forces in the Caucasus in late 1914 and early 1915. He might just as well have blamed the mountain winter, for which his forces were ill-fed, ill-clad and unprepared.

On 25th February 1915 Enver ordered that all Armenians serving in the Ottoman forces should be disarmed and sent to labour battalions, the *Ameles*. Thus, those conscripted were neither able to defend their home towns and families or themselves.

Special units, many of them recruited from convicts, were formed for action against the Armenians. At Van, where the Armenians were in a majority, they resisted after nearby towns and

Navy Minister Cemal Pasha, one of the triumvirate who ran the Turkish Government's onslaught on the Armenians in 1915.



villages had been cleared, holding out from 20th April, for three weeks until they were relieved by the arrival of General Yudenich's Russian forces.

On 24th April, Interior minister Talat passed the order claiming that the Armenians had rebelled against his government. Some 250 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Istanbul were taken from their homes and placed in special holding centres. Elsewhere, Armenians were being forced on long marches, without food or water, into the Syrian desert. The guards who escorted them were often from special detachments, and only too ready to attack and rape those they were guarding.

Satisfied that 'the deportation of the Armenians has been decided', General Bronsart von Schellendorf, at army GHQ, thought he understood the way these helpless people were being treated: '...the Armenian is just like a Jew, a parasite outside the confines of his home and, sucking of the marrow of the peoples of the host country. Year after year they abandon their native land – just like the Polish Jews who migrate to Germany – to engage in various activities. Hence the hatred which was, in a medieval form, unleashed itself against them ... entailing their murder.'

This hatred was neither spontaneous nor universally shared. A secret order, revealed at a post-war court martial, said that 'any Muslim who dares to harbour an Armenian will be hanged in front of his house'. It also warned any official or officer who broke ranks with the policy that they would be stripped of their rank and court-martialled.

From Erzurum, in June, officers reported that young Armenian men had either been conscripted for labour battalions or shot. No bombs or weapons had been found in house-to-house searches, and there was no sign that the Armenians were preparing an uprising. Bronsart still insisted on the 'military necessity' of deporting women, children and old men.

On 17th June 1915, German ambassador Wangenheim informed Berlin that Armenians from Diyarbakir who were supposed to be deported to Mosul 'were en route to be slaughtered'. On 29th June he testified: 'The deportees are being set upon and butchered.' On 7th July he concluded that 'the manner in which deportees being treated ... shows that the government is in fact pursuing the goal of annihilating the Armenian race in Turkey'.

The forces sent to remove the Armenians sometimes found shorter ways than taking them on long marches. Giacomo Gorrini, Italian consul at Trabzon in 1915, wrote: 'I saw thousands of innocent women and children placed on boats which were capsized in the Black Sea.' An affidavit presented in post war trials in Trabzon described how Armenian villagers were burned. 'The shortest method for disposing of the women and children concentrated in the various camps was to burn them ... Turkish prisoners who had apparently witnessed some of these scenes were horrified and maddened at remembering the sight. They told the Russians that the stench of the burning human flesh permeated the air for many days after.'

US ambassador Henry Morgenthau tried unsuccessfully to intercede with the Turkish authorities for the Armenians, and reported to Washington. 'Early in July 2,000 Armenian *Ameles* were sent from Harput to build roads. ...practically

every man of these 2,000 was massacred.'

Some Germans were shocked by what they saw. Dr Walter Rossler, consul in Aleppo, said he could not believe his eyes when he read an official document referring to 'temporary relocation' of Armenians. He relayed to the Chancellor in Berlin the account of a German cavalry captain who had witnessed the slitting of young Armenians' throats in a labour battalion, and seen hundred of corpses by the roadside in September 1915.

But Colonel Felix Guse, 3rd Army Chief of Staff described the Armenians as a people deserving 'punishment'. The official line was that the Turkish authorities were protecting their country from Armenian insurrection. The German Foreign Office made sure that 191 Reichstag deputies were unable to see a report on anti-Armenian atrocities.

Lieutenant Colonel Boettlich, chief of railway services at Ottoman GHQ, ordered the deportation of Armenian railway workers, engineers and clerks who had been engaged in construction of the Baghdad railway. The Armenian workers were 'despatched with the knife'. The Baghdad Railway, which had seemed so important to the war, was now delayed because so many workers and technicians had been killed.

Bronsart attacked 'agitators' and 'the Jew Morgenthau', for interfering. In August 1916 he put in a request to his superior, General Lyman von Sanders, for the deportation of Greeks from Turkey's coastal areas.

Immediately after the war there were trials at Harput and Trabzon, for what had been done to the Armenians. But the big three Turkish leaders – Enver, Talat and Cemal – were among seven whom Bronsart von Schellenburg and Lt General Seekk assisted to escape trial, if not justice of a sort.

Talat was assassinated with a single bullet on 15th March 1921 as he came out of his house in Charlottenburg. His assassin was Soghomon Tehlirian, a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) from Erzurum.

Cemal was assassinated on 21st July, 1922, in Tbilisi, Georgia, by Stepan Dzaghihian, Bedros Der Boghosian and Ardashes Kevorkian, all members of the ARF. His body was returned to Turkey for burial, also at Erzurum.

Enver Pasha seemed to enjoy a second and even third life, owing to his chutzpah, but it was not to last. He attended the Congress of Peoples of the East in Baku in 1920, supposedly representing revolutionaries in the Maghreb, Egypt and India, and denouncing imperialism. The following year he was sent to Bukhara to help suppress anti-Soviet Basmachi rebels. Switching to the rebel side, he became their commander, reorganising them with Turkish officers.

On 4th August, 1922, near Dushanbe, his headquarters were attacked by Red Army Bashkir cavalry, and Enver was killed by machine gun fire. The raiders were commanded by Yakov Melkumov, aka Agop Melkumian, an Armenian.

The book remains open on the true significance of the Armenian tragedy, and so do the wounds. We have seen how some leaders take such enormous crimes not as a warning from history but an encouragement to do it again. We have a duty to uncover and recover the truth, if 'Never Again' is to mean, as it should, never again to anyone.

Pack up your roubles

According to family lore, my maternal great-grandfather, Shlomo Epstein, went back to Russia in 1917 to take part in the revolution. Exhibit A in support of this is a composite photograph of many faces embedded into a background of ships, train lines and public buildings, with the internal caption, 'Members of the Convention, taken in Ekaterinoslav November 1917'.

In fact, my great-grandfather (despite his Bundist sympathies) was not an enthusiastic revolutionary returnee but a reluctant deportee. Along with thousands of other Russian Jews in Britain, he was sent back to serve in the Russian army, having 'chosen' this option in preference to what seemed like certain slaughter on the Western Front as a conscript in the British army. As Harold Shukman's rather wonderful book explains, he was not a 'member' of any convention, but rather a victim of one – the Anglo Russian Military Convention of 1917.

Before the Great War, Britain had been one of the few European countries to have no system of conscription; the Empire was better served by a powerful navy, a small professional army and lots of colonial soldiers as garrison troops. But by 1916 it was no longer possible to support the manpower requirements of the army with volunteers, who were in any case becoming much harder to find. Conscription was the result; and since only the King's subjects could serve, a series of military conventions with Allied powers followed, to allow nationals of these countries to either serve in the British army or go 'home' to their own.

Agreeing a convention with Russia was harder, and applying it to Jews who were recognised as fleeing from Czarist persecution even more so. But the February/March Revolution put an end to this argument. The allies were keen to keep Russia in the war with every bit of help that they could, and a military convention with the Kerensky regime seemed like a good opportunity to clear up the kind of anomaly that civil servants detest.

Of course, the Russian army was short of pretty much everything except reluctant conscripts. What it really needed was war materials. Wasting valuable shipping space with boatloads of socialist-inclined tailors did not seem like a good idea – though the British believed that the Russians really wanted their Jews back. But the wheels had been set in motion, and the British began arranging to round up and dispatch non-naturalised Jews who refused the opportunity to serve in the British army.

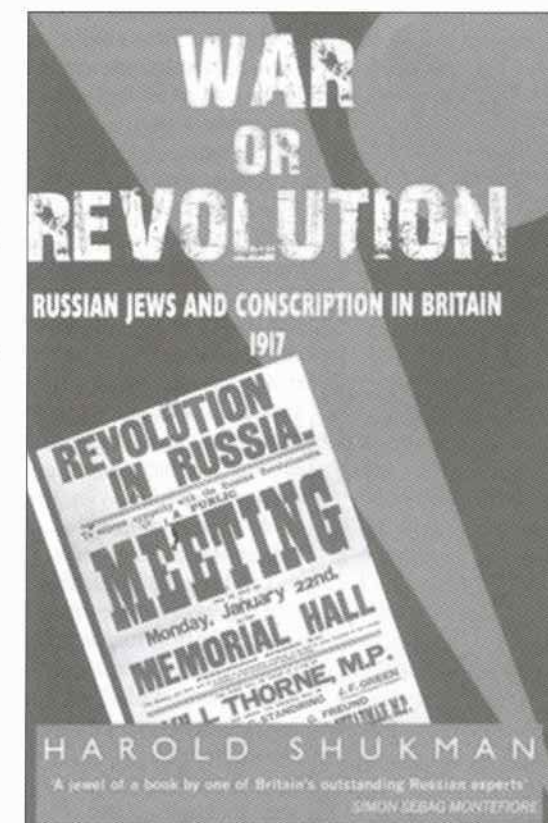
The deportees were let down by almost everyone. The Jewish establishment, and the Zionist leadership too, were keen to prove their loyalty to the British cause. Their own socialist leaders advised them very badly – telling them that if they signed up in large enough numbers the scheme to deport them would collapse under its own weight, and through lack of ships. A group of Latvian miners from Scotland who were similarly

ill-advised, were deported and seem to have disappeared into the Russian maelstrom.

And so the Russian Jews from Britain were marched down to Kings Cross in columns and sent to Archangel via the Arctic route. By the time they arrived, there was little prospect of conscription into the Russian army, which was in the process of disintegration. Instead they were put on to trains and shunted from one railhead to another, with the promise that their meagre luggage would follow them shortly (it didn't). A large group ended up in Ekaterinoslav, a city fought over incessantly by Germans, Reds, Whites, anarchists and sundry Ukrainian nationalist factions – according to Shukman, Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk, in case you were wondering) changed hands 25 times during the Civil War. Broken up into progressively smaller groups, the 'Conventionists', as they came to be called, were scattered from Moscow to Odessa to Vladivostok and Shanghai. Some made their way back to England via Constantinople, or Germany. Others were never seen again. My great-grandfather, who had left his wife and children behind, was one of the lucky ones. Shukman's book includes some moving interviews with survivors, many of whom seem barely able to speak about their experiences.

This is a thoroughly researched book about an episode that is now largely forgotten but reveals much about the formation and context of the Jewish community of Britain.

Jeremy Green



WAR OR REVOLUTION: RUSSIAN JEWS AND CONSCRIPTION IN BRITAIN 1917

Harold Shukman
Valentine Mitchell) £14.95

CONFLICTING

**THE ARABS
AND THE
HOLOCAUST:
THE ARAB-
ISRAELI WAR
OF
NARRATIVES**
Gilbert Achcar
Saqi, £25

**ISRAEL AND
PALESTINE: RE-
APPRAISALS,
REVISIONS,
REFUTATIONS**
Avi Shlaim
Verso, £10.99

For me, as for many others, Haj Amin al Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, was the first Palestinian whose name I ever heard. The religious and political leader of the Arabs of Palestine who spent the war in Berlin broadcasting for Hitler, Haj Amin was the lens through which the history of the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians was viewed and refracted – proof positive that antisemitism pure and simple was the motive for Arab hostility to Zionism.

In what Gilbert Achcar rightly calls 'the Arab-Israeli war of narratives', this damning image, perpetuated at Yad Vashem by the giant photograph of the Mufti with the Führer which faces the visitor on the way out, is the defining icon. In the age of the 'war on terror' the association is updated by the notorious extracts from the 'Protocols' in the Hamas Charter and the frequently anti-Jewish vocabulary of Hizbollah.

Of late, other powerful images have been counterposed in the public imagination: the ruins of Beirut; Palestinian families squatting in the rubble of their homes; humiliation at checkpoints, white phosphorus raining down on the trapped people of Gaza.

Gilbert Achcar has set out in this impressively researched and documented study to explore and map these conflicting analyses against the background of the full political and ideological spectrum of the Arab world.

As Neville Mandel and Rashid Khalidi have shown, the initial hostility of Palestinian villagers to Zionist colonisation was not the result of theological Islamic or Christian Jew-hatred, nor Arab nationalist xenophobia, but rather the

response of farmers expelled from their land as it was acquired for exclusive Jewish settlement.

Awareness that the Zionist aim was a Jewish state, inevitably at the expense of the existing population, and achievable only with the support of outside powers, made the issue of Palestine central to the development of Arab national consciousness across the region.

As Achcar points out, this explains why to this day the issue of Palestine continues to be the focus of global attention despite the fact that in terms of loss of human life, there have always been far bloodier conflicts elsewhere. Palestine is seen throughout the

former colonial world as the only ongoing settler-colonial project of dispossession.

The way in which this perception was worked through is analysed across the political spectrum. Achcar describes the differing reactions of the main ideological currents in the Arab world to Zionism and to the rising tide of European antisemitism in the period up to, during, and after the Holocaust. Liberal internationalists, Marxists, nationalists and reactionary religious fundamentalists all, not surprisingly, saw the events of the day through their differing ideological lenses.

But most clearly distinguished between Zionism and the Jews, and rejected the Nazis. As Achcar sums up, 'An overwhelming majority of liberal pro-independence activists, a majority of progressive nationalists, and all Marxists – in a word all those Arabs who shared an allegiance to the values ... that issued from the Western enlightenment ... rejected Nazism and alliances with Hitler's Germany'.

Of course this will cut little ice with convinced Zionists, for whom the fact that all these currents nonetheless rejected Zionism, will be taken by definition as proof of antisemitism – the sort of circular Zionist solipsism with which rational argument is all but impossible.

As Achcar also points out, nationalist activists in countries colonised by Britain and France were under no obligation to support their colonial masters in a war for a 'democracy' in which they had no share. Which makes it all the more remarkable that 9,000 Palestinians did respond to the call from the Mufti's political rivals to volunteer to fight with the British army against the Nazis.

But the author does not flinch from recording that the Mufti went beyond the limits of an alliance of convenience with 'the enemy of my enemy'. As he concludes '... while it may be necessary to strike an alliance with the devil under certain circumstances, it is never legitimate to become the devil's advocate, and even less so to present the devil as an angel. Therein lies the difference between an alliance of convenience and full complicity.'

Apart from some small pro-Nazi groups (which, as he demonstrates with detailed research, did not include the early Baath party) 'it was fundamentalist pan-Islamism that exhibited the greatest affinity with the fascist states, Germany in particular ... the common enemy was not Britain, but the Jews. The best demonstration of this affinity is that bastion of reactionary pan-Islamism, the Saudi monarchy.'

But here, as so often, it was the colonial power that promoted religious reaction against the popular movement. Haj Amin was a British appointee, chosen over the more qualified religious scholars preferred by the Sheikhs of al Aqsa and was backed by the British against his rivals in the secular nationalist Istiqlal party. In the early 1930s, 'the Mufti, unlike the Istiqlal, strove to channel the anger of the Palestinian Arabs towards the Jews rather than the British'.

Before the 1936 revolt, as two Israeli historians have pointed out, 'the party was forthright in

ACCOUNTS

proclaiming that the British, not the Jews, should be the primary targets of action – in some cases Palestinians even organised contingents of guards to protect Jews and their property during demonstrations.'

And as the Palestinian uprising grew after 1936, it was Haj Amin and the Arab Higher Committee which negotiated behind the scenes with the British and the Arab states to persuade the neighbouring governments to call for an end to the uprising, while the Istiqlal fought in vain for popular committees to continue the struggle against the British.

So why were religious fundamentalists such as 'Izz-ul-Din al-Qassam, after whom the armed wing of Hamas is named, able to mobilise popular support behind a politics which identified 'the Jews' as the enemy? And why are their successors able to do so today?

Achcar quotes the Iraqi-Jewish Israeli writer Nissim Rejwan: 'Since its inception Zionism has been calling itself "the movement for national liberation of the Jewish people": it has been identifying itself with Judaism and Jewishness; it has practically appropriated the Jewish Bible, the Talmud and the whole of Rabbinical Judaism and made them its own; and it has turned Abraham, Moses and the Prophets into the first Zionists. After 1948, Israel defined itself in such a way ... that it virtually turned all the 90% of Jews living outside its borders into Israeli "nationals". Who are we then to accuse Arabs of antisemitism when all they have done is fallen right into the ideological trap which the Zionists set for them?'

As Achcar argues, 'One cannot equate the antisemitism called forth by an occupying army that declares its allegiance to a "Jewish state" and has perpetrated war crimes in Palestine and Lebanon with the antisemitism based for example on the notion that "the Yids" were to blame for German or French military defeats with which Judaism had absolutely nothing to do.'

Comparisons between Israel and the Nazis have of course multiplied since the latest assault on Gaza. But Achcar finds this hardly surprising. 'Only someone possessed of unlimited effrontery and utter insensitivity could inform those on whom the bombs were falling, as they watched the mangled corpses of children and adults pile up around them, that their fate was admirable in comparison with what the Jews in the concentration camps endured. Given the atrocity of the Israeli bombing attacks, the attempt to meet such comparisons with accusations of Holocaust denial and antisemitism or even in some countries to subject them to legal prohibitions, was ludicrous.'

Zionism sought to overcome the historic middleman role which the Jews played in Eastern and Central Europe by 'normalising' their position as a nation 'like any other' settled in its own 'national home'. It was Isaac Deutscher in his article – one of his last – on the 1967 war who pointed out the irony that instead Zionism had recreated that

role on a larger scale in the Middle East, with Israel as the local agent of imperialism, much as Jewish *arendars* were used as local agents and enforcers by the Polish gentry in the Ukraine.

Just as classical antisemitism was 'the socialism of fools' so Islamist and right-wing nationalist adoption of European antisemitic narratives is 'the anti-imperialism of fools'.

Not that those Palestinians who reject 'denialism' get any thanks for it from Israel. Sheikh Jamal Mansour, a leader of Hamas, is quoted by Achcar as saying in 2000: 'It is not fair to deny the Holocaust or to diminish the importance of the persecution that the Jews have suffered. We must clearly condemn it and stand by the oppressed – whoever they may be – and against the oppressor.'

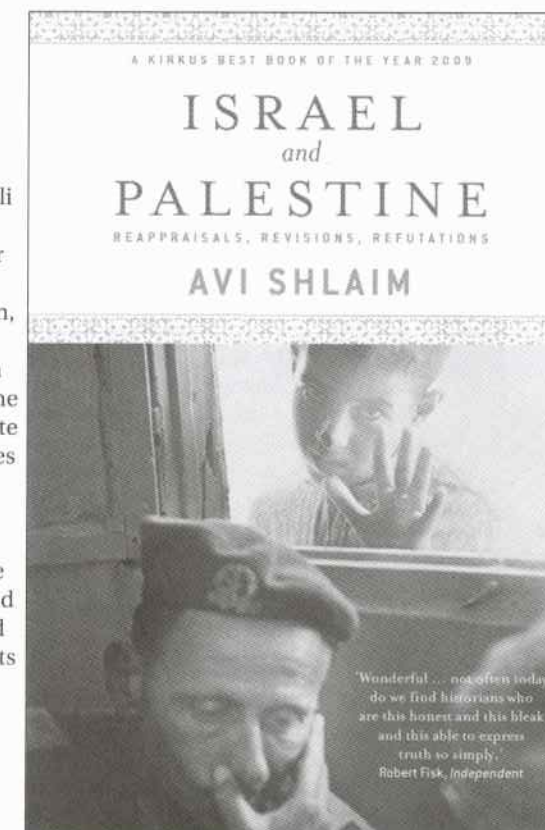
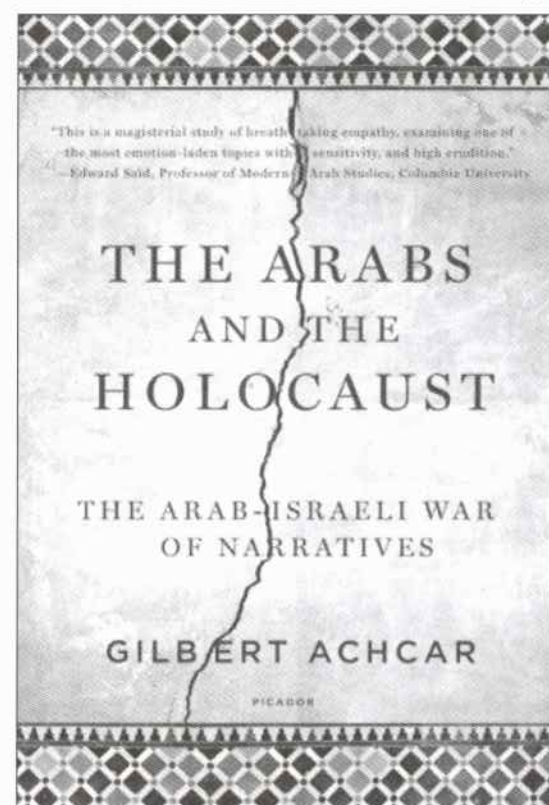
Unfortunately little has been heard from Sheikh Mansour since then, as he was assassinated by an Israeli missile in July 2001.

Where Gilbert Achcar combines exhaustive scholarship with passion, there tends to be an unfortunate segregation between the two, with the first half of the book quite heavy going while it takes us on a thoroughly documented tour of all points of the Arab political spectrum in the 1930s and 1940s. It would have been an easier read if the more general points covered in the second half had served as an introduction.

There is no such problem in Avi Shlaim's latest book *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations*, a collection of essays and articles, most of which have already appeared elsewhere. In his usual easy style, he combines erudition and humour in his coverage of a range of aspects of the conflict, from the Balfour Declaration to the Oslo process, the origins of the Naqba to Israel's war on Hamas, and from Golda Meir to Edward Said.

Where Achcar burrows deeply to refute a single major myth about the cause and motive of the conflict, Shlaim deals mainly, though not exclusively, with the missed opportunities for peace, in keeping with his oft-repeated view that the existence of Israel is in itself legitimate and the continuation of the conflict is predominantly though not exclusively the result of Israel's commitment to continued occupation and the military option.

Stephen Marks



Book worm

THE FINKLER QUESTION

Howard Jacobson
Bloomsbury
£18.99

I think I should start by declaring an interest. I am a member of the Executive Committee of Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JJfP), which seems to be one of the groups that Jacobson is targeting in *The Finkler Question*.

Very briefly, to sum up the novel, *The Finkler Question* is about the friendship between three men, two of whom are Jewish and recently widowed. The third, who is not Jewish and has been unable to sustain a relationship, becomes obsessed by Jews, who in his eyes are represented by his friend Finkler – hence the book's title. The older Jewish friend, Libor, is staunchly pro-Israel, but Finkler at the beginning of the book is an anti-Zionist, who goes on to become involved with a group called 'The ASHamed Jews'.

The book is well-written and at times entertaining. But the sections about the 'ASHamed Jews' (which are a major part of the book, though many reviewers hardly mention them) are crude political propaganda – which is surely very detrimental to a work of fiction – rather than satire.

Jacobson portrays the 'ASHamed Jews' as self-righteous ideologues, but he has his own polemicised agenda, which is that of the Engage group, rightly described by Ran Greenstein, an Israeli-born academic based in South Africa, as 'useful idiots serving Israeli state propaganda' (despite claims to be liberal, anti-occupation etc). Engage have hailed Jacobson's Man Booker prize as a political victory. Of course I am biased against the novel, but it is such blatant political propaganda that it calls for a political response.

Jacobson makes no distinction between the different Jewish groups such as Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), JJfP, Jews Against Zionism (JAZ) or the Jewish Socialists. To him we are all 'anti-Zionists' and 'Ashamed Jews'. All of us reject entirely the latter label. On the contrary, we are asserting a universalist and prophetic Jewish identity of which we are proud and which this book repudiates. Instead, Jacobson retreats into tribal paranoia. The extreme paranoia about British antisemitism is worthy of satire itself.

True satire should contain some compassion and understanding for the characters, rather than the over-the-top fantasising in which Jacobson indulges. For instance, there's a founder-member of the 'ASHamed Jews' who spends his whole life sitting naked on a chair pulling at what remains of his foreskin in an attempt to reverse his circumcision. He does this all morning and then spends the rest of the day posting written accounts and photos of his efforts on his blog.

As well as such unrestrained flights, there are also caricatures of

actual people. A character called Tamara Krausz, who is clearly meant to be a satire on Jacqueline Rose, calls forth violent misogynist fantasies from Finkler: 'he knew what would happen if by some mischance or mutual misunderstanding they ended up in bed together and she screamed the dialectic of her anti-Zionism in his ear – he would come into her six or seven times and then kill her. Slice off her tongue and then slit through her throat.'

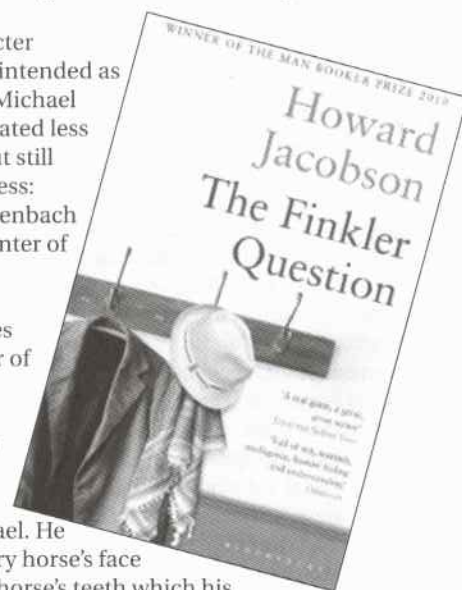
A character apparently intended as a satire on Michael Rosen is treated less violently but still with nastiness: 'Lonnie Eysenbach was a presenter of children's television programmes and a writer of school geography books from which he famously omitted Israel. He had a hungry horse's face and yellow horse's teeth which his producers were growing extremely anxious about. He was scaring the children.'

The book can be very inconsistent and illogical. At one point two non-Jewish characters are discussing the 'ASHamed Jews' in a very puzzled way, asking why Jews living in Britain should be ashamed of Israel's actions, which have nothing to do with them – then later on, at an 'ASHamed Jews' meeting, Finkler objects to the idea of a boycott of Israel, saying Israel is their 'family' – 'Whoever boycotted his own family?' So here it is clear that he thinks Jews are very much associated with Israel.

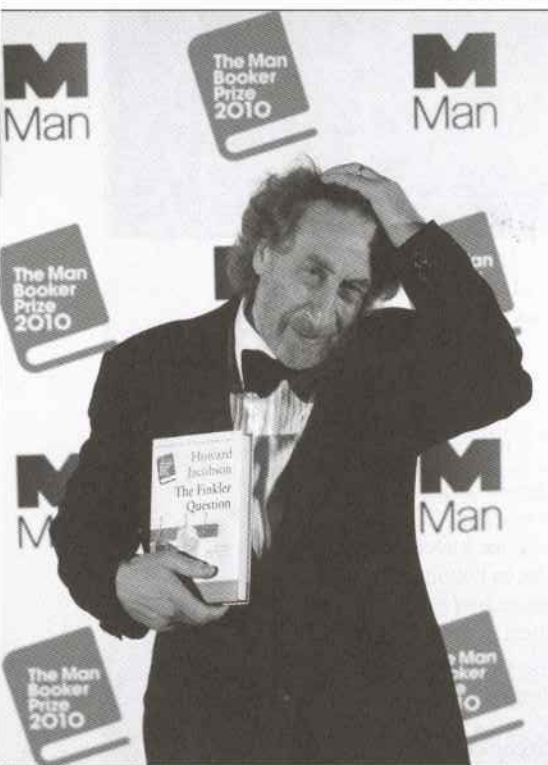
Against the background of Operation Cast Lead, the author writes of Finkler (with evident approval), 'Gaza didn't do it for him', and (again with authorial approval, indeed Finkler stops being a character and becomes a mouthpiece for Jacobson's political views) Finkler doesn't understand why Israel's response is called 'disproportionate'. (According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, in Gaza 762 civilians and 330 combatants were killed and these figures exclude 248 police officers; 13 Israelis were killed, including four civilians.)

I've recently read Gideon Levy's book, *The Punishment of Gaza*, which contains articles expressing his anguish over the atrocities committed during Cast Lead, and to read Jacobson after that is truly appalling. As I've said above, if a novelist decides to spoil his novel by including large chunks of political propaganda, then he issues an open invitation for his work to be judged in political terms.

Deborah Maccoby



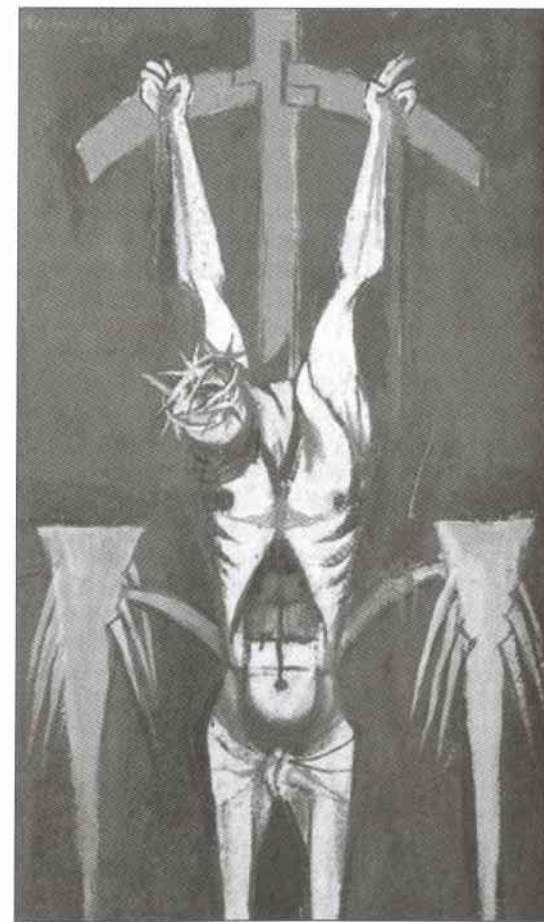
Howard Jacobson looking abashed at winning the Man Booker prize



The power of the cross

Curators will tell you that where you place a work of art, the space it inhabits, can assume as much importance as the work itself. Thus when the London Museum of Jewish Art – the Ben Uri Gallery – decided to mount *Cross Purposes*, an exhibition that traces 'the rapid evolution of the symbol of the Crucifixion from the sacred to the secular' the resonances were more powerful than had it been mounted by a non-Jewish institution. Benjamin Perl, a Ben Uri patron, said to *The Jewish Chronicle* (24th June 2010), 'From all the subjects from our heritage, why choose this? They are trying to play to the non-Jews. Why don't they call it a Christian museum?' He also went on to say, 'What type of material is this for our Jewish museum? This would never happen in New York or Jerusalem.'

I thanked my beloved London until I recalled that, years ago, on a visit to Spain, I bought a beautiful mono-print as a gift for my parents. It was a village in the snow. There in the distance was a church and on the snowclad roof a barely perceptible cross. It was never put up. My mother finally admitted she couldn't bear to have a crucifix up on her wall. We Jews live alongside Christianity but we do not invite it into our homes. We do not name our children Christopher or Christine or Mary, and however fanatically we support our national team, we will not have the flag of St George fluttering outside our windows or on our wing mirrors.



This exhibition features, among others, Graham Sutherland, Stanley Spencer, Eric Gill, Lee Miller, Craigie Aitchison, Tracey Emin and Marc Chagall. The accompanying texts are informative. Professor Ben Quash of Kings College London reminds us that 'depictions of Christ in the pre-Constantine world never showed him suffering ... his resurrection is victory over the power of death.' Many artists seem to play with the form using, as Professor Quash says, 'its extraordinary fecundity as a provocative as well as a consoling image.'

Its power to touch even the most secular is shown by Maggi Hambling's lonely little cross on a windswept East Anglian hill. Hambling confesses to 'doing a crucifix picture' every Good Friday in tribute to her observant Catholic mother. The crucifix becomes a gimmicky prop, with a Sunday Times cover from 1998 showing Raquel Welch mounted on a cross and, of course, in a bikini. K-Fed and Bobby Brown (respective husbands of Britney Spears and Whitney Houston) are illustrated as crucified figures in a celeb magazine feature from 2007. Here is an unjust persecution (or unfair media exposure) distilled into one instantly recognisable image. I find it disturbing in the same way as I feel about the words 'holocaust' and 'rape' becoming text-speak and used thoughtlessly.

Upstairs is the Crucifixion in the Holocaust context. Here is Graham Sutherland's painting and Marc Chagall's drawing. Here also is Emmanuel Levy's 'The Passion', painted in 1942 before the full horror was universally known. An orthodox Jew is nailed to the cross wearing his prayer shawl and with 'Jude' pinned above his head. Levy flings this Christian symbol of all human suffering back through the centuries of blood libels and persecution. I would have happily held it up as a welcoming banner for Jonny Ratzinger on his recent tour and replaced 'Jude' with 'Homosexual.'

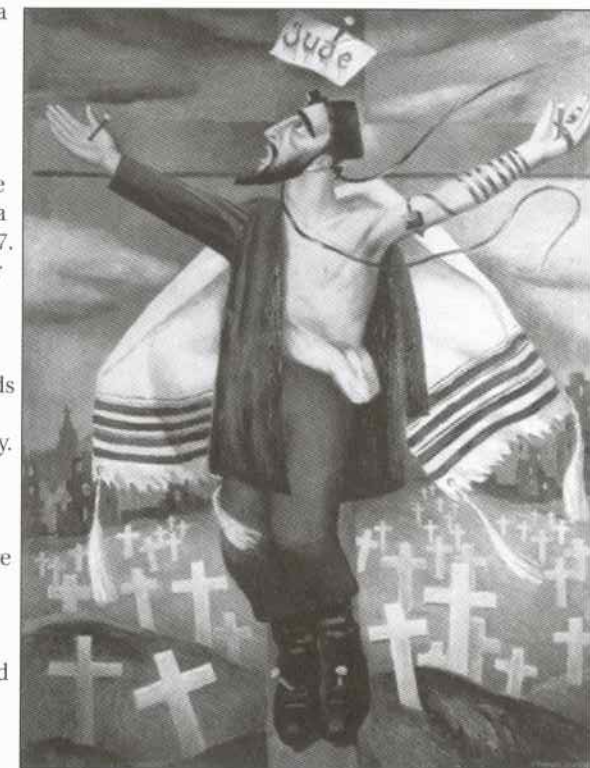
I travelled home with the mental imprint of two exhibits. Both, I believe, are an articulate reply to the critics of this exhibition. The first was Emmanuel Levy's painting and the second was one of the infamous photographs of the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison. The photograph is coarse, as if taken on a camera phone. It shows a hooded figure made to stand on a box. A soldier stands casually on guard at the foot. The prisoner's hands are open-palmed and wired up to electric cables. His arms are outstretched. There are no beautiful curves. We do not see the angular grace of his upturned jaw. He is forlorn and humiliated. Crucified.

Ruth Lukom

CROSS PURPOSES

Shock and Contemplation in Images of the Crucifixion
Ben Uri Gallery, London

Opposite: Crucifixion by Graham Sutherland.
Below: The Passion by Emmanuel Levy.



Cross Purposes ended on 28th November 2010. For details of current and future exhibitions, and for opening times, contact Ben Uri Gallery, 108A Boundary Road, Off Abbey Road, St Johns Wood, London NW8 8RH. Tel: 020 7604 3991. Email info@benuri.org.uk. Website: www.benuri.org.uk

Raf Salkie
rediscovers a
smooth talking
chronicler of
Europe's
heartbreaking
history



Lets hear it for Jewish wide boys, and one in particular who combined smooth talking chicanery with political commitment and enormous courage. Earlier this year a massive biography of Arthur Koestler appeared (Michael Scammell's *Koestler: The Indispensable Intellectual*, Faber, £25). I didn't read it (books with 689 pages are a bad idea), but enjoyed two very different reviews. One, typically brilliant from Neal Ascherson, came in the *London Review of Books*, and the other was a sneery dismissal in *The Guardian* by Tibor Fischer. Fischer's contained the delightful sentence: 'In any café in Budapest you can find a hand-waving, self-

promoting smart-arse like Koestler.' Both reviews are easy to find on the web.

I read many of Koestler's novels and essays in my youth and so decided to try his two early volumes of autobiography. *Arrow in the Blue* (Vintage, £9.99) and *The Invisible Writing* (Vintage, £10.99). I also read Koestler's account of escaping across France from the Nazis and their French sympathisers in 1940, *Scum of the Earth* (Eland, £12.99). These books are the closest thing to essential reading that I have come across for some time – especially the last one. The glory and the heartbreaking failure of the European left hit you in the face. I could only read them in short chunks because they are so intense.

So who was Arthur Koestler? Born in 1905 into a Hungarian Jewish family, he was too young to fight in the Great War. At university in Vienna he joined a Zionist drinking fraternity, and later went to Palestine as a follower of the revisionist Jabotinsky. Returning to Europe, he worked as a science journalist in Berlin and joined the Communist Party. By the late 1930s his experiences in the Soviet Union and Spain had made him a bitter critic of Communism. His 1940 novel, *Darkness at Noon*, about the Stalinist show trials, was very influential. It was published in France in 1945 as *Le Zéro et l'Infini*, sold hundreds of thousands of copies and played a large part in the French CP's electoral failure.

Narrowly avoiding being shot by Franco's thugs in Spain, by 1940 Koestler was in France, along with most of the surviving socialists and communists from fascist Europe. He was taken by the French police to a southern prison camp, Le Vernet, near Toulouse. Koestler was jailed for months with progressives from fascist Spain,

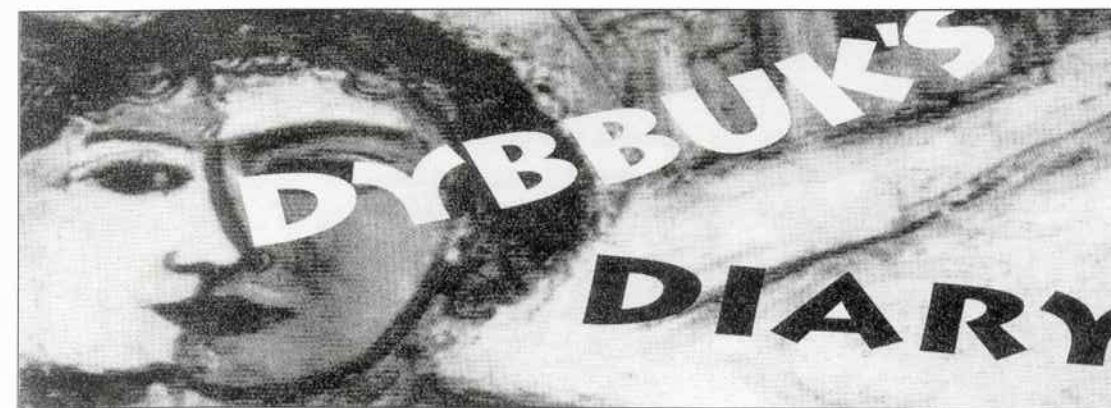
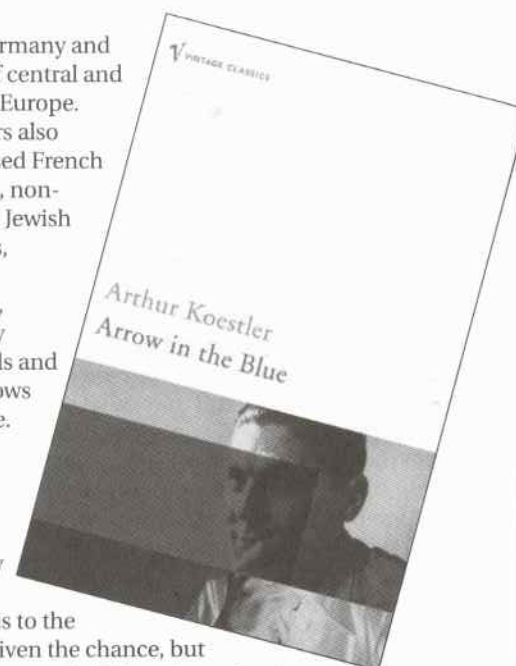
Italy, Germany and much of central and Eastern Europe.

Prisoners also comprised French activists, non-political Jewish refugees, Russian émigrés, ordinary criminals and God knows who else. Most of them would have willingly fought the Nazis to the death, given the chance, but were left to rot in filth and squalor. As so often when I study powerful elites, I cannot decide if their cruelty or stupidity is more shocking.

Not long afterwards, most of the detainees were dead at the hands of the Nazis or the Vichy French. Koestler survived because he was, by his own admission, a silvery-tongued rogue. During chaotic months on the run, he talked his way into the French foreign legion – a brilliant ploy which protected him from arrest and also got him some decent food and lodging. Eventually he reached England via Portugal. By the time I read his books in the 1970s he was best known for writing about psychics and the paranormal. To his credit, he had played a large role to help end capital punishment in Britain and in championing prison education. Each year the Koestler awards for prisoners' art draw thousands of entries.

As well as their political lessons, the three books contain superb comedy, including a scheme to claim part of the North Pole for the Jewish community in Palestine. Read them, laugh, cry – and tell me how we lefties can avoid being defeated like that again.

Let me finish with a quick plug for another splendid true story, *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers (Hamish Hamilton, £18.99). Abdulrahman Zeitoun grew up on an island off Syria which most maps do not show, and was running a decorating business in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina struck five years ago. For several weeks he used his canoe and Koestleresque trickery, commitment and courage to rescue survivors. Zeitoun kept in phone contact with his wife and children, who were far away staying with relatives – until one day the calls stopped. After several agonising weeks, presuming him dead, his wife found him in a prison where he had been left to rot by a callous succession of vicious National Guards and government bureaucrats. Again, which is worse, the stupidity or the cruelty? You be the judge.



ISRAEL? YOU'RE WELCOME

Whatever people say about Israel's Hasbara (PR work), you can count on the team at Ben Gurion airport to give visitors a taste of the real Israel. Prof Donna Shalala, 69, was Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Clinton administration. Now president of Miami University, she was in Israel last summer with a delegation of university heads opposed to the academic boycott on a visit sponsored by the American Jewish Congress (AJC). Members met Shimon Peres, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, and Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. After the official visit, Prof Shalala, who was born in the US to Lebanese immigrant parents, and has visited Israel many times, stayed on for a couple of days.

When she arrived at the airport they did not recognise her as a VIP, but did notice her Arabic surname. As a result she was, she says, detained for 2.5 hours, and asked invasive and humiliating personal questions. She managed to board the flight to the US, but was deeply offended by her treatment. The AJC says it had notified the airport authorities of who Prof Shalala was, and expected her to get VIP treatment. But whoever heard of Israeli officialdom taking notice of what Diaspora Jews tell them?

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

Talking of airports, the London Borough of Barnet has a rich aviation history, having hosted Hendon Aerodrome, de Havilland and Handley Page. But residents were surprised when the council announced plans to model its services on airlines like RyanAir and EasyJet. Residents would get a basic service, but 'extras' would have to be paid for. First of the 'frills' to go would be wardens in old people's sheltered housing.

Barnet used to seem more giggles than Biggles. former Labour Mayor Ellis Hillman was president of the Lewis Carroll society and a member of the Flat Earth Society, as well as a *Jewish Socialist* reader. Tory councillor and Likudnik Brian Gordon made the news with his Purim party portrayal of Nelson Mandela. Fellow Tory Brian Coleman, who became Mayor last year, has inspired a Facebook group, 'Mr Toad must go!', possibly alluding to his love of motoring.

The councillor was caught by a speed camera in Borehamwood, in 2006. St Albans magistrates added three points to the nine on his licence, fined him £300 and banned him from driving for six months. But Cllr Coleman leads a busy life, doubling as Greater London Assembly member, and honouring invites to many a charity dinner. By April 2007 he had spent £10,000 on taxi fares. By August that year he

had spent one third of all cab expenses for the Mayor and GLA members, and the following year he accounted for half the total. On one day alone he ran up a cab bill of £656.

Tory leader Lynne Hillan has voted herself a 55% increase, to over £54,000 per year, and other cabinet members' allowances practically doubled to nearly £35,000. Brian Coleman receives £114,322 a year in allowances – £34,000 for sitting on Barnet council, plus £53,439 for sitting in the London Assembly and another £26,883 for being chairman of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. Brian says he is worth it. A lot of people disagree, not least council workers facing a pay freeze and job losses.

HOOVERED

World War II flier Howard Zinn took advantage of the GI Bill to study at New York University after the war. J Edgar Hoover's FBI started studying him. Zinn, best-known for *A People's History of the United States*, died in January 2010, and was the subject of many tributes (see JS60). Now the FBI has released the 423-page dossier it kept on him.

The first 21 pages mention his employment as a shipping clerk with Associated Transport, the Stutz Textile Company, and Lerner Shops, his work with the New York City Housing Authority, and involvement with various left-wing groups. Mentioning 15 confidential informants, the reports acknowledge that half of them provided no useful information.

In 1949, Zinn was vice chairman of Brooklyn branch of the American Labor Party. An internal FBI memo dated 9th March 1949 reported that an informer inside the ALP said Zinn had divulged in 1948 that he was a member of the Communist Party and regularly attended party meetings. In 1953, two FBI agents asked Zinn. He told them he was not now, nor had he ever been, a member of the Communist Party. He was not hauled before the Un-American Activities Committee, but surveillance continued following Zinn's involvement with civil rights and anti-war movements.

A document from the Boston FBI said a 'source', was outraged over Zinn's comment at a protest that the US had become a 'police state' and that prosecutions of Black Panther Party members were creating 'political prisoners'. Before he died, Howard Zinn said of the FBI: 'They don't like social movements. They work for the establishment ... to keep things as they are. And they want to frighten and chill the people who are trying to change things. So the best defense against them and resistance against them is simply to keep on fighting back, to keep on exposing them.'