

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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Membership Secretary
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JEWISH SOCIALIST

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM

Will people's power turn the tables in Israel and Palestine?



- Moshé Machover on the Arab Spring
- Afif Safieh on Palestine's hopes
- plus
- Multiculturalism under attack
- Dreyfus re-examined
- Jews and boxing

Few tears will have been shed for the death of Osama Bin Laden. He was responsible for thousands of innocent deaths. America and its allies killed thousands more in their supposed "war on terror" before finding Bin Laden living under the noses of the Pakistani security and intelligence services. US special forces were instructed to kill their prey, rather than bring him in for questioning, and trial.

When Israeli agents captured a much bigger criminal, Adolf Eichmann, in 1960, their orders were to bring him back from Argentina, not out of excessive legality (it was a kidnap, after all), nor concern for Eichmann's rights, but because the Israeli government wanted to put the Nazi on public trial, and in Jerusalem. It is odd that the US authorities, after so many "extraordinary renditions" and Guantanamo detentions, lacked confidence in their own justice system.

The assassination of Bin Laden may mark the end of an era, not for its effect on al-Qaida, which was already waning, but for the bigger events with which it coincides. Across the Arab world, mass struggles are bringing down governments and confounding strategies. It isn't a homogenous movement, nor is its outcome assured. In Egypt, trade unionists and young women boldly came to the fore, sidelining the old Muslim Brotherhood, but the army still holds the fort. Rebels in Libya are given western support. The West's Saudi allies encourage rebellion in Syria while sending

tanks to crush the people in Bahrain.

But the era of the "strong man" ruler has gone, and with it that of the small, well-funded terror group substituting its outrages for the popular will. People taking to the streets have discovered their own strength, whether in Tunisia, Tahrir Square, or Teheran.

Fatah and Hamas have decided to work together, partly because Abbas lost a backer in Mubarak and Hamas feared losing Syria's Assad. The opening of Egypt's Gaza border was another result of the Arab Spring. But above all it was popular demonstrations in Gaza and the West Bank which demanded that Palestinian leaders unite for the common cause.

On 15th May, Israel's Independence Day, the world saw crowds of Palestinians trying to return to their homeland, and heard the word "Nakba" (catastrophe), which the Israeli government tried to ban.

Hundreds entered the occupied Golan Heights. It was a costly victory for the Palestinians, with dozens injured and up to 15 dead, but a victory nevertheless, reminiscent of when Jewish "illegal immigrants" confronted the British in Palestine.

Admitting an "intelligence failure", Israeli leaders, and the US State Department blamed the mass border demonstrations on a Syrian diversion. But come September, the long overdue declaration of Palestinian Independence could bring the Third Intifada as well as international recognition. The real failure of intelligence – and

humanity – is Netanyahu's inability to acknowledge legitimate Palestinian aspirations, or to grasp that Palestinian unity, endangering present Israeli policy, could also be the opportunity to change that policy. Instead of crooked deals with weak leaders, backed by military bullying, it could offer the more difficult but worthwhile task of achieving a genuine peace with the Palestinian people. But maybe the current Israeli leadership can think no further than another war in which they count on America and the Jewish Diaspora for support. It is time they were dissuaded of both assumptions.

There is another Israel: the Sderot residents who demonstrated against escalation on the Gaza border, demanding instead an end to the siege – and negotiations; the Israeli citizens who joined Palestinians in Hebron on 8th May to plan a joint campaign against the occupation; and those Israelis who consider the settlements as a burden, on top of economic and social policies they are having to bear. But if these Israelis find their voice, will the established Jewish media let them be heard?

Here, too, a conflict is going on: one we can't avoid. As students, teachers, carers, public service workers and professionals, or NHS users, many Jewish people find themselves with others in the front line, and yet facing moneyed pillars of the community who are prominent figures on the other side. We may need to re-examine what we mean by "community".

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Greens in the firing line

A sure sign of the Green Party's growing political profile, and its increasingly significant role in social justice campaigns, is that they are now in the firing line of organised pro-Israel campaigners. A pro-Zionist group has been formed within the Green Party called Greens Engage. It is closely linked to the Engage website and other pro-Israel blogs. This group has aimed at withdrawing the Green Party from the Stop The War Coalition (STWC) – which they dismiss as antisemitic; they want to repeal Green Party policy supporting the Boycott, Disinvestments and Sanctions campaign (BDS) launched by Palestinian civil society campaigners; and they would like the Green Party to adopt instead a clear pro-Israel position.

The party's representative on the STWC

steering group is Green Left activist, Joseph Healy, also a member of the Green Party's International Committee. He played a major role advancing the motion on BDS that was adopted by the Green Party conference. As he result, he says that he has "been at the sharp end of the bile emanating from a small but determined pro-Zionist group. They are effectively what the 'Labour Friends of Israel' are to the Labour Party and there are equivalents in other UK parties. The usual methods are pursued – accusations of antisemitism combined with furious condemnation of any in the party who do not pursue their line, including Green Party MP Caroline Lucas, when she supported the anti-war protesters in Brighton who damaged an arms plant sending materials to Israel."

Healy notes that Greens Engage have been using the controversial EUMC definition of antisemitism to make accusations of antisemitism against those in the Green Party supporting justice for the Palestinians. He sees a parallel process in Australia, "with the pillorying of the Green mayor who attempted to have a BDS policy accepted by her local council in New South Wales. Not only was she attacked by the usual suspects but also by the national leadership of the Greens."

Healy concludes: "Israel and its supporters are busily attempting to undermine genuine support for the Palestinians and opposition to Zionism in all UK political parties. The Green Party is only the latest example, and some of us have got the scars to prove it, but we will continue to fight on."

75 here we come

Wilton's music hall – the world's oldest surviving grand music hall – is hosting celebrations in October to mark the 75th anniversary of that milestone in anti-fascist history, the Battle of Cable Street.

On Sunday 2nd October events will run at Wilton's from midday until 10 in the evening, with music, poetry, stalls, speakers and, in the afternoon, a book launch of five Cable Street related books. These include *Battle for the East End: Jewish responses to fascism in the 1930s* written by David Rosenberg, one of the editors of *Jewish Socialist*.

Two days later Wilton's will host the first public showing of the film *Cable Street to Brick*



Lane being made by Phil Maxwell and Hazuan Hashim. The film commemorates the events of 1936, but also locates them in the context of the ongoing battle against racism and intolerance.

Money to make the film is being raised through the labour movement; JS readers can contribute by sending cheques payable to: Wilton's Music Hall Trust c/o 20 Moravian St, Bethnal Green, London E2 0NJ.

Champion of immigrant workers

Jayaben Desai, who died at the age of 77 last December, was the inspirational leader of a groundbreaking strike at the Grunwick mail order film processing factory in Willesden, north west London in 1977. The workforce was comprised mainly of women, many of them recent immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, worked very long hours for low wages.

As they unionised and struck, other local unions, especially postal workers, took up their cause. Then miners from Yorkshire came down to London to show their solidarity and on one memorable day the TUC mobilised 20,000 workers from various unions outside the

factory. Ultimately the strike was lost but the Grunwick workers had shown that unity was possible between male and female workers and across ethnic lines.

A few years earlier, workforces had allowed employers to divide them along ethnic lines. At the final Grunwick Strike meeting Jayaben Desai said: "We have shown that workers like us, new to these shores, will never accept being treated without dignity or respect. We have shown that white workers will support us."



Can you believe it?

Four Jewish organisations in Britain levelled charges of hypocrisy at the institution behind a conference encouraging people to convey positive images of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

"We Believe in Israel" was staged in London on 15th May by the British Israel Communications & Research Centre (BICOM), featuring speakers from Conservative, Lib Dem and Labour Friends of Israel.

On the same weekend, pro-Palestinian groups were protesting opposite Downing Street for an end to Israel's siege of Gaza, and a rally in Jerusalem marked the Nakba

(catastrophe) of 1948.

The four organisations – Jews for Justice for Palestinians, the Jewish Socialists' Group, Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods (J-BIG) and the radical diaspora group Jewdas – warned that the event would be addressed by apologists for Netanyahu's administration, who would paint a distorted picture of the role of media, of the campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions, and deny well-founded allegations that Israel abuses international law.

JFJP spokesperson, Diana Neslen, said: "This conference intends to encourage support for whatever Israel does. If

people really want to help Israel, they must speak out against its government's policies and withdraw their support until the occupation ends."

David Rosenberg, of the JSG, said: "Who are the 'we' who 'believe in Israel'? Britain's Jews are more divided on Israel than at any time since the state was created. Many Jews here cannot reconcile their belief in human rights and democracy, and their opposition to racism, with the appalling treatment of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. They know it is wrong."

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, from J-BIG, said: "They are going to present a hypocritical view of

democracy by campaigning for Israel as 'a Jewish and democratic state', which excludes the non-Jews under Israeli rule."

Jewdas spokesperson Joseph Finlay said: "This conference wishes to found a new religion, worship of the state of Israel. Jews, it proclaims, needn't worry about pesky things like Torah or ethics any more – all they need to do is 'believe' in the Jewish state. Like all good new religions, this one has taboos, the chief one being 'don't mention the occupation'. Just send in your money, keep shtum, and bow down to the state of Israel, the golden calf of our times."

Paul Collins

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FIGHTING SPIRIT

Miriam Karlin would have loved the irony that national papers reported her death on the day the UK's business secretary warned that unions faced possible bans on public sector strikes. Karlin's catchphrase from the TV series *The Rag Trade* was "Everybody out!" and no one at the GMB conference would have been surprised to hear her voice. After all, she once starred as the chicken-soup-making ghost in Paul Mendelson's *So Haunt Me*.

Though Karlin came from a wealthy home in Hampstead, members of her extended family died in Auschwitz and her barrister father Harry Samuels wrote books about the labour movement. The comedy show, based in Fenner Fashions, was co-written by Ronald Wolfe, cousin of sitcom antihero Warren Mitchell, and Ronald Chesney, whose grandfather Moishe was a Bund activist in Russia. Karlin was a feisty character actor on both the small and large screens, as well as the boards, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, and she

was the first woman to be given the title role in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*.

Following in her revered dad's leftist footsteps, Karlin worked hard for the actors' union Equity and the Anti-Nazi League. And, despite physical frailties, such as eating disorders, back problems and leg pain, she marched with CND and striking miners, joined the Neuropathy Trust and wrote for the assisted suicide group Exit. Even when diagnosed with cancer and losing part of her tongue, Karlin appeared during recent years in the films *Children of Men* and *Flashbacks of a Fool*, with Daniel Craig.

Karlin's passing at 85 leaves a legacy of fighting spirit to inspire us, like another Jewish activist, Claire Rayner, who before her death threatened to haunt David Cameron if he ruined the health service. Sisters and brothers, let's drink a toast to a pair who maintained a radical Jewish feminist tradition.

L'chaim!

Paul Collins

The editors of *Jewish Socialist* mourn the death, on 17th May 2011, of **Lesley Misrahi**, socialist, pacifist and campaigner for a better world. We also remember with love her daughter Esther Misrahi, who died in 2008 and husband and Jewish Socialist activist, **Bernard Misrahi** who died in 2003.

We also mourn the death of the courageous Jewish feminist activist and Women Against Fundamentalism campaigner, **Helen Lowe**, who died suddenly on 12th June 2011.

CHANGE THE WORLD



TARABUT is a joint Arab-Jewish organisation struggling against the occupation and inequality, and for social justice within Israel itself. Its name means "come together" or "associate" in Hebrew and Arabic.

Tarabut was formed in October 2006 in the aftermath of the campaign against the War in Lebanon, and has several hundred active members. It has been involved in several campaigns, such as fighting against house demolitions and discrimination of Arab residents of Wadi Ara;

supporting the general students' strike in Israeli universities; campaigning against the deportation of migrant workers and refugees; fighting for recognition of local trade unions; campaigning

against the eviction and dispossession of poor inhabitants of Tel Aviv's popular neighbourhoods in the interests of real-estate developers – and that of the Arab residents of Jaffa, who faced combined problems of gentrification and discrimination.

Its members come from very different backgrounds: long-time activists against the occupation, activists involved in projects against unequal access to education, Arab activists involved in campaigns for empowerment and equal rights for the Arab minority within Israel, experienced activists against the discrimination against Oriental Jews and the delegitimisation of Arab culture, young refuseniks, feminists involved in local campaigns for women's empowerment, students

Killed for crossing boundaries

Two devoted activists for Palestinian rights were murdered recently by elements within the Palestinian community – one in the West Bank, one in Gaza. Juliano Mer Khamis was an actor and director born to a Jewish mother and a Palestinian father committed to socialism and a common future for Palestinians and Israelis. He was shot in Jenin, where he had become well known for his innovative work in the Freedom Theatre and his activism against the occupation. Israeli journalist Amira Hass described him as an "angry man beset by conflicting yet complimentary identities" who was "born to two cultures and chose to live in both". He was "an artist and a Palestinian and a left winger and a Jew" who "embodied the idea of a binational resistance movement".

Vittorio Arrigoni, a devoted activist of the International Solidarity Movement with the Palestinian people, was murdered in the Gaza Strip by a Salafite Muslim group. The joint Arab-Jewish initiative, Tarabut, commented: "Whoever murdered Vittorio does not struggle to end the Occupation. Whoever wishes to cleanse the Gaza Strip of volunteers aims to remove solidarity, humanity, and leave the Palestinian population



more exposed, more vulnerable to the shells and bombs of the Occupation forces. We should not forget the covert – and at times overt – collaboration of Palestinian right-wing zealots with various dictatorships in our region and with the Occupation regime."

Tarabut's spokesperson added: "We do not know enough today to tell what threads bind the Palestinian right-wing that dons religious garb in its fight against leftist activists, against women struggling for their rights, against social and cultural openness – to the dictatorships in the Middle East and the Israeli occupation-and-dispossession regime. Perhaps time will tell. But we do know enough to realize that our place is with our comrades and friends, women and men fighting against the Occupation and for a democratic Palestinian society."

For more information on Tarabut, see Change the World below.

campaigning to defend public higher education against creeping privatisation and more.

Tarabut seeks to bring together people, not organisations, to think together without dogmatic certainties, and to work for social change; to forge alliances that bring together the dispossessed and the oppressed in Israel through involvement in social struggles.

You can support Tarabut by sending a cheque, made payable to "Chiburim le-Peula Meshutefet", to Tarabut, PO Box 39724, Tel Aviv 61397 or transfer donations to "Chiburim le-Peula Meshutefet", Bank HaPoalim, Einstein Branch (No 778), Account No 436411 (12-778-436411), IBAN: IL02-0127-7800-0000-0436-411, Swift code: poalilit.

Website: www.tarabut.info Email: tarabut@gmail.com

UNFOLDING REVOLUTION

There is confusion among socialists about Libya, and this is partly for understandable reasons. Given the despair of the Libyan people, I would not be too critical of them for calling on the so-called "international community" for help. But the "international community" is itself an ideological construct, a term used to conflate the US-led global hierarchy of states with global public opinion. There is world public opinion – civil society – which has real humanitarian concerns, and then there is the so-called "international community", which is the *nom de guerre* of the US and its followers.

Why did they go for Libya and not other places? Firstly, there is the question of oil. The quantity in Libya is next to nothing compared to Saudi Arabia, but it is the best oil you can find, particularly for aircraft fuel. Secondly, they have been asked to intervene, which provides them with an ideological and political cover: nobody asked them in Egypt or in Yemen; nobody even asked them in Bahrain.

Thirdly, although Gaddafi's Libya ceased to be a "rogue state" from around 2003, there is some truth in the claim that, from the standpoint of the imperialists, Gaddafi is still a rogue. Although he was "our friend" until very recently, he could never be fully trusted, as he is unstable in every possible manner – including mentally.

It would be foolish to predict exactly how things will pan out in Libya. There might be a situation where it is divided between east and west and there is a civil war of attrition lasting for some time. Or it could end one way or the other. But, to the extent that there was a popular uprising, I think the people have lost ownership of this process and thus the revolution is defeated.

This is not so in other parts of the Arab world. There are still positive dynamics in Syria, for example. Syria is the second most important Arab country after Egypt. If Egypt had, by virtue of its large population, been the leader of the Arab people up to the time when it made peace with the US and Israel, then Syria is now the claimant to this role.

Events in Japan and Britain have squeezed the reporting of Yemen, but things are going forward there too. And few people mention Bahrain, which is in a catastrophic situation. What some feared would happen in Libya is happening right now. There the regime – aided by forces it invited from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states – has actually invaded the hospitals. So if you are wounded on a demonstration and taken to hospital you are likely to be killed. We are seeing a massacre of unimaginable cruelty.

Bahrain is the source of the pearls of Arabia. Now these forces have demolished the symbolic

pearl in Pearl Square, where enormous demonstrations took place. This is a huge insult to the people who occupied the square. Here there are signs of the revolutionary process receding, while Yemen and Syria are still going forward. This is no coincidence. It can be traced back to social structure.

Yemen is the product of a forced union of the north and south – two areas with a vastly different social composition. North Yemen is tribal and backward in its economic and social development. South Yemen is mostly made up of the former British colony of Aden. Politically it was also very developed. For a time there was a self-styled socialist republic here, which was then overthrown by an internal coup and external forces from other countries and from North Yemen. This localised would-be socialism had some very democratic ideas. In the heyday of socialist revolution in South Yemen it said and did a lot of things which went beyond Stalinism. There was a real struggle which took place there between Stalin-style communists and real communists. Of course, they were limited as to what they could achieve and in the end they were defeated. But in terms of its political development, South Yemen was probably the most advanced country in the Arab world. While South Yemen is now merged with the very different North Yemen, we can still see this influence of working class struggle and organisation today. We see a radical intelligentsia and the heritage of a well-organised workers' movement making its mark on the events unfolding there.

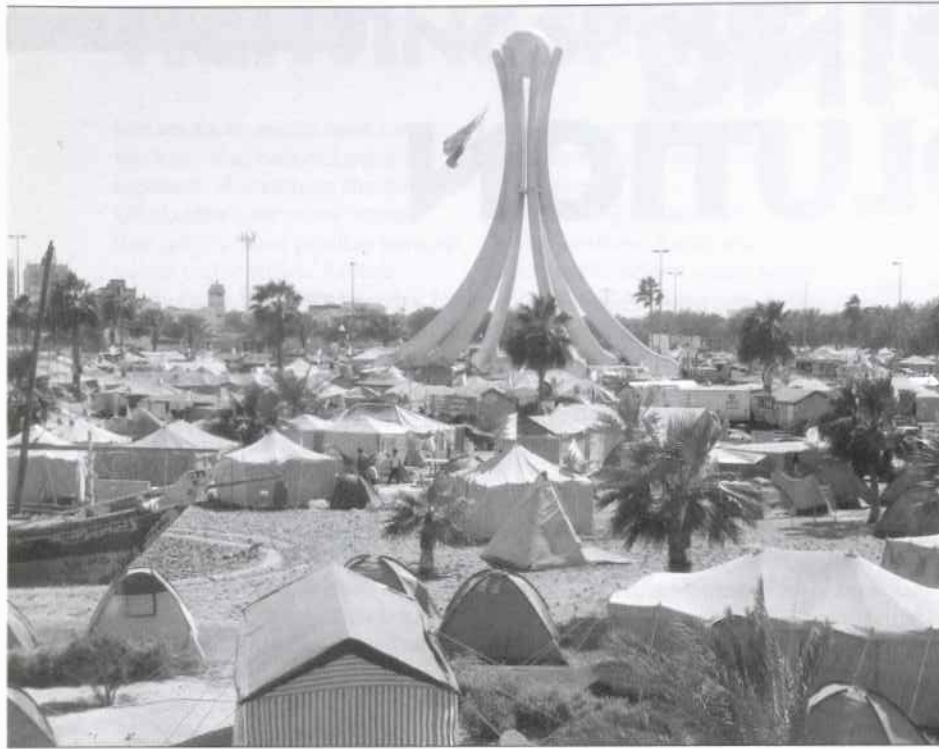
There were only a few countries in which there was a sizeable working class movement in the Arab world beyond South Yemen. The largest Communist Party, which was highly Stalinised, was in Iraq. But when the monarchy was overthrown in 1958 it was the only party to emerge intact from the underground. The coup to remove the monarchy was a military one, but on the civilian political scene the Communist Party almost had a monopoly. Of course, this was wasted because of its policies. I am old enough to remember when Anastas Mikoyan came to "advise" the Iraqi Communist Party following the fall of the monarchy in 1958-59. He actually told them not to rock the boat and to maintain the Soviet policy of "peaceful co-existence" with the west – a revolutionary policy in Iraq would have undermined this and was thus to be avoided. This marked the beginning of the decline of the CP, and what remains now is really shameful. It is not even an anti-imperialist force, let alone a force for socialism.

MOSHÉ MACHOVER explores short and long term expectations of the continuing uprisings in the Arab world

IN BAHRAIN, IF YOU ARE WOUNDED ON A DEMONSTRATION AND TAKEN TO HOSPITAL, YOU ARE LIKELY TO BE KILLED. WE ARE SEEING A MASSACRE OF UNIMAGINABLE CRUELTY.

This article is edited from a longer talk given at a dayschool organised by the Communist Party of Great Britain in March 2011, and the text was first published in *Weekly Worker* on 31st March 2011

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE US-LED IMPERIALIST ORDER,
THE MIDDLE EAST IS NO LONGER SOMETHING
YOU CAN REGARD AS A SAFE ZONE.



Protest camp in Pearl Square, Bahrain

The third country where there was a strong movement, albeit a Stalinist one, was Syria. Syria had a fairly sizeable Communist Party led by the Kurd, Khalid Bakdash. It is a very mixed country with quite a lot of Christians, Jews, Armenians and all sorts. Again, because of its Stalinist policies, the CP declined. But, once again, traditions have been retained which survive to this day.

Qatar is a genuine exception in all of this. It is a very rich place and its ruling family is playing a clever game. There have been calls for demonstrations there too, but few people have turned up. There is opposition, of course, as there is everywhere. But, right now, business is business – and part of the business of the Qatari ruling family is Al-Jazeera. They are actually profiting from the Arab revolution and – for the moment at least – they do not feel threatened by it. Whether they will succumb to it or not remains to be seen. As for Al-Jazeera itself, in many ways it presages Arab unity in the form suited to the 21st century, with Arab workers from all over the region.

It would be foolish to prophesy. Things are still unfolding and numerous options are presenting themselves. But it would also be foolish to expect too much. I think it is unlikely that we will see even a progressive kind of bourgeois democratic regime emerge, or some kind of social democratic arrangement. These things do not come about with just one push. This revolutionary movement is only the first of a whole historical process, which is only in its infancy.

So even the most realistically optimistic scenario is not for all the old regimes to be overthrown and replaced by liberal, social democratic administrations. It will probably be far short of this. But the longer-term effects will be more profound. The world has changed already in many ways. First of all, from the point of view of the US-led imperialist order, the Middle East is no longer something you can regard as a safe zone. The whole policy of the US in the region – the most strategically important in the world, due to oil and

the Suez Canal – was based on the fact that, while US policy-makers were clearly aware of the discontent of the masses, they believed in the ability of the rulers to keep them under control through repression.

This revolutionary wave was not without previous tremors – even in Libya. In 1995, for example, there was a local uprising in Benghazi, no coincidence, of course. It was drowned in blood. But there have been uprisings in every one of these countries – protests that the regimes were able to suppress. But that period is now over. Nothing is the same. This is also reflected in Americans' lack of confidence in relation to the unfolding events. They are no longer sure of restraining this region. With Syria's exception, all of the countries gripped by revolution are allies of the United States and, at least implicitly, of Israel.

Although, in the Egyptian and Tunisian demonstrations, you did not see many slogans such as "Down with the United States" or "Down with Israel", this was because the protests were dealing with the immediate task at hand – overthrowing the regime. If you actually watch journalists talking to ordinary people, as Al-Jazeera did, what becomes clear is they were not simply protesting about unemployment or corruption in the various regimes, but about the fact that those like Mubarak are lackeys of imperialism, and the shameful conditions of the peace treaty with Israel imposed on them.

When you hear interviews with Syrians, though, they assert that one thing they do not mind about the regime is that it is opposed to the US and does not toe the Israeli line. It is hated because of repression and the state of the economy, but not for foreign policy. It is important to observe what people are saying, rather than just what is on their placards.

The Arab world is more like a single nation divided into sub-nationalities. If you want a rough analogy, then I would say it is like Italy, where there is the Italian nation, but within it there are the Sicilians, Tuscans, etc, who are akin to sub-nationalities. In fact, in the period of World War I, when there was the promise of uniting the Arab world, explicit comparisons were made with Italy. Many were arguing that the Arab world should be treated like Italy under Garibaldi. The British actually mobilised support against Turkey using this very promise of Arab unity. Of course, this was later betrayed.

If you spoke to Arab comrades in the 1980s and 1990s then they would say that Arab unity was a lost cause, it was not going to happen, there was too much divergence. But now, if you speak to them, it is clear that the idea is back on the agenda. Today, one of the attributes of a nation is that it is a people who get their news from the same television station. In this respect, all the Arab world is one nation. The rulers know this and, indeed, some have even blamed Al-Jazeera for the revolution, which is, of course, exaggerated, but it reveals a truth.

It is not simply the same language, culture and history which is important. It is also an economic need. This should be a very important consideration, especially for Marxists. Currently divided up into one big state, a few medium-sized states and then a lot of

mini-states, the Arab world does not make economic sense. The distribution of the population and natural resources is skewed and uneven. The riches of Libya and Saudi Arabia, for example, could finance the extensive development which is needed in a country like Egypt. A country like Syria has much fertile land which is underused. The dispersal of all these human and natural resources means that it makes no sense to keep them apart. The first step could be something along the lines of the European Union – first and foremost an economic union – but without the reactionary agenda.

Unfortunately, it would seem that the Arab bourgeoisie is incapable of actually leading this transformation. Achieving such a union requires the mobilisation and leadership of the working class. The bourgeoisie has tried to do this – and not just in Egypt and Syria. Even Gaddafi had a Mickey Mouse project for Arab unification.

The bourgeoisie, of course, could achieve Arab unity by its own means, but I think this is doubtful. Recent historical experience suggests the reason. The United Arab Republic, for example, was initiated by the Syrian bourgeoisie, not Nasser and

the Egyptian bourgeoisie. They thought it would protect their interests and it would be better to work together with others of their class interest in the Arab world. But in the end the Syrian bourgeoisie was not so keen because it found it was being competitively undermined by the much larger and more powerful Egyptian bourgeoisie. It was too bad for business.

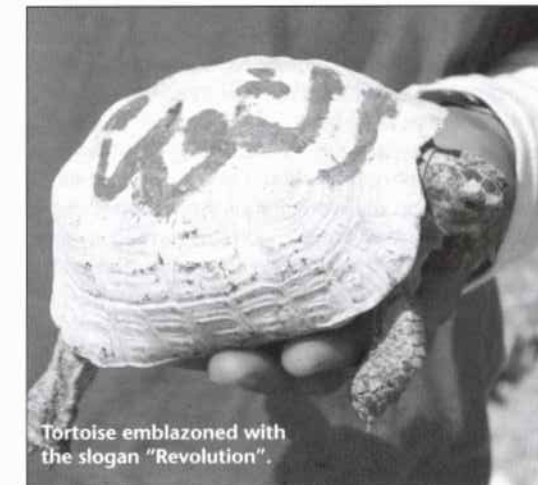
This is a dilemma for the various national capitals, which base themselves on snatching a bigger part of the market. It looks improbable that the bourgeoisie will transcend immediate interests in order to unite the Arab nation. To do this you need a class which is not held back by competitive, immediate material interests, but can think in a more international sense – the working class.

Of course, that would require the working class to organise, and for this a whole historical period will be required. That is why in the short term we should not expect too much. We need a period in which the working class can organise and create its own political leadership, which can then start a new revolution aimed at uniting the Arab world.

"LET OUR STORIES BE KNOWN"

"Every single moment of this revolution has been full of emotions. Sometimes glorious, other times complicated, sometimes full of sadness because you've lost someone shot in front of your eyes," said Ramy Sghayer, one of Tunisia's youth organisers. He explained that the successive waves of protest needed to dislodge not only the old dictator, Zine Ben Ali, but a whole structure of dictatorship and the systems that shored it up internationally.

"Our revolution overcomes the borders of Tunisia. It is a revolution for dignity and freedom in which every single human being is affected. We flew the Egyptian flag for Tahrir and danced in the streets



Tortoise emblazoned with the slogan "Revolution".

when Mubarak fell. We're waiting for Libya, watching Yemen and Syria. It's not only Tunisia's struggle but the struggle of the whole South under colonialism."

Here's a story from the Tunisian revolution I wanted to tell Jewish socialists. In a small town called Manouba, Ben Ali's secret forces – using tactics echoed by Mubarak's agents in later weeks – tried to stir up violence between Muslims and Christians. The aim: to keep people disunited and create "disorder" which the regime can claim to be quelling. Agents attacked a church and killed a Polish priest. Immediately young people from nearby Sousse, who were forming nightly patrols to protect their town, formed a ring around its synagogue. They realised instantly that "it will be the Jews who get attacked next time", and weren't having their revolution destroyed by hatred.

Israeli premier Netanyahu's first response to the Jasmine Revolution was to beg Tunisia's Jews to emigrate. There was even a special fund set up. They resoundingly refused. Professor Sophie Bessis – feminist, historian, Unesco and Unicef officer and secretary of the International Federation of Human Rights – wrote in the Tunisian press repudiating the "ill-intentioned" attempt to separate Jews from other Tunisians. So did the Rabbi on the island of Djerba where most remaining Jews live.

Bessis has been nominated for the new High Commission preparing for July elections to a new Constituent Assembly, in place of the old rigged one

AMANDA SEBESTYEN returned with powerful impressions of the Tunisians' struggle against dictatorship and bigotry from a visit in April, when she was hosted by the General Union of Tunisian Workers and the Tunisian League of Human Rights

WHATEVER HAPPENS TOMORROW, THIS LIBERATION WILL MAKE HISTORY BECAUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE ARAB WORLD A PEOPLE STOOD UP, NOT TO REPLACE ONE LEADER WITH ANOTHER BUT TO REPLACE AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME WITH A DEMOCRATIC ONE.

Tunisians have endured till now. Her membership has a symbolic meaning: democratic Tunisia wants to say that all commission members are citizens regardless of religious origin. This disturbs those who believed that Jews could never be at home in any Arab country. Bessis acknowledged that there was indeed antisemitism in Tunisia, as in other countries: "A few dozen fanatics have to be fought, like all inciters of hate. We also hope that the flourishing anti-Arab racism in Israel will be tackled vigorously."

Interviewed in *Jeune Afrique*, the paper she edited for many years, Bessis responded to the following acute question: "Will the Tunisian revolution change

defended Algerian liberation fighters, working closely with Simone de Beauvoir. The earlier generation like Albert Bessis, father of Sophie and one of the leading figures of the anti-colonial struggle, stayed in the country. Georges Adda was the Tunisian communist leader, trade unionist and passionate supporter of the Palestinians who always described himself as "an anti-Zionist Tunisian Jew".

As the defence of the Sousse synagogue shows, the safety of Jews has become one touchstone for the democratic revolution. As with the rights of women, the fight to end political impunity and prosecute those who killed unarmed demonstrators, and the desperate need for employment, this issue too has sparked off multitudinous debates and a real sense that talking is a political good in itself.

The revolution in Tunisia is seen as bloodless, but not when you reach small towns where almost everyone knows someone who died, or was injured, or mentally traumatised.

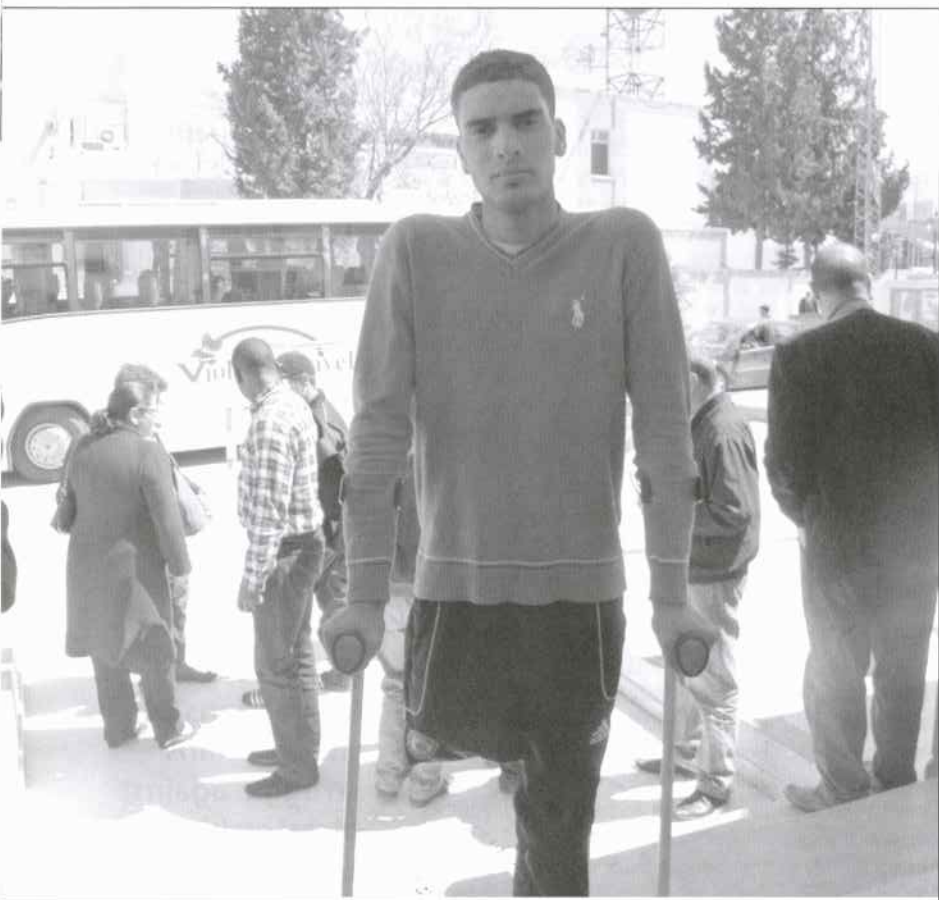
In Sidi Bouzid, Nejib Beyoui of the teacher's union told us how teachers, lawyers and doctors formed a Support Committee after Mohamed Bouazizi burned himself, at first just to get him to a proper hospital "and to ask for work and dignity". The trade unionists stood in the streets for 13 days being teargassed and beaten, while the town's young people stayed up all night and were shot with live ammunition. Then the uprising spread to nearby Kasserine, where a local factory owner posted snipers on the roof of his building: 52 people were killed and 600 wounded. Hunger strikes and self-immolation continue, alongside tremendous achievements in self-organisation.

These towns feel neglected. We need to change that. Munira Thibia, a young homeless woman famous for her bravery in the uprising, asked us: "Please let our stories be known." They need twinning, solidarity actions, and keeping communications open. Nasri Charfeddine of the new unemployed graduates' organisation Elkarama wants to start up community radio so the region can speak for itself (contact Nasri Charfeddine at achrafnasri@hotmail.fr or via Facebook at [Nasricharfi@live.fr](https://www.facebook.com/Nasricharfi)).

Wael Karaffi, who has lost a leg at only 19, spoke with the dignity which Tunisia expects from all its revolutionaries: "Those who killed, one wants to see judged not killed. We sacrificed for this nation so we want our voices to be heard. If not, we will go back on the streets to remake the revolution. We don't want money, we want to be seen and heard. I've made a big sacrifice – I hope you won't forget my message."

It is a crime that British soldiers returning wounded from wars of empire are getting the best surgery, prosthetics and rehab, while these who overthrew a dictator and "fought only with their voices" are being left disabled and without redress against the police who killed their friends.

To join the appeal to bring specialist medical and legal help to the survivors and activists, contact: med.saha@gmail.com or amseb@blueyonder.co.uk



Wael Karaffi, 19, who has lost a leg, who says: "... we want our voices to be heard."

the relationship you have with this country where you were born?"

"I do not know yet. I am immensely happy with what has happened in Tunisia, which is my country. We've seen a real liberation. Whatever happens tomorrow, this liberation will make history because for the first time in the Arab world a people stood up, not to replace one leader with another but to replace an authoritarian regime with a democratic one. The Tunisians have eliminated the very concept of 'the leader', in favour of democracy."

Tunisia's Jews have often been a source of pride but frequently for achievements overseas. Gisele Halimi, the human rights lawyer and feminist, founded the group Choisir in 1971, which achieved legal contraception and abortion in France; she

THE ART OF DELAYING THE INEVITABLE

Last autumn, Afif Safieh published a fascinating collection of speeches and articles spanning nearly three decades of interventions to advance the possibility of peace with justice between Palestinians and Israelis. At the book launch he made special mention of his dialogue with Jews in Britain, which, he told the attendees, began with the Jewish Socialists' Group. When we invited him to speak to our group early in 2011 and to reflect on how the arguments he developed in the book could impact on the reality today, he was eager to do so. In the period between the invitation and the meeting, however, political eruptions had shaken the Arab world. At the meeting, Afif shared his excitement at the promising popular initiatives that were being led by a new generation seeking to overthrow dictatorships and participate in a democratic future.

"What happened a few weeks ago, starting with Tunisia and followed by Egypt, was something superb. It was a beautiful movement which opted for non-violent protest, and in Egypt, luckily, the army took the position of defending the country and the people, not necessarily the President and his regime, and this avoided painful military confrontations. There were 400 killed – it could have been 400,000 had they reacted the way Gaddafi and his children have misbehaved. I am so happy with the popular movement to unseat Gaddafi and angry at the way he is brutally repressing those expressing their discontent and their desire for change."

Afif hoped we would be entering a new moment but struck a note of caution. "In the Arab world we have suffered a double crisis of regimes and of oppositional forces. It is a suffocating experience. We have neither the governments we deserve nor the oppositions we need. The left in the Arab world collapsed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Arab national movement is still an orphan 40 years after the death of Abdul Nasser. The liberal school of thought never really took off the ground and the only organised popular movement with an ideology was the Islamic school of thought. Regimes which were unpopular, unrepresentative, illegitimate and unaccountable have been kept in place as not being a worse option given the absence of real choice. We deserve better."

He is hopeful that Egypt, when it emerges from its current turmoil, will again play a significant regional role. "I miss the importance of Egypt in the Arab arena. I prefer Egypt as a regional important player rather than Qatar. Qatar is a satellite that has a government rather than a government that has a satellite. They are the hosts of the American bases that aggress from Afghanistan to Iraq." He notes that Qatar is also host to Al-Jazeera which, he says, "promotes Islamic thought but has also given a breath of fresh air for debates". He is critical

though, of its tendency to foster pessimism: "They have elevated pessimism as though it is the only criterion for the measurement of one's patriotism, and it is very detrimental. It is not the pessimists who make history, it is credible optimists."

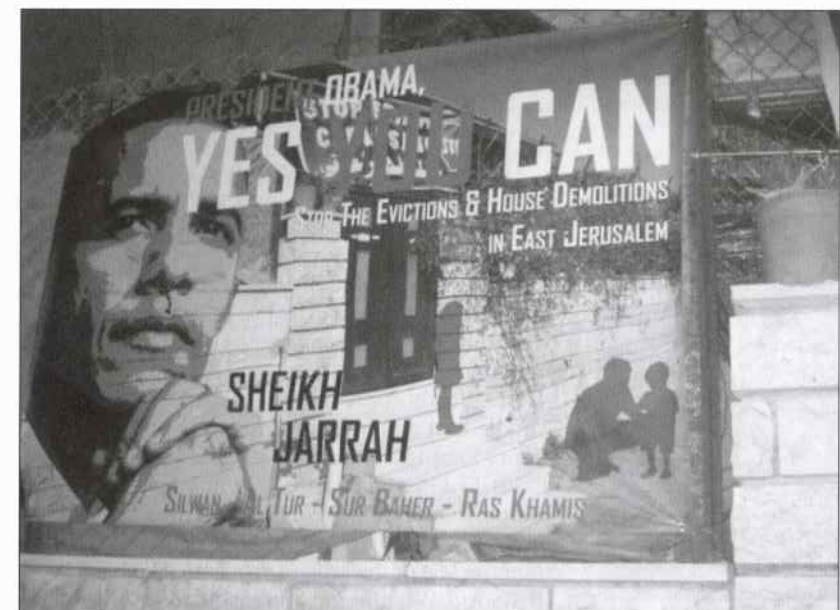
Afif sympathises with the plight of those threatened by Gaddafi's forces and understands why they plead for assistance from the West, but he admitted to being "very uncomfortable today with the decisions the West took to bombard, and the happiness some had to bombard any part of the Arab world under whatever pretext". He finds it hard not to be suspicious of their enthusiasm to intervene, "especially when you see the West's self-inflicted impotence when they deal with the Palestinian tragedy". The Palestinians have also pleaded for international assistance in the past but without success. "We, too, happen to have oil," says Afif, "but it is olive oil!"

Turning to the original focus of his talk, he reminded the audience that, for Palestinians, "the Nakba (catastrophe) is not something that happened in a frozen moment in 1948 but an ongoing process until today. Successive Israeli governments have sought to acquire as much Palestinian geography as possible with as little Palestinian demography as possible."

He recounted how Israeli governments, led by Labur, Likud and Kadimah, had all contributed to worsening the Palestinians' situation by "caging the urban centres, dislocating and disconnecting, making them not contiguous, preventing easy access to each city from the surrounding villages, and the villagers from the farming land, and from the farming land to the water". But he noted one distinction. "It was Labour that made Palestine unliveable for Palestinians: the ethnic cleansing of '48, the war of '67, the settlement building, the idea

Leading Palestinian diplomat, **AFIF SAFIEH**, was a good friend of the Jewish Socialists' Group during his UK posting in the 1990s. After Moscow and Washington, he is back in London as the PLO's Roving ambassador for Special Missions. He spoke to the JSG in March. **DAVID ROSENBERG** reports.

Campaign poster in Sheikh Jarrah, Afif's childhood home.



IN THE ARAB WORLD WE HAVE SUFFERED A DOUBLE CRISIS OF REGIMES AND OF OPPOSITIONAL FORCES. IT IS A SUFFOCATING EXPERIENCE. WE HAVE NEITHER THE GOVERNMENTS WE DESERVE NOR THE OPPOSITIONS WE NEED.

of the Wall. What Likud has done is made Israel unliveable for Jews."

Afif acknowledged that the winds of change had swept the Arab world at an opportune moment for the Palestinians, turning public attention away from a painful internal debate arising from Wikileaks, which, he said, could have created "further fissures of our social tissue". While committed to debate, progress and change within the Palestinian polity he believed that some allegedly incriminating documents had been "misused and taken out of context by Al-Jazeera". He reminded the audience that Al-Jazeera itself was "also a player in the Palestinian internal debate", adding, "I know for a fact that Palestinian negotiators have not abdicated on the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah where I grew up." But the washing of dirty linen was bound to have an effect. "When negotiations resume," he predicted, "our future negotiators will be much more careful."

In keeping with the spirit of popular resistance that is emerging in many Arab countries, Afif expressed deep satisfaction that the Palestinian national movement today has adopted popular non-violent struggle as a way of expression, an approach he had long advocated personally. He argued that "with a ceasefire in both the West Bank and Gaza, and even Hamas worried about keeping the pacification agreement going, any serious observer will tell you that it is not terrorism that is the obstacle to peace, it is territory – the territorial appetite of the Israelis. With the Arab peace plan on the table, at least from 2002 if not before, the fact that today we have a deadlock and an impasse is no more due to the Arab rejection of Israeli existence but due to the Israeli rejection of Arab acceptance. If Israel withdraws out of the expansion of '67 we are prepared to recognise the pre-'67 existence."

But he laments the absence of moral leadership on the Israeli side and in diaspora Jewish circles that could break the impasse, such as that displayed at one time by the late Nahum Goldmann. He described how Goldmann had "a very Krushchevian funeral in Jerusalem, boycotted by everyone in the establishment because he was a freethinker, even though he was the president of the World Zionist Organization for 40 years."

Goldmann's writings and observations had a profound impact on Afif. "He wrote beautiful chapters in several of his books about Jewish-German relations. He spoke of the enormous historical pain and of the way he can see the future. One day it will be useful for us Palestinians, when we think of Palestinian-Israeli, Palestinian-Jewish relationships."

Afif greatly appreciated Goldmann's definition of Middle East diplomacy. Commenting critically on Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in the mid-1970s, Goldmann described diplomacy in the Middle East as "the art of delaying the inevitable as long as possible". Afif commented: "Twenty years after the last of the peace processes which started in Madrid, Washington and the breakthrough in

Norway, I believe that his definition is even more relevant today." Oslo, he added wryly "has not yet put Palestine on the map but it has put Norway on the map", adding that instead of lasting peace, there is a durable peace process, which has no obvious end point.

He blames Labour's Ehud Barak, in particular, for destroying the chance of a peace camp that went beyond the small groupuscles in Israel, when he accused Arafat of having torpedoed his most generous offer of the Camp David talks of 2000. Afif continues to dialogue with many Israelis but he despairs "that in any foreseeable future there will be 50 + 1% in Israeli society in favour of what is realistically acceptable to us as Palestinians."

He elucidated an idea of Nahum Goldmann's which he described as "profound wisdom". He said: "Knowing the Israeli collective psyche, the pluralistic nature of Israeli society, and the political game between the multiplicity of actors in the system, Goldmann said that we should agree about the finality of the exercise at the beginning and then move backwards towards it, so there is only one Israeli uproar and protest, that we deal with once and for all. We would mobilise everyone who is interested in that finality and we would deal with it. The way it has been done is forwards towards nowhere. Each step forward has provoked an uproar by those who go on the streets and say 'shame on you', 'it's national suicide', and has been followed by two steps backwards. We have continued in that way the last 20 or 30 years."

Goldmann, according to Afif, was "openly and shamelessly in favour of American pressure on the Israelis". He recalled Goldmann's conversation with Israeli General Moshe Dayan, in which he pointed out to Dayan: the Americans give you much aid and some advice: "you take all the aid and leave the advice aside." Goldmann asked, "What would happen if the Americans say you can only have the aid if you also take the advice?" And with resignation, Moshe Dayan replied, "We would have to do that."

"In the Arab world," Afif said, "we have been waiting for the Eisenhower moment. In 1956 Eisenhower called Ben Gurion – and believe me Sharon and Netanyahu are lambs compared to the roaring lion Ben Gurion. With a phone call to Ben Gurion, Eisenhower had the Israelis withdraw out of the occupied Sinai. He didn't have any carrot with it, except good American-Israeli relations. Today, Obama or his predecessor or his successor has a carrot. He can tell them: if you withdraw out of the '67 occupation, not only do you have the two-state recognition and peace, not only you have the 22 Arab countries recognising you, but the 57 Islamic countries are bound by the organisation of Islamic countries to recognise you. So it is the 57-state solution not the two state solution. Eisenhower didn't have any carrot; he just said I want you out in 24 hours and this is what happened."

Recent American behaviour has not been promising. The Americans used their veto to torpedo their own policy on a UN draft resolution concerning settlements which was actually worded

on the basis of the American official position. Afif commented: "Each time the Americans promise us some pressure on the Israelis, it turns out that the only remaining superpower carries the political weight of Luxembourg or Lichtenstein." Recalling his own posting as Palestinian ambassador in Washington, he said: "I used to joke that for us the ideal American president would be a president that combines the following three prerequisites. He should have the ethics of a Carter, the popularity of Reagan to confront a certain lobby, and the strategic audacity of a Nixon. May God protect us from having an American president who has the ethics of a Nixon, the popularity of a Carter and the intellectual agility of a Reagan. We had one of this description – George Bush Junior – unfortunately it coincided with my term of duty."

He acknowledged, though, that there have been missed opportunities to influence American policy. "I want us to be an actor in history not an object. Just as America often takes the liberty of choosing who our leaders in the Third World should be, if we are smart in the Third World, we can contribute to helping America decide on who they want to have as their leaders. In 1979-80, when Carter was starting his campaign for re-election, his campaign was damaged by the hostage taking in Iran. Either because of deliberate intention or because of an unsophisticated knowledge of the complexities of the world, those who took those hostages kept embarrassing Carter and helping Reagan. With hindsight we can ask what was better for the Third World, what was better for leftist forces in the industrialised world – the second mandate of Carter or the first mandate of Reagan? And we would all have said the second mandate of Carter rather than Reagan for years. With a sophisticated approach, the Third World can help promote the credibility, the electability, of certain candidates. If tomorrow Iran started engaging in constructive dialogue with the Americans, that would strengthen Obama and the dovish wing in the administration, which doesn't want the military option as the first resort. We can all influence international relations, and even the domestic politics of a superpower."

Afif has long been in favour of "an elegantly imposed solution, which is mutually unacceptable". Territorially speaking, he says, "everybody knows what is desirable, possible and acceptable. It is a two state solution along the border lines of '67, with mutually acceptable small territorial swaps, so on the territorial side we Palestinians should get a geography equal to that occupied in '67, with some territorial rectifications. This is an accepted fact among those who want peace. There isn't a majority for this in Israel but there is around the world. I applauded the birth of the quartet. Today, though, the quartet is a one-tet operation. There is only one superpower. China is an economically rising power but of no influence on Israel-Palestine. America can be of tremendous influence. When I was in America, my message to the American establishment was

that non-alignment should be what characterises American foreign policy in a unipolar world. There is still a big reservoir of American idealism and Obama has the potential to reconcile America with itself and America with the world."

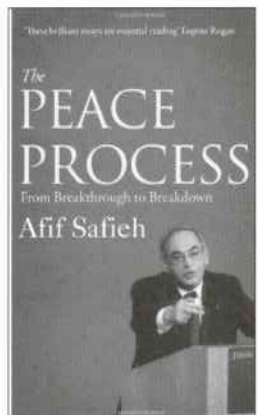
He describes America as "a fascinating society – a nation of nations", whose social composition is constantly changing and evolving. And he noted that today, when America aligns itself on Israeli preferences, "not only does it alienate and antagonise all the other players in the region unnecessarily but it also offends and antagonises a component of the American national social fabric. I know the humiliation of the 400,000 Palestinian and the four million Arab Americans, the eight million Muslim Americans, and their anger because of what they perceive as the insensitivities of the Americans towards the tragedies of their countries of origin by the country of adoption. For the last two decades the Israeli strategy and the American interest have bifurcated but, because of the importance of the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington, that has hijacked American foreign policy in the Middle East, America is putting up with Israeli capricious politics that go contrary to their global interests, giving the semblance of an impression that they are in total collusion and putting them on a collision course with the Arab Islamic world."

In the long run though, he argued that, "it is a winnable battle in Washington. There is no more any identity and convergence of American and Israeli interests, and this is where a Jewish voice of reason needs to be injected. I don't want the day when the Americans get fed up with Israel to be an anti-Jewish reaction. I want that change of policy to happen with majority support." Today, he argues, "There is a comfortable majority in American society for a two state solution. Among the American Jewish community there is an even more comfortable majority towards this idea. My major grievance against Obama is that when he was elected he was unaware of the switch in Jewish attitudes, and he has lost three battles of will between himself and Netanyahu."

Afif sees the greatest potential in "a convergence, if not a joint lobbying, by Arabs, Palestinians and Jews. I prefer the word "convergence" to alliance. Alliances mean we think the same things; we don't. With convergence, those who believe in that common finality should do the lobbying." He very much welcomed the birth of JStreet and the emergence of alternative Jewish voices, adding, "We need Jewish lobbying in favour of that finality because this will give political courage for decision-makers who might lack the political audacity and the political will. I have always seen Israel-Palestine as the test between courage and cowardice, and I hope our rendezvous with courage is not in the too distant future. Territory that was occupied in six days can also be evacuated in six days, so that the Israelis can rest on the seventh, and we Palestinians can engage in the fascinating journey of national building."

OSLO HAS NOT YET PUT PALESTINE ON THE MAP BUT IT HAS PUT NORWAY ON THE MAP. INSTEAD OF LASTING PEACE, THERE IS A DURABLE PEACE PROCESS, WHICH HAS NO OBVIOUS ENDPOINT.

The Peace Process: From Breakthrough to Breakdown by Afif Safieh is published by Saqi Books, £16.99.



UPPER CLASS CONTEMPT

DAVID ROSENBERG decries the Prime Minister's attacks on multiculturalism and argues for a nuanced understanding of what lies behind it

Historically Europe has been a cauldron of war and conflict, so those who love peace may feel gratified that in recent months leading politicians from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Britain have been singing from the same hymn sheet, making statements that seem to indicate a common view underpinned by a shared set of values.

Sadly, they are not our values as socialists and anti-racists. The unity they have displayed has been to agree that immigration is too high and to declare that multiculturalism has failed. Our local advocate is David Cameron, whose "rallying cry" in Munich – a city noted for rallies – was conveyed on 5th February this year. His speech specifically named Muslims, especially more extreme varieties, as representing this failure. But Cameron's own epic failure that day was omitting to mention those forces, such as the English Defence League (EDL), who are aggressively attacking the rights of minorities – an omission made more poignant by the fact that on that very day the EDL were scraping their knuckles marching through Luton's streets with their anti-Muslim messages of hate.

Cameron's host in Munich, Angela Merkel, had already told young Christian Democrats a few months earlier that: "This multi-kulti approach, saying that we simply live side by side and are happy about each other ... has failed, utterly failed." She added with regret, "we kidded ourselves ... [that] they won't stay, sometime they will be gone". In Munich, Cameron blamed "multiculturalism" for inducing "different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream". He blamed immigrant communities for failing to take up the apparently generous offers to become integrated within the tolerant polity that exists in Britain. Combining disappointment, condescension and reproach, he said: "We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values." But enough was enough, he argued: it was time to shed "the passive tolerance of recent years" and replace it with "a clear sense of national identity."

Socialists and progressives might ask who are the "we" and "our" that Cameron talks about and apparently on behalf of? They hardly seem inclusive categories. We – the left – might agree that it was time to attack Tory racism. But to do so effectively we need to understand its complexities and contradictions, who it is talking to and how, where its ideology is coming from, and not simply reduce it to its lowest common denominator. We certainly need to do more than mouth the equivalent of the Beatles lyrics, "ou say yes, I say no, you say stop, I say go...". Which is why I find some of the anti-racist response to be so wanting.

Having carried my personal rage about Cameron's remarks for a few days, I went to a rally in London organised by Unite Against Fascism (UAF) which had called on people to "Defend Multiculturalism". I hoped to hear arguments that would analyse

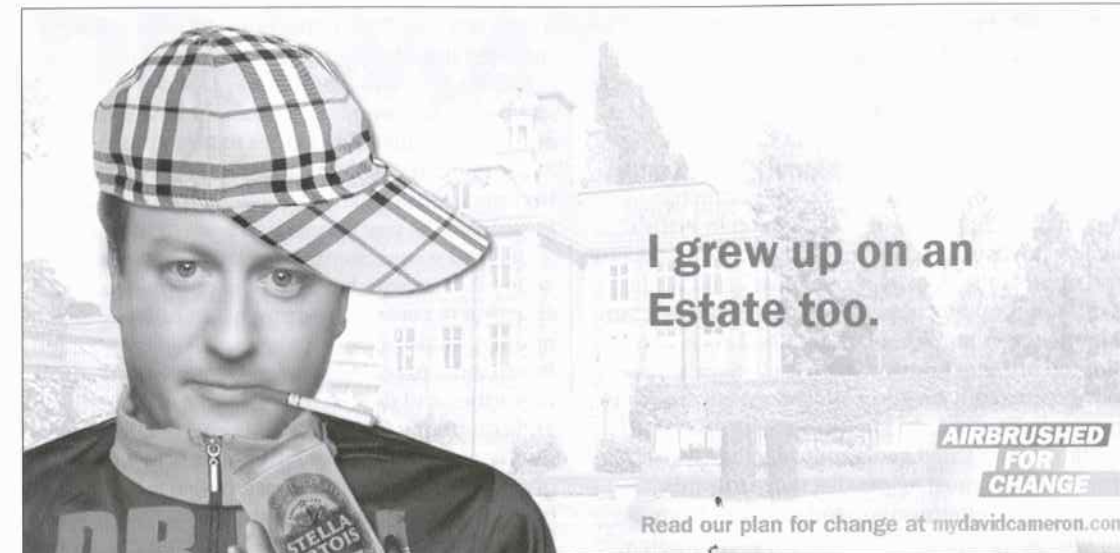
Cameron's comments, validate my rage and suggest ways to channel it. Apart from having far too many speakers stating the obvious at length, leaving no possibility of open discussion from the floor that might have explored the deeper layers of the argument, it was the content of one of the keynote speeches that really bothered me. Martin Smith, a UAF national officer and head of the dominant faction within the seemingly conflicted leadership of the Socialist Workers Party, told us that the reason Cameron made this kind of speech on 5th February was because it was revealed on 4th February that Cameron's Tories were falling behind on the polls. Yes, I guess he would have hurriedly written his notes while he was travelling to Munich.

There's no way of being polite about this kind of "analysis": it's complete rubbish from top to bottom. It absolves Cameron of any attachment to racist ideology and treats racism as little more than a cynical trick, employed by the ruling class for tactical reasons. Instead of locating racism in Britain's past and present relations with the world and identifying Cameron's deep immersion in certain ways of seeing that history and current reality, Smith treated racism as if it was a tap that could simply be turned on and off for political advantage.

The Trade union leader Billy Hayes was more perceptive, describing ways in which people are manipulated by racist arguments, and Michael Rosen convincingly showed how the movement and interplay of cultures was a natural part of human history and had been for thousands of years. Edie Friedman from the Jewish Council for Racial Equality questioned the "British values" that Cameron lauds and poses against multiculturalism. She asked whether slavery and colonialism were also British values.

In terms of wider public responses UAF published press statements and letters which relied heavily on "justlikery". For the uninitiated, "justlikery" is where a politician says or does something bad; you condemn it in shrill tones and show how it is just like what so and so did or so and so said all those years ago. Cameron's attack on multiculturalism in 2011? Just like Thatcher's "swamping" speech on 1978... which was just like Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech of 1968, which was...

Well, no, it wasn't, actually. Thatcher's "swamping" speech, made while Labour was in office, was indeed a cynical ploy to capture votes for the Tories that might have gone to the National Front. But in many ways Cameron and Thatcher are opposites. She was a grammar school Tory who openly declared that there was no such thing as society, and was a particularly determined opponent of sectional interests operating collectively – such as, for example, trade unions. She wanted to "free" the citizens of the country to grab opportunities for self-improvement, to seek personal advantage regardless of any cost to others. Her "survival of the fittest" approach mostly granted the freedom to be poor



Poster airbrushed by Lisa Firth/Amanda Kirk from mydavidcameron.com – the website created by Clifford Singer, which gave people the tools to subvert the image.

and unemployed. But she was not particularly a defender of any old order, hierarchies and traditions. Thatcher was a Tory radical – a believer in meritocracy, though very unwilling to recognise that there was not a level playing field.

Cameron, on the other hand, does believe sincerely in society and tradition. He wants citizens to feel as though they are all within one society and part of it, but to know their place, and submit to the cultural preferences of those he sees as most fit to govern. He wants to re-establish the hierarchies and traditional outlooks of old public school Toryism, though he likes to portray himself as Dave – the modern guy who listens.

Any socialists feeling the desperate need to indulge in justlikery with Cameron, would be better off looking at aristocratic pre-war British colonialists and nationalists – Tories and others. One of these aristocrats, associated by most historians with a racist mindset, wrote in 1933 that Britain's "versatile genius which has enabled us to found the greatest Empire in the world" was due to being "composed of more different races than almost any other nation in the world", adding, "If we had been merely a pure race type of Nordic men, we should have achieved no more than Sweden or Norway." That was Sir Oswald Mosley, a firm believer in authoritarianism, hierarchy, British nationalism and white supremacy, but without subscribing to fantasies of creating a pure master race.

When I read Cameron's words, which promoted the thinly veiled notion that the coexistence of cultures in Britain must be predicated on the adaptation of minorities to the white majority and a commitment to British national identity, it was not Thatcher's but Mosley's voice that seemed to be echoing. Neither Mosley then, nor Cameron today, could conceive of a genuinely pluralist society held together by different kinds of bonds between people, some stronger, some looser, that is not predicated on British nationalism. Cameron derides separatism but what he really cannot abide is the living, breathing, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism of Britain's inner cities where very mixed communities live together in equality (often equality of poverty) but rub along well, and don't need an overarching nationalism to bind them with each other. Cameron doesn't know the working class communities they are part of, but wishes to construct a simplistic model of them that is all too easy to knock down.

"Without doubt, centre-right politicians across Europe are making similar noises about multiculturalism and feeding and fuelling each other, but we should not assume they all have the same motivations and the same perspective on the future. It is important to analyse each of these politicians in their local context too. And it is in Cameron's local context that his words seem particularly chilling.

We know now, following his further intervention distinguishing "good immigration" from "mass immigration", accusing immigrants of creating "discomfort and disjointedness" in communities, Cameron is ideologically committed to this theme and determined to push it. It has unsettled the BNP. Their leader Nick Griffin accused him of stealing BNP policies, and commented: "Cameron has played the race card. You would think that he had joined the BNP." Ever so trustworthy Nick Griffin warned BNP supporters not to place any trust in Cameron. Griffin fears that BNP voters will return to mainstream parties – but isn't it a sorry situation when a party like the BNP feels strong pressure to move rightwards to reassure its supporters that it will be harder on immigrants than the Prime Minister?

Labour has struggled to mount an effective challenge to Cameron's racist propaganda because it too has been preaching similar messages. Nearly 10 years ago New Labour's David Blunkett regretted that "over-tolerance" encouraged certain groups to "self-segregate". In August 2006 his colleague Ruth Kelly instigated the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, whose central idea, according to Institute of Race Relations commentator Jenny Bourne, is that "the nation somehow had a deficit of glue which would have to be artificially manufactured and injected into British institutions", while the very communities excluded through economic decline and discrimination, especially in housing, are themselves "blamed for their isolation." The cutting of services that could support immigrants began with New Labour, but for all Cameron's complaints about immigrants being unwilling to learn English or integrate, it is his government that continues to make swingeing cuts to provision for teaching English as a second language and support for refugees.

Between Cameron's two interventions, a report came out at the end of March, that merited far greater coverage than it received. Based on a 25,000-strong survey sample, a Manchester University-based research team concluded convincingly that

deprivation, not multiculturalism, was the root cause of fragmented communities, and that neighbourhoods with higher rates of ethnic diversity were actually associated with higher rates of social cohesion and respect for differences.

The Manchester report sits well with the earlier findings of Professor Danny Dorling, who has shown that the increasing segregation in British society is that related to "inequality poverty, wealth and opportunity, not by race or area". And while Cameron is openly targeting Muslims, the veteran commentator on race relations, Ken Leech, has pointed out that Roman Catholics in Scotland are more segregated geographically than any minority groups in England, and Jews and Sikhs in Britain are more segregated geographically than Muslims. Ironically, the most aggressive move towards geographical ghettoisation today comes from mainly white people within the predominantly middle and upper income bracket – increasingly housing themselves within gated communities; guarding their wealth and power by limiting their physical contact with people from less privileged classes. Cameron does not choose to acknowledge this process but his scapegoating of minorities goes hand in hand with the defence of class privilege.

We need to attack Cameron's racism, not through moral outrage, nor through applying crude ideas that Tories use racism when they are becoming less popular, but through sound political analysis. We need to expose how it is simultaneously a deeply rooted attack on minorities in the name of British nationalism and assimilation and a defence of class privilege at the expense of working class communities.

But also on the left we need to win arguments about multiculturalism more widely by providing more sophisticated arguments than were common

in the '80s and '90s. In that period the right wing press led the attack on grassroots efforts to expose racial discrimination and promote racial equality. It claimed that a reverse discrimination was occurring and regularly invented stories to try to prove it. But at the point at which multiculturalist activism became institutionalised, it often took on a different guise from the one people had been fighting for.

In local government, especially when many councils were won by Labour, in contrast to the situation in central government, an official multiculturalism came to be practised that tended towards the tokenistic, which homogenised ethnic minorities and denied the existence of diversity and competing interests within them. This "official" multiculturalism also enshrined the power of unaccountable and unrepresentative religious leaders within certain minorities.

Feminists, sexual minorities and political progressives within minority communities developed their own critique of multiculturalism and how it could be, and was, manipulated by those in power in society at large and conservative forces within minority communities. The battle with racism of the type espoused by Cameron and his cheerleaders in the right wing press, must go together with a battle at grassroots level within our communities to tackle all hierarchies and oppression.

Against the tide of racism emanating from Cameron and his acolytes, we need to build open and confident communities of people who can respect and support each other and gain strength from each other. At the same time as confronting racism together, we can unite to resist the economic war that is being waged by the powerful against the bulk of society. Its victims are black and white, male and female, gay and straight, but so are those who will fight it.

YOU WRITE

Hyperbole

Diana Neslen's article on the "Jewish Boat to Gaza" was very interesting but contained two points with which I disagreed.

The first was the repetition of the widespread, but completely illogical, belief that a swan moves smoothly on the surface but has to paddle like crazy under the surface. What possible evolutionary process could produce such a result? If you ever look at a swan in clear water, you will see that one firm but leisurely push back with one of its large webbed feet will propel it quite some distance. It's just as calm under the water, in other words, as it appears on top.

OK, this was just a metaphor that Diana casually borrowed and we knew what she meant.

But towards the end of the article, she uses the phrase "the overkill that only Israel knows how to produce". This is hyperbole. Sadly, there have been, and continue to be, many regimes and states that produce more "overkill"

than Israel. I'm sure readers can think of a list of examples without much hesitation.

Most readers of *Jewish Socialist* will have a deep interest in Israel and the injustice done to the Palestinians, but it is not helpful to consider Israel as uniquely evil; it undermines an argument by showing a lack of balance.

Paul Seligman, Cardiff

Single chance

We have launched an exciting campaign to get the song "Freedom for Palestine" by OneWorld into the UK charts. Tens of thousands of people need to buy the single – you can pre-order it now from iTunes or HMVdigital.

If "Freedom for Palestine" gets into the charts, it will show the UK government and all those who lend economic or political support to Israel, that a critical mass of people want to see an end to the Israeli occupation. The mainstream media will find it hard to ignore or censor

it, and we would be sending a message of solidarity to the Palestinian people. Any profits raised will support War on Want projects in Palestine. As Palestinian academic and activist Edward Said urged us – let's use the power of culture against the culture of power.

Yasmin Khan
War on Want, London

Still alone?

Another excellent issue of *Jewish Socialist*! Congratulations on the editorial. Whilst a socialist would like to agree with you that, in 25 years, "we are not alone any more", at least in relation to Israel/Palestine, within the community, we are still alone, despite the appearance of Jews for Justice for Palestinians and Independent Jewish Voices. Fair weather "friends" like Jonathan Freedland and Paul Usiskin are still ploughing their own paths, while Meretz has veered rightwards.

Dave Shepherd, London

DRAMATIC LIVES

The devastating civil war in Spain was the precursor to the Second World War. Hitler and Mussolini used Spain as a testing ground for their military tactics, and were surprised and no doubt delighted to find that Britain, France and the USA turned a blind eye to their military games in Spain by signing a non-intervention policy. This allowed the fascists to wreak destruction on Republican Spain with impunity, while preventing the democratically elected Republican government from exercising their legal right to buy arms. It was against this background that a number of people in different countries decided that they had no choice but to personally go to help the beleaguered people of Spain, even if their governments would not. They became volunteers in the International Brigades.

It is a stirring story. I had read a profile of some of the surviving Brigaders in *The Guardian* back in 2000, and an idea began growing in my mind. In 2004 after the success of our first musical at the Arcola Theatre in Dalston, London, I suggested making a musical based on the International Brigades to my collaborators, playwright Judith Johnson and artistic director of the Arcola theatre, Mehmet Ergen. They were both very keen, and with the help of the International Brigade Memorial Trust we began our research.

We travelled to Wales to meet Alan Menai Williams, then 92, who had been a medic for the International Brigades throughout all the major battles of the Spanish Civil War, and Penny Feiweil, in her flat in Bournemouth, who was then 95. She had volunteered as a nurse in 1936. It was a real revelation to hear them speak so animatedly about the events that had had such a dramatic effect on their young lives 70 years previously, and which had changed them forever.

We met Sam Lesser in his flat in Brixton at the age of 90, whose undimmed eloquence and brilliant powers of recall, so vividly brought to life the passion and determination that had inspired the Brigaders to offer to risk their lives to fight against fascism. Sam became a good friend to myself and to the show we went on to write, coming to the first reading in 2008 and making a very moving speech afterwards.

I rang him regularly to clarify details of the Brigaders' lives: which books did they use in the windows to stop the bullets when they were helping to defend Madrid University? As it happened they used the Everyman series as they were the thickest! Which bullets, which guns, how did they feel, what did they sing, and what did they eat? So anxious was I to find out every last bit of information about the Brigaders and Sam's time in Spain, that it was only after his death that I found out about his astonishing career as a journalist for the *Daily Worker*, through which he was at the heart of major political events for more than 40 years after leaving Spain.

We met the great Jack Jones, and Lou Kenton (now 102) who was an ambulance driver and courier. I wish we had interviewed more of the surviving veterans, although subsequently we met other Brigaders informally at the annual

commemoration and other events.

Following this period of research, we were commissioned by the Arcola Theatre and the Arts Council to write the first draft of what came to be called *Goodbye Barcelona*. Judith developed the characters: Sam, an 18-year-old from Stepney in London, who volunteers to fight in the Brigades, and his mother Rebecca who misses him so much she also decides to volunteer and to try to find him. In the first draft we had a modern day couple who discover their relatives through diaries and letters, but we cut that in favour of a more linear narrative. We are now on the 9th draft!

It had a first reading in 2008, and two more in 2009 and 2010. Each reading tells us more about what works and what doesn't, and we rewrite accordingly. From the time we started our research at the end of 2004, I feel as though I've been on the most incredible journey of my life. Not only gleaning insights into the Brigaders and their motivations, but finding a way to reflect this musically and dramatically.



A gathering of veterans of the International Brigade.

Sam Lesser told us about some of the books we should read, and my shelves now groan under the weight of scores of books, read and waiting to be read. When I read the poems of the Brigaders, the personal journals so many of them wrote, or the histories of the Spanish Civil War, both by historians and journalists, they never fail to inspire me.

I listen to composers such as Manuel de Falla, Granados and Isaac Albeniz, as well as flamenco, the rhythms of rumba, bulerías, and soleares. There are also the songs sung by the Brigaders themselves such as the Internationale, Jarama and Ay Carmela.

My kids now think of me as a Spanish Civil War bore, but they too have become so much more aware of this neglected part of history and these astonishing people. Not that they had much choice! I hope that we can do justice to the Brigaders and their ideals with *Goodbye Barcelona*. We want the show to be entertaining, moving and thought provoking as all good theatre should be and, above all, a lasting testament to the courage of the Brigaders.

How you can help

Goodbye Barcelona will play at the Arcola Theatre from December 2011 provided we can raise sufficient funds. We had a fundraising launch in March and are holding an art auction in the summer.

We welcome all donations of money towards the production costs. Full details of how you can help are on the website at goodbyebarcelona.com

KLEZMER

A Jewish musical tradition that almost died out 50 years ago is enjoying an international revival and moving in new directions, says **ILANA CRAVITZ**



Ilana Cravitz is a London-based fiddler specialising in traditional klezmer style. Her book, *Klezmer Fiddle – A how-to guide* has been described in *Folk Roots* magazine as “Highly recommended ... the best exposition I’ve come across of Eastern European-style Jewish fiddle playing.”

Check out Ilana’s website at www.ilanacravitz.com for listings, resources and the debut album of her London Klezmer Quartet, or email klezmer@hotmail.co.uk to go on her mailing list. She is also a founder member of Freylekh Klezmer Dance Band.

Ah, klezmer! The foot-tapping, rabble-rousing Jewish party music with a soulful edge can now be heard around the UK – on street corners in London, at weddings in Glasgow, at festivals in Cambridgeshire, in concert venues like the Sage in Gateshead and London’s South Bank Centre, folk clubs in Eastbourne, sessions in pubs in Totnes, and even emanating from the occasional village hall in Hampshire. Bands, promoters and audiences around the country are awakening to the possibilities for collaboration, cross-over and just plain ceilidh-style fun that this ever-more popular world music form offers.

These days, tunes from the traditional klezmer repertoire’s modal, sometimes mournful canon are becoming a staple of many folk/world music bands. Go to a jam session at a festival and you’ll often hear a klezmer tune, and the fact that so many bands and labels use “klezmer” as a selling point indicates that it’s making some headway into the mainstream. There are universities that give credit for klezmer units, and music conservatoires that run courses.

What’s the impetus behind this? How can a music that nearly died out in the 1950s now be blossoming in the most unexpected places? In fact, what is klezmer, who’s playing it, and why?

A distinctive Jewish musical tradition was learned by instrumentalists in successive generations of eastern European Yiddish-speaking communities until the Holocaust. It reflected all the musicians’ internal and external influences – social, cultural, geographical and religious. Some would say that klezmer music, or just klezmer, is the rediscovered instrumental music of those eastern European Yiddish-speaking Jews.

The term klezmer, though, is quite recent; traditionally, a klezmer was a

professional Jewish folk musician and klezmerim (plural) played music for their communities that fulfilled requirements for both ritual and celebration. But the chain of succession is very thin with this tradition, and now the repertoire is mainly learned from books and old recordings; much more rarely from musicians who remember the tunes or have learned them from others who do. The sound world associated with the tunes is often lost, although a recognisable version of the eastern European tradition survived longer in the US, and when interest was rekindled in the 1970s it was still possible to study with a very few living exponents of the émigré generation, or those who had learned from them directly. So a description of klezmer could be:

“An eastern European Jewish music that has/had its roots in Jewish communities with particular religious and cultural traditions. These are reflected in the music, which uses distinctive scales, has a playing style unique to the genre, and a close association with dance.”

This description works for musicians who like to get as close to the source as possible. They will spend a lot of time understanding and trying to recreate a “traditional” sound that incorporates these factors. Learning from living musicians within the tradition and listening to, analysing, and internalising recordings from the early part of the 20th century play a very important part in continuing the oral/aural way of learning, and keeping alive klezmer’s distinctive sound. These musicians (perhaps a couple of dozen at most in the UK) form the core of the klezmer revival, and they run courses around the world to share the techniques, repertoire and, increasingly the dances for which much of the repertoire was created. They may have bands that popularise “traditional” material, but also often compose new music growing out of their understanding of the old style of performance.

These dedicated individuals, though, are just the tip of the iceberg of people who play “klezmer” these days. I am a performer and teacher, and the author of a traditional klezmer “how-to” book with international distribution. I also host a website with klezmer resources and listings. As a result, I encounter hundreds of people of all ages with an interest in this subject area – Jewish and non-Jewish, amateur and professional. Some students might come via workshops at festivals, or courses at colleges and universities. Some find my book and want a lesson to get some live input on the exercises and tunes in it. Others have formed a group and want someone to provide some direction. Some dabble in “klezmer” for fun – it’s just one of the folk/world music genres they like to play. Others, like those described above, take it more seriously, wanting to develop their professional/musical skills and play the music “properly”.

The reason I put “klezmer” in quotes is because there is no universal understanding of what the term encompasses. The range of performers and listeners mentioned above has a varied understanding of the term, going well beyond the repertoire and style that is common currency in the revival movement.

Played through the ages by [predominantly] Jewish musicians living amongst and hired also by non-Jewish communities, even many tunes in the traditionalists’ canon reflect a wider influence, and some are clearly discernible as coming from other traditions – although generally played by the old klezmerim using the same style as for their Jewish repertoire, rather than by adopting the nuances of the musical traditions as appropriate.

The repertoire collections of any professional function band that offers Jewish music for social events at the request of Jewish or non-Jewish clients will almost certainly contain a mixture of what they like to play, what works for the event they have been hired for (such as dance medleys), what clients request, what is popular, and what brings in more work. Increasing numbers of these performers use “klezmer” as an element in their marketing, moving the definition away from

MUSICAL MOVEMENT

exemplifying the revival. A quick internet trawl pulls up a UK band with “klezmer” in its name which explains: “our repertoire spans traditional Chassidic nigun to modern Israeli dance music”. No mention of freylekhs, bulgars, zhoks, shers, doynes – all staples of the traditional repertoire.

Is “klezmer”, then, tunes that have a Jewish origin, are popular with Jewish audiences, are played by Jewish musicians, or are recognised as Jewish? In other words, does “klezmer” equal generic Jewish music, as defined by performers and audiences based on their own experience and interests?

The tune/song Hava Nagila is described variously as having its origins in a Ukrainian folk song from Bukovina (Wikipedia) or the Sadegor Hasidic community in Bukovina (My Jewish Learning) – obviously not mutually exclusive claims. It is said to have been taken to Jerusalem by members of the Sadegurer community and became popular in Zionist circles, eventually achieving global popularity and legendary status as the most recognisable Jewish tune. This tune, as far as we can tell, was not a staple of the eastern European traditional repertoire, yet every traditional “klezmer” musician will be expected to know and be able to perform it. Its popularity brings it automatic association with Jewish repertoire, blowing narrow definitions of “klezmer” out of the water.

The potential for inter-play between Jewish music and that of other cultures gives this style of music a flexibility that is attractive to players, arrangers and composers. There are currently many UK bands playing and recording material that claims the “klezmer” label simply by lifting melodies from the old repertoire and exploring or inventing crossover with other popular genres – for example jazz, Latin, Balkan and Middle Eastern music.

The term “klezmer” now straddles boundaries in more or less comfortable ways. As a relatively recently purloined word that attempts to define an increasingly popular revived tradition evolving in many directions, this is probably not surprising. The musicians who play the music are equally diverse: the gamut spans those who celebrate the Jewish spiritual or religious potential of the music, those who see the music as a way to actively engage in a secular expression of their cultural Jewish heritage, and those who fail or even choose not to mention that the music they are playing owes a debt to Jewish musical tradition.

However you define it, it’s much easier these days to hear live klezmer music, and to access audio and written resources and teaching if you want to play it yourself. You can choose to attend a klezmer music event, increasingly involving the Yiddish dances that the traditional music is so entwined with; learn tunes and traditional ornamentation on your instrument at a workshop; download pdfs of sheet music to play at home in whatever style you choose; or let a band evoke a bygone era/bring contemporary influences to bear for you.

Individual musicians from the UK’s 25-year-old first revival wave like Merlin Shepherd (clarinet)

and Ray Kohn (violin), and some of those who were part of the UK’s first modern klezmer bands, are still involved in klezmer performance and education. Vivi Lachs and her longstanding group Klezmer Klub are still generating new ideas – the latest of which is researching and performing Yiddish songs of London, excavating the social history of one of the capital city’s older ethnic communities.

The Jewish Music Institute’s 10-year-old KlezFest, which has trained hundreds of amateur musicians and a new generation of professional klezmerim, has been transformed into a national “Klezmer Caravan”, which sends the trained bands, teachers and dancers out into UK communities to educate and entertain.

Active regional promotion of klezmer can be seen in the form of KlezNorth, the latest incarnation of a collection of enthusiastic and dedicated individuals. Regular workshops, sessions and a klezmer library built up over the years have recently been supplemented with a low-cost weekend of klezmer and Yiddish song and dance in the Peak District attracting more than 100 attendees, the large majority of whom are not Jewish.

The eight-piece She’Koyekh Klezmer Ensemble is a collection of musicians from various musical and cultural backgrounds. This year celebrating their 10th anniversary, members of this band are perhaps the most recognised advocates of the traditional style in the UK. They still play regularly on the streets at home and abroad, despite concerts on world-class stages and a busy gigging schedule, raising the profile of traditional klezmer, along with other east European styles, by showcasing it in an immediate and accessible way.

A musical revival that started as a niche and predominantly secular Jewish interest is finally starting to generate interest and support within the more observant Jewish community, as well as finding a huge and appreciative non-Jewish audience through a transcendental music whose great tunes, infectious enthusiasm and spiritual undertones provide entertainment for the trained and untrained ear alike.



The London Klezmer Quartet. From the top: Francesca Ter-Berg (cello); Carol Isaacs (piano/accordion); Ilana Cravitz (violin); Susi Evans (clarinet).

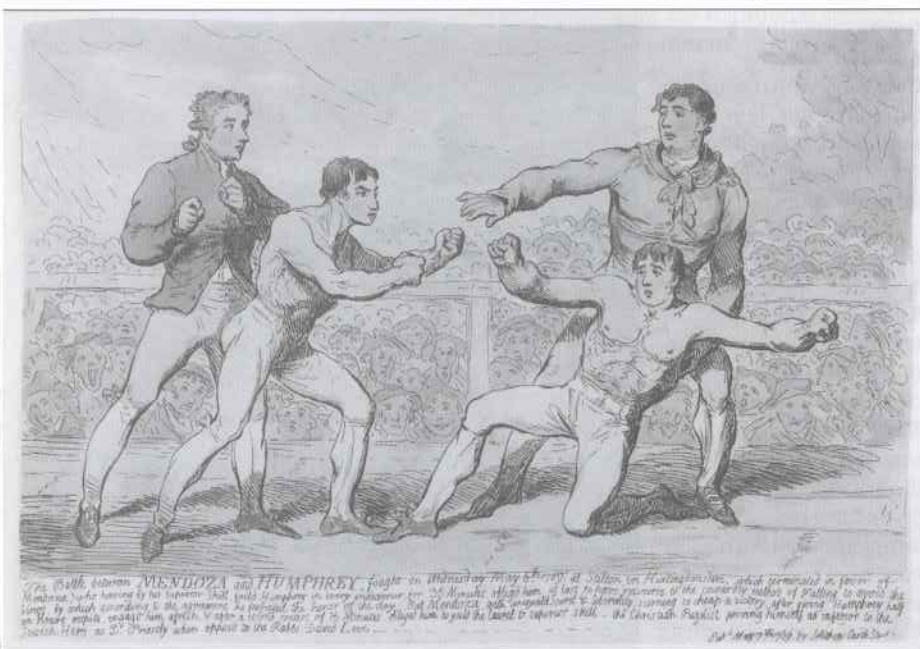
GHETTOBLASTERS

MIKE GERBER explores the connection between Jews, boxing and the immigrant experience

At a recent London Metropolitan Archives conference on 20th century Jewish culture in which I was involved, boxing was not covered – culture, as understood for the purposes of the event, was limited to the creative arts. But in the vestibule outside the conference room, my eyes fixed on a lithographic print that got me musing on the interconnections.

In the first half of the last century Jews proliferated in popular music, comic books, the movies, comedy and other cultural spheres because, talent aside, many professions were all but closed to them. Surely, I reasoned, that must be one reason too why Jews were once so heavily engaged in the fight game.

The lithograph was a reproduction of *The Last Round*, a vivid artwork in bold crayon colours



Bare-knuckle boxing, 18th-century style

capturing two boxers in a ring. The artist was Sam Rabin, whose career embraced sculpture, painting, art teaching, acting, singing, labouring, but also wrestling and boxing. Born Samuel Rabinovitch in 1903 to a poor Russian-Jewish family in Manchester, he was 11 when he won a scholarship to the Manchester School of Art, the youngest-ever entrant, and later studied at the Slade. His paintings often depicted ringcraft. As a boxer, he fought as the Hebrew Jew, Sam Randor, sometimes as Rabin the Cat; as the wrestler Black Eagle, he became British Empire heavyweight champ. And he played the role of 18th century prizefighter, Daniel Mendoza, in the 1934 movie *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

Mendoza, a Sephardi Jew, was champion of the London prize ring from 1791 to 1795 and is acknowledged as “the father of scientific boxing”. Until the Marquess of Queensbury Rules codified boxing in 1867, contests in England were bareknuckle affairs of dubious legitimacy, and Jewish boxers were rife. The most famous was Mendoza but others, perhaps as many as 30, included Tom Jachau (possibly the first Jewish prizefighter), “Dutch Sam” Elias (who it is claimed invented the uppercut), Barney Aaron (“Star of the East”, whose son, Young Barney Aaron, became US

lightweight champion in 1857), even an Ikey Pig! Also “a noted Jewess of Wentworth Road”, who, as a 1795 boxing publication reported, in a 1-hour 20-minute “slugfest” in a London field, succumbed after being knocked down more than 70 times.

Boxers who fought for a living – as distinguished from “gentlemen” amateurs – were working class or lower. During the prizefighting era, records John Ford in *Prizefighting: The Art of Regency Boximania*, “a significant number of the pugilists came from the immigrant population, and in particular the Jews, the Irish and the Negroes”. When, in 1771, Jewish burglars were hung for murdering a butler, Jews in London were “frequently brutalized”, writes Ken Blady, author of *Jewish Boxers Hall of Fame*. Many attended Mendoza’s boxing academy, better enabling them to defend themselves and weaker members of the community, some becoming prizefighters. According to Joseph Jacobs in *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, “there can be no doubt that the changed attitude of the populace towards the Jew was due in some respect to the success of Jewish boxers”.

With the flood of poor East European Jews into British and American cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many again answered the call of the ring. The pros interviewed in Phil Bodner’s *When Boxing Was a Jewish Sport* said they took it up for the money, rather than – as Zionists claimed – to overturn stereotyped prejudices about weak Jews. Even so, it was common for these boxers to sport large Jewish stars on their shorts, if only because it helped draw Jewish punters and also no doubt boxing fans who hoped to see the Jew take a pummelling.

In London’s East End, the Wonderland and the Premierland (pronounced Pree-mier-land) regularly staged bouts featuring Jewish boxers. Many were journeymen such as Kosher Hunt, suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst’s bodyguard, but a good number became champions, including Matt Wells, who won the world welterweight title in 1914.

Ted “Kid” Lewis and Jack “Kid” Berg, both East Enders, were the most celebrated Anglo-Jewish fighters. Lewis contested an incredible 300 fights, won 227 – 80 by KOs, drew 23, and became world welterweight champion in 1919. Berg was world light welterweight champion between 1930-31. The late British heavyweight Henry Cooper, in a 2007 *Daily Telegraph* article in which he ranked the top 10 all-time British boxers, put Lewis in first place and Berg at number five. In 1931 Lewis stood as a candidate for Sir Oswald Mosley’s populist New Party, later to become the British Union of Fascists. According to the account of Lewis’s son, when his father learned of Mosley’s antisemitism, he strode into the party HQ a final time, struck Mosley across the face and knocked out one of his bodyguards.

In America, in the first half of the 20th century, more than 20,000 Jews fought as professional boxers. If we discount all titles other than world championships, 20 or so attained that pinnacle starting with Harry “The Human Hairpin” Harris, the bantamweight world titleholder between 1901-2. Other world champions included Abe Attell and

Louis Kid Kaplan (featherweight), Benny Leonard (lightweight), Barney Ross (welterweight and lightweight), Maxie Rosenbloom and Barney Levinsky (light heavyweight), “Phil” Rosenberg (bantamweight) and Al McCoy (middleweight).

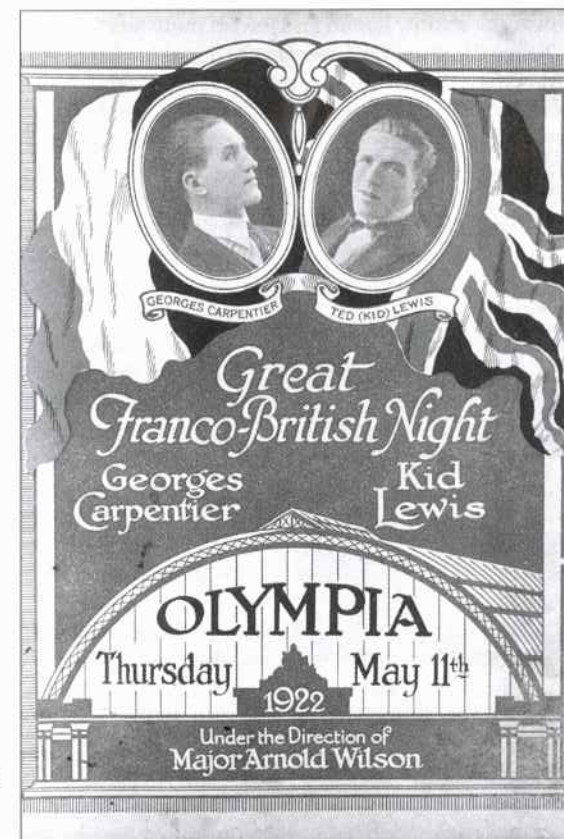
What about world heavyweight champion Max Baer? His mother wasn’t Jewish, his father may only have been half. Yet, possibly at the behest of his Jewish manager Ancil Hoffman, Baer fought with a Star of David embossed on his shorts, and Jews rejoiced when, in 1933, he defeated German heavyweight Max Schmeling at Yankee Stadium. Schmeling had won the world title in 1930 but lost it the year before he fought Baer. In 1936, when Schmeling reclaimed the title against black heavyweight Joe Louis, Nazi propagandists trumpeted him as a superman symbol of Aryan supremacy. Schmeling however was no Nazi; although he met Hitler, many years later it emerged that he had helped save two Jewish children during the 1938 Kristallnacht rampage. That was unknown at the time and when at a 1938 rematch, Louis KO-ed Schmeling, Jews were exultant. So were the African-American community because Louis was the first black boxer permitted to compete for a title against whites since the flamboyant Jack Johnson’s reign as world heavyweight champion between 1908-1915.

Johnson’s rise was partly attributable to Joe Choynski, son of a Polish-Jewish immigrant. During his boxing career, Choynski beat several fighters that would become world heavyweight champions, including Johnson, but was never given a title shot. Choynski knocked out the young Johnson in a three round contest in Galveston, Texas in 1901. They were jailed for taking part in a mixed-race contest, struck up a friendship and Choynski became Johnson’s trainer and sparring partner.

Boxing figured as one of the points of contention between Zionists and Bundists before the Second World War. Zionists were quick to lionise Jewish boxers as far back as Mendoza as prototypical “New Jews”, and the left Zionist sports organisation Shtern encouraged recreational boxing. The Bund’s sports organisation, Morgenshtern, was initially opposed to boxing because of its violent competitiveness but later promoted it as a defensive sport.

When the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, one of their first acts was to clamp down on Jewish, part-Jewish and Gypsy athletes. The German Boxing Association promptly expelled Germany’s amateur middleweight and light-heavyweight champion Erich Seelig, a Jew, who resumed his career in Paris, twice losing world middleweight title fights on points.

In Nazi death camps, Jewish boxers fought bouts against other inmates for the amusement of the guards. This was the theme of the 1989 Hollywood movie, *Triumph of the Spirit*, based on the account of Greek-Jewish amateur boxer Salamo Arouch, who claimed to have fought and won more than 200 camp contests. His reward was extra food rations and “privileged” work in the kitchens. According to Jacques Razon, another Greek-Jewish boxer and camp survivor, Arouch greatly exaggerated his exploits.

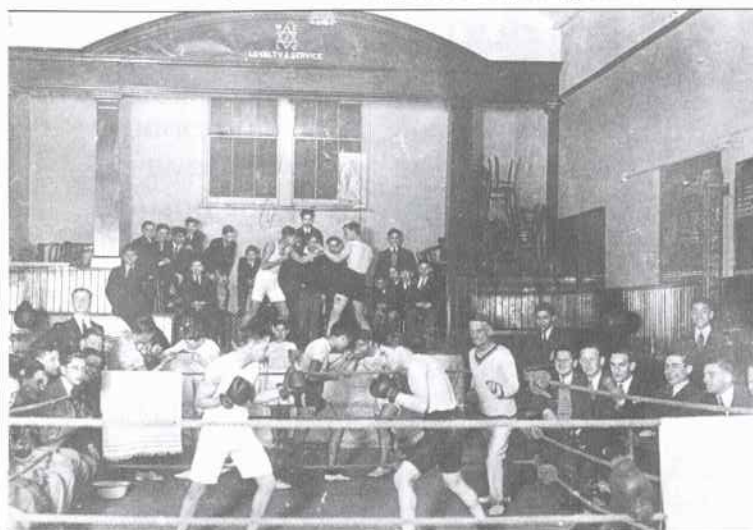


Dutch champion Ben Bril refused to beat up a fellow Jew in Westerbork, the Dutch transit camp, was interned at Bergen-Belsen but survived the war. Polish-Jewish champion boxer Szapsel Rotholz survived, but made a deathbed confession to his family that he had served as a Warsaw ghetto policeman. Tunisian Jew Victor “Young” Perez, world flyweight champion in 1931-32, survived two years in the camps, only to be shot dead by the Nazis during the 1945 Death March evacuation.

The more you dig, the more you realise just how profound has been the Jewish input in boxing. French-Algerians Robert Cohen and Alphonse Halimi were respectively bantamweight world titleholders in 1954-56 and 1957-59, American Mike Rossman won the WBA’s light heavyweight world championship in 1978, and Fabrice Benichou of France the world featherweight championship in 1991. European champions include light heavyweight Albert Yvel in 1950-51 and welterweight Gilles Elbilila in 1983, both French, and Glaswegian welterweight Gary Jacobs in 1993-94. Henry Nissen of Australia won the British Commonwealth flyweight championship in 1971, and Jewish fighters have claimed national titles in Canada, Denmark and South Africa.

Jews have been heavily involved as boxing managers, trainers and promoters, as writers – notably the late Nat Fleischer who founded *The Ring* magazine – and in other capacities such as Jacob Golomb, who established the Everlast boxing clothing and equipment company in 1910. The gangsters that fixed fights included Jews, too, as recorded in American-Jewish sportswriter David Remnick’s *King of the World*, a superb socio-political study about the rise of Muhammad Ali: “Throughout the ‘50s, to read Dan Parker in the New York Daily Mirror or Jim Carson in the Post was to scan a bill of particulars against a dirty game run entirely by

Jewish boxing club



mobsters – mainly Italian and Jewish mobsters.”

Today there are far fewer professional Jewish boxers than before the Second World War – who wants to risk getting beaten up for a living when

there are nice middle class professions one can aspire to? Well, featherweight Laura Saperstein for one. She attained a first class honours law degree in Australia but moved to London, discovered boxing and found she had

a flair for it. Her record to date is 10 wins in 11 fights and one draw.

For Jews not brought up in the comfort zone, boxing can still seem a viable enough career option. Ukraine-born Dmitry Salita, raised in an immigrant family in Brooklyn, began boxing to protect himself against the neighbourhood toughs. After winning a silver medal at the 2004 Olympics, he rose in the professional ranks to challenge British Muslim Amir Khan for the WBA light-welterweight world title in 2009 but was knocked out. Both boxers played down any religious implications. “Like Salita,” said Khan before the fight, “I respect the Jewish religion and he respects me.”

New Yorker Jill “The Zion Lion” Matthews is another whose upbringing has determined her calling as a boxer. “I was born and raised in tough neighbourhoods,” she told *Boxing Illustrated*, “the only white girl and from a Jewish family, and you get stereotyped. People look at me and assume I’m boxing for kicks. They don’t know I’ll fight to the fucking death.”

Alf of Aldgate

He fought as Young Alf of Aldgate, he was a journeyman Jewish boxer from London’s East End, and he was the grandfather of *Jewish Socialist* editorial committee member Ruth Lukom.

Alf’s son, Simon, describes him as “a little guy, but people who watched him fight told me one thing: my Dad, if he hit you with a right hand, you stayed hit”.

Born Abraham Lukomsky, Alf came to Britain around 1910. Simon says: “He was approaching the call up for the Russian army. When the First World War started, he was 19. He came over here on his own because this was a halfway stage for him, he was going to join his older brother in America. He wanted his mother to come out. This was one of the reasons he was fighting ... eventually he got money for a ticket, but his mother wouldn’t leave without her sister. But by the time they got the money for the sister, the 1914-18 war had started, and they must have been killed in a pogrom because the part of Russia where she was living ... now Moldova, was really Romanian, and Romanians hated the Russians and Jews.”

Alf, says Simon, “was always a scrapper” – he and his cousins had fought antisemites in Eastern Europe, and in east London Alf took on the toughs who hung around Victoria Park. “And someone suggested, ‘If you’re going to scrap why don’t you get paid for it?’”

So Alf donned gloves as a lightweight, a puncher, rather than a scientific fighter according to Simon. “The sport of fighting gave him an outlet; he couldn’t

express [himself].”

His manager was his brother Mendel – a figure of some infamy in Lukom family lore – “the villain of most of our life, and also the most intelligent,” says Simon. “He was here because he had been kicked out of America for attempted murder of his older brother. And he got to France and was deported when the French got rid of a load of nihilists and people like that, with the assassination of a couple of politicians. Mendel got to London when my father arrived, and he organised my father’s life from then on – unfortunately – including, he was his manager in the boxing. And that old stinker, he booked him twice in one night.”

That was the night Alf fought at Premierland in the East End, then at Blackfriars Ring in south London. “There was a horse and cart waiting outside, and my Dad, still in his boxing shorts, they gave him an overcoat and galloped over and got there just in time to be introduced.”

Simon remembers his father’s homecoming that night: “When he got in, I said, ‘Dad, what happened?’ He said, ‘Listen, if you’ve been fighting twice on one night, you had to knock him out or be knocked out. I had to go to work the next day.’”

Alf wasn’t a full time boxer. Simon says: “None of them were full time in those days. He came over here as a printer, but he was a baker because his family owned bakeries, so he knew how to bake. Being a baker, he had to get up

very early. He was in the same stable as [Ted] ‘Kid’ Lewis, so he knew Kid Lewis quite well; sparred with Kid Lewis.

“When he started, [he made] as little as a shilling a round,” excluding the winner’s purse.

“But the most important thing for him is that, if he did get beat, he didn’t get injured. Because, if you got a cut eye, then, depending on your manager, also the British Board of Control, they started to get worried. If your eye wasn’t completely healed and you went in the ring again, you could get a serious injury and get blinded. Although they tried to cut that down in the little rings, where they didn’t give a toss. The people went in there for blood, let’s be honest about it, and if you could see a Jew boy getting a good whacking, that was wonderful. But a lot of these Jew boys did the whacking.”

Simon’s mother pressed Alf to end his ring career. “God rest her soul – she made him stop boxing. Because he used to come to pick her up, and because they [boxers] had a few quid more, they were dandies, he’d turn up in a white polo neck sweater, and he’d come swaggering up the road to meet her with a whacking great big black eye.”

Love thus delivering the knockout blow to his boxing exploits, Alf quit with no titles to his name. “No, he was a journeyman, he did it for money and because it gave him status,” Simon says.

‘And maybe gave a little bit of fear around him, he knew that no one would take any liberties with him, or – this is important – with anyone he protected.’

TAKING LIBERTIES

In March this year, Prime Minister David Cameron was invited to the annual fundraising dinner of the Community Security Trust (CST) – the organisation that has emerged as the guardian of Jewish events and institutions. Cameron’s invitation was a follow-up to the announcement by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, that the government would fund the CST to the tune of £2 million, initially, to guard 39 Voluntary Aided Jewish schools.

For those who are not aware of the arcane workings of the British school system (in which “public schools” means elitist, fee-paying private schools), “Voluntary Aided” refers to schools that are governed by non-state institutions, mainly churches and other religious bodies, who have a degree of freedom about selecting their students, but are financed (involuntarily) by the taxpayer.

According to recent statistics, more than half of all children whose families are affiliated to Jewish organisations (primarily synagogues) now go to Jewish schools. There have been some high profile rows about the admissions policies of some of the most popular schools, such as the Jews’ Free School, a large secondary school in north-west London, which was taken to court for refusing to admit the child of parents whose Jewish pedigree was not considered kosher enough.

With this critical mass of Jewish children being funnelled into religious schools, the institutions which run them have acquired a massive ideological lever. Schools are effectively becoming gatekeepers – and therefore definers – of the “community”, and epitomise the relationship of the community with the surrounding society.

As well as affecting the content of what is taught, this relationship is manifested powerfully in the policing of the schools’ boundaries. If the medium is the message, what do students and their parents and teachers learn from being surrounded by surveillance cameras, barbed wire, security guards with walkie talkies and special buses laid on between their home neighbourhoods and the school gates? They learn that Jews are beleaguered and vulnerable, and that the outside world is too hostile for them to experience directly and interact with themselves.

The CST, which is not chosen or controlled by any kind of democratic or representative mechanism, polices the boundaries of the community both literally and metaphorically, by controlling who is “inside” and who is “outside”. In other words, the community is not just being protected from the ravaging hordes waiting to descend on it, but is also being policed. Many Jewish people who have chosen not to be corralled inside mainstream Jewish organisations, have, as a result, found themselves excluded from or harassed at Jewish cultural events, such as by being refused entry to Jewish film festivals or trailed by security guards at Jewish music concerts.

The CST and its backers who claim to represent all Jews, appear to see the community as a homogeneous entity, whose essential character

rests, apparently, on the twin pillars of religion and Zionism. In fact, like any other community, it is diverse, conflicted and dynamic. It is split along class, ethnic, political and other axes – as it should be. And if the life and future of the community mean anything to its members, solutions to our problems need to be debated openly – and sometimes bitterly – and resolved, rather than imposed. Instead of which, the CST defines the danger, decides what to do about it, and is given the resources to act and speak on our behalf, and represent us to the state. Gerald Ronson, the moving force behind the CST said at this year’s dinner: “The security challenge is obvious. It needs to be met with guards, with fencing, with CCTV cameras.”

It might seem obvious if your every encounter with a Jewish institution means passing through 11-foot barbed wire fences bristling with cameras, but for those of us who don’t live segregated lives, and whose children go to local state schools (albeit schools that are severely depleted of Jewish students), the necessity for such barricades is not obvious at all. Here we have an unelected, unrepresentative “charity”, whose directors’ names are kept secret, and which Ronson has the chutzpa to claim is acting “in defence of our common values of decency, freedom and democracy” (my emphasis), imposing on us both their assessment of the threat and their solution to it. Their definition of the threat is based on the discredited and highly contentious EU Monitoring Committee definition of antisemitism and their equally contentious response to it.

The CST, according to Geoffrey Alderman (The Jewish Chronicle, 10th June 2011) has met with the Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and the Jewish Police Association to discuss how they might work together for the security of the London Jewish community. “How curious, therefore,” writes Alderman, “that while the CST had been invited, the Board of Deputies had not.” The Board of Deputies has at least been elected by someone, if not by many of us.

This all fits in with successive governments’ agendas to privatise public services, atomise the institutions that provide them, and remove them from open scrutiny and democratic or even strategic control. Handing large sums of money to promote private, unaccountable, opaque, self-appointed organisations to carry out the functions of the state – whether that is education, health care, rubbish collection or policing – is the real agenda. Not many of us are taken in by the sham of Cameron’s “Big Society”, apart, perhaps, from those who will never need it – and those who are being bribed with money being cut from essential services to break up the infrastructure that supports and makes life possible for all of us as individuals, communities and a society. The CST has taken a big handout to be part of the “Big Society” The government won’t hold them to account but, in the interests of our real security, we need to scrutinise who they are and what they are up to.

JULIA BARD looks at the agendas being served by the Community Security Trust

VICTOR'S

The anti-poverty charity War on Want was created 60 years ago by Victor Gollancz, son of Polish-Jewish immigrants to Britain. **PAUL COLLINS** recalls Gollancz's life and his legacy for campaigners today

Earlier this year War on Want handed in a petition from thousands of people to Foreign Secretary William Hague. The petition supported a call by the charity for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan. It was backed by Afghan politician Malalai Joya and many public figures, including the leaders of several trade unions representing civil servants and local government workers, university lecturers, transport workers and journalists. The petition started as a letter published by The Guardian from War on Want, with signatories including Joya and the union leaders. Their letter, demanding a negotiated settlement, echoed 1951 correspondence from publisher Victor Gollancz run in the same newspaper. The Gollancz letter invited readers to send him postcards with the word "yes" if they agreed with his appeal for a negotiated end to the Korean war and the creation of a "great international fund" to help those "starving, destitute and in despair". Within a month thousands answered the plea, and War on Want was born.

Gollancz, the son of prosperous Polish-Jewish immigrants, attended St Paul's public school and Oxford University, before becoming a teacher at the fee-paying Repton school. Yet his invitation to join the UK's reconstruction committee – which would help plan Britain's recovery after the First World War – came from a portentous source. Gollancz was recruited to the committee by the social reformer Seebohm Rowntree. He became a strong follower of the Liberal politician William Wedgwood Benn and acted as secretary to the Radical Research Group. And the legendary Gollancz career took off in the wake of Benn's decision to recommend him for a job to his publisher brother Ernest. Gollancz persuaded Ernest to produce a series of art books, which proved such a big success that annual turnover rose from £2,000 to £250,000 within seven years.

Gollancz recruited socialist novelists, such as H G Wells and Edith Nesbit, and promoted books through newspaper advertising which quoted positive reviews from press critics. However, though Benn labelled Gollancz a publishing genius, he would not give him full control over the company. Moreover, while Benn had moved rightwards, Gollancz had shifted to the left. After Gollancz criticised Benn's own book, *Confessions of a Capitalist*, advocating free markets, he left to launch his own firm. It proved a rapid success as he recruited writers including George Orwell, as well as Fenner Brockway, who, with Gollancz co-founded War on Want.

In 1936, a seminal lunch took place between Gollancz and two politicians – Stafford Cripps and John Strachey. The same year, as war loomed, Cripps said he did not "believe it would be a bad thing for the British working class if Germany defeated us". But he later advocated a united front against fascism and opposed appeasement towards the Nazis. Strachey had earlier resigned from Labour to join the New Party, founded by Oswald Mosley. Nonetheless, when Mosley returned from Italy to Britain – impressed with Benito Mussolini's

feats – and formed the British Union of Fascists, Strachey, a strong opponent of right-wing totalitarian governments in Europe, did not join. At the meeting with Cripps and Strachey, Gollancz proposed launching a Left Book Club. The trio decided that another partner in the venture should be Harold Laski, son of a Jewish cotton merchant and a professor of political science at the London School of Economics.

Gollancz announced: "The aim of the Left Book Club is a simple one. It is to help in the terribly urgent struggle for world peace and against fascism, by giving, to all who are willing to take part in that struggle, such knowledge as will immensely increase their efficiency."

For the knockdown price of two shillings and sixpence, members received a different book each month – all picked by Gollancz, Strachey and Laski – which ensured high circulation without risk to the publishers. Gollancz's biographer, Ruth Dudley Edwards, said: "They were a formidable trio: Laski the academic theoretician; Strachey the gifted popularizer; and Victor the inspired publicist. All three had known a lifelong passion for politics and all had swung violently left in the early 1930s. Only Victor did not describe himself as completely Marxist, though he was objectively indistinguishable from the real article."

The club's first book, by communist leader Maurice Thorez, focused on France and the People's Front, and the titles which followed tackled the struggle against European fascism. But though the club's books included many on the Spanish Civil War, Gollancz refused to publish Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which attacked the press, including the Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*. "Gollancz is of course part of the Communism-racket", Orwell wrote to Rayner Heppenstall, a BBC journalist who produced a radio version of the writer's *Animal Farm*. Instead the book was brought out by another Jewish booksmith, Fredric Warburg, who then proceeded to publish *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Gollancz hoped to recruit 10,000 members during the club's initial year. Instead, a remarkable 45,000 signed up, and the year ended with 730 local discussion groups in place. It was estimated that, on average, 12,000 people met to discuss the books every fortnight. The late historian Ben Pimlott commented: "In April 1937 Gollancz launched the Left Book Club Theatre Guild with a full-time organiser; nine months later 200 theatre groups had been established, and 45 had already performed plays. Sporting activities and recreations were also catered for."

The club's success brought approaches to Gollancz from Labour MPs who saw a market emerging for a weekly left-wing newspaper. The politicians included Cripps, Aneurin Bevan, Jarrow MP Ellen Wilkinson and George Strauss, a Jewish Tory MP's son traumatised by antisemitism at his public school, who was later expelled from the party for supporting the socialist-communist

JUSTICE

popular front against fascism, but returned to become a minister in Clement Attlee's post-war government. From these meetings Tribune was born in 1937, with Gollancz on the editorial board. By 1938, though, Cripps and Strauss had lost £20,000 in the venture. Gollancz agreed to help, provided Tribune dropped its united front campaign. When the editor William Mellor refused to change the editorial line, Cripps fired him and offered the position to Michael Foot. But Foot declined to replace a journalist who had been unfairly treated. The job went instead to H J Hartshorn, a secret Communist Party member, who was himself sacked to make way for Raymond Postgate when the Second World War started, after he denounced the conflict as imperialist and supported the Soviet invasion of Finland.

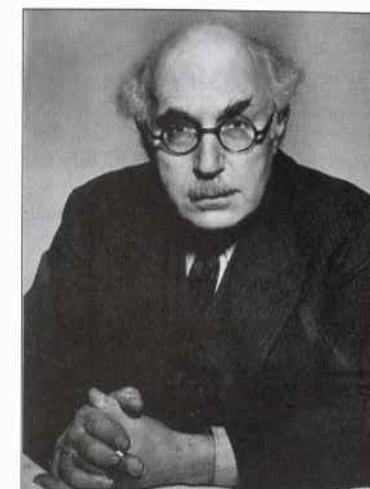
Besides Tribune, his publishing business and the club, Gollancz proved a prolific writer himself and established campaign groups. His pamphlet *Let My People Go* called on the Allied powers to attempt to rescue Jews under threat of extermination in occupied Europe. It reached a mass audience following extensive British media coverage of the Nazi's death camps. Another Gollancz pamphlet on this industrial slaughter failed to reach large numbers: journalists had almost entirely lost interest, after western powers refused to divert resources from the war effort. Gollancz, together with independent feminist MP Eleanor Rathbone, was the foremost wartime British campaigner on the issue.

When the conflict ended, he set up a campaign to send food and clothing from the UK to occupied Germany and Italy. Gollancz also worked hard to relieve starvation in Germany and founded the Jewish Society for Human Service. Its main focus was relief work, including for Palestinian and Arab peoples. Gollancz shut the club in 1948 after the initiative helped defeat fascism and Labour won a

postwar general election landslide. But in the 1950s he helped Jewish MP Sydney Silverman launch the National Campaign for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, and formed the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament with Foot, Bertrand Russell, Fenner Brockway, J B Priestley and Canon John Collins.

Though Gollancz missed out on Orwell's best sellers, his publishing company secured major successes, including Kingley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* and Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*. In 1960, he became the first and so far only British recipient of the peace prize given by the German book trade, and was knighted five years later, just before he died. His death, aged 73, left behind his artist widow Ruth, and daughters, including another artist, Vita, and musician Livia, who inherited the publishing business. The business was sold on a few times, eventually being acquired by the Orion Publishing Group who turned Gollancz into its current science fiction/fantasy imprint.

If Gollancz were alive today, the War on Want pioneer might well find many UK anti-poverty charities stranger and more shocking than the most appalling fiction. His organisation moved from battling Third World debt to baby food companies over powdered milk, Apartheid, and British retailers exploiting overseas workers. In recent years, War on Want, limited in funds and with under 30 employees, has denounced in turn Labour and ConDem governments alike for their failure to tackle how UK firms profit from human rights abuse in the Middle East, including Palestine, Asia, Africa and Latin America. But ministers face no fears from bigger charities which receive millions in state funds, pay extravagant salaries to many staff and run their operations like big business, resorting to market-speak terms, such as branding and high value development. In stark contrast, Gollancz may have long gone, but through the organisation he founded, his radical legacy endures.



Victor Gollancz.

Bitter

by David Kessel

In memoriam Salvador Allende

The bells of St Anne's are ringing down
East India Dock
Do they ring for Christ or Pinochet?
Tears falling like rain
On the mean streets of London,
Red as workers' blood,
Falling on the market place,
On a labourer's fierce decency,
On a busman's daily lot;
Flooding the streets with pain and desire.
Plane trees finger into a winter sky,
Beautiful as Bengali girls,
Straight as cockney lads.

We are all alone, but not separate
From each other in streets and parks.
We live in the spaces of other's lives
To spill the entails of M.I.6,
That worldly terror,
Onto the wide market pavements,
Between the alcis and fruit stalls.
Life so fragile, death arbitrary
Lascar seamen and Bantu gold miners.
And I have heard in desperate streets
Poor kids whistle like blackbirds, at midnight.

J DAVID SIMONS
tells the story
behind his novels
of Glasgow
Jewish life

I always wanted to write novels. But as with the eligibility criteria for receiving the Kaballah, I felt I had to wait until I was at least 40 years old to do anything about it. When that milestone arrived, I didn't think I would be mining my Jewish roots for material, until a couple of throwaway remarks resulted in the writing of two novels.

My grandfather was a credit draper, a peddler of goods on behalf of the warehouses in Glasgow, that Second City of the Great British Empire, as it was once known back in the early 20th century. It was an easy way for the more established Jews to provide employment to the ever increasing number of fellow immigrants arriving in the city. "Take my goods, sell them on credit to your customers, as long as you get your money back before you have to pay me, you make a profit, you make a living. I get rid of my stock and I make a living too. Everyone is happy."

I never really gave my grandfather's profession much thought beyond an initial amusing incident. On the first day of his new job as a credit draper, he entered a pub in Clydebank, sold all his goods on credit to the punters around the bar, went home entirely satisfied with his new venture. It was only when he went back the following week to collect his payments, that he couldn't locate any of his new customers. Therefore, the first rule of credit drapery – only sell to people if you know where they live.

I assumed that credit drapers only worked in and around Glasgow. It wasn't until my stepfather mentioned to me that his uncle Jonny had been a credit draper in the Highlands that the idea for my first novel was born. What would it have been like for an Orthodox Polish Jew with his religious ways, hardly speaking a word of English, tramping the Highlands with his goods to sell? What occurred when these two cultures collided? As it happens, these two cultures didn't present as much conflict between them as a novelist would have liked. So when it came to writing my story of identity, community, whisky, football and waterproof clothing, I ended up having to construct my own conflicts between the Scots and the Jews. Towards the end of *The Credit Draper*, the main character Avram, the eponymous credit draper of the title, returning to Glasgow by train, muses on the connections between the two cultures.

"Avram thought about his return to Glasgow. Does everyone return? Returning was in his blood, for the Jews were in a constant state of returning. Returning from their exile. The children of Israel returning to the land of Canaan from Egypt. Only to be expelled again. And now two thousand years later Uncle Mendel telling him about Theodor Herzl and his Zionist descendants wanting to return to that very same land. Does everyone return to the source? Would he return not only to Glasgow but some time later retrace his steps back to Russia? Mother Russia. The Russia of his mother. The Russia of revolutions.

"The Scots. They never seemed to return.

JEW IN THE

They went to far-flung places like Canada and New Zealand and India and there they stayed. They colonised, they set down roots, they established their church, they taught people their proud ways, they sang their songs that longed for the return they would never make. They lived life in straight lines, seeds in a furrow ready to seize the soil with a fervour and send up shoots from wherever they scattered. The Jews were different. They trod lightly on the land. Their suitcases were always packed. Their return tickets were forever hidden under the mattresses. They kept their songs to themselves. The Jews were forever moving in circles.

"But there was a tangent where the linear Scot met the circular Jew. He just had to look to Uncle Mendel as living proof. Not just with the common love for the herring, the betting, the fiddle and the schnapps. But a thirst for education and social justice. The Scots and the Jews. Karl Marx and John MacLean. A Scottish Jew. A Jewish Scot. With his tallith and his kilt. His yarmulke and his sporran. His vursht and black sausage."

A number of readers of *The Credit Draper* told me that they really liked the character of Avram's sister, Celia, a feisty young woman caught up in many of the social issues of the time. However, I had absolutely no intention of writing any kind of sequel or companion novel to *The Credit Draper* until I met the publisher Ross Bradshaw of Five Leaves Publishing at Jewish Book Week a couple of years ago. Ross talked to me about Celia as if she were a real person, and pointed out to me that not enough had been written about the Jews and socialism, especially in Scotland. Once again, a simple remark heralded the birth of a novel.

Like many other Jewish parents, mine sent me to that Jewish Zionist youth group, Habonim. It was the 1960s, and the idea of going off to that plucky little State of Israel and building communities dovetailed very nicely with the idealistic notions of the time. I first went off to a kibbutz for a month in the summer of 1972. I loved it so much that I promised myself I would return. In the end, I gave up a burgeoning law career and spent six years on a kibbutz in the Jordan Valley. I was very happy there. It was and still is the best social system I have ever lived in. I learned the language, I became a citizen. I was the epitome of the most Habonim could have expected from its young recruits. That was until basic army training beckoned and the first Intifada broke out. I left Israel with a sad heart and very complex feelings towards that country. So when Ross planted the idea that I might be able to explore some of the initial idealism that led me to go there in the first place, I jumped at the chance.

My second novel, *The Liberation of Celia Kahn*, begins in Glasgow in 1915. For the Jews, this was an interesting time. How did the Jewish socialists respond to the revolution that was brewing in Russia – a country many of them had escaped? And then there were the Zionist arguments. What kind of Israel did the Jews want? Did they follow the Zionists to Palestine or the Territorialists to any

SECOND CITY

land that was given to them? And what of these socialist communes that had started with Kibbutz Degania on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in 1912?

For the people of Glasgow, this was a time of great social unrest as well. The country was in the middle of a terrible war. And Glasgow was at the centre of several industries servicing that war – shipbuilding, steel works, armaments factories. From all over the country, workers were flocking into the city looking for jobs. Property for rent was scarce and at a premium. Meanwhile, many of the city's menfolk were now soldiers off fighting at the front, leaving their wives and families struggling to pay their rents. Greedy landlords were rubbing their hands with glee as they sought to raise these rents or kick out those who could not afford to pay and bring in the incoming workers at higher rents. It was the women who were left who started to organise against these increases. They set up community groups, arranged demonstrations and rent strikes and eventually marched on the Sheriff Court to try to prevent the evictions. The government backed down and the rents were frozen until the end of the war. These rent strikes also coincided with an important time in the women's movement. Suffragettes were struggling for the vote and were also heavily involved in anti-war demonstrations. Women were also going out to work for the first time, learning what it was like to earn a wage.

These seeds of social upheaval culminated in Bloody Friday in the winter of 1919. There was a mass rally in Glasgow's George Square built around the campaign for a 40-hour week. The Jewish activist, Manny Shinwell (later Baron Shinwell), as a member of the executive of the Clyde Workers' Committee was one of the speakers on the day. But the authorities were too fearful of the crowds, the Riot Act was read, and the police baton-charged the demonstrators. A bloody riot ensued. Shinwell and other leaders were arrested. The government sent in the army to the city not from the Scottish barracks but from down south. Tanks rolled into Glasgow, a machine gun position was set up atop

the post office in George Square. The slightest spark could have set off a revolution. Glasgow had become Moscow on the Clyde.

Shinwell was imprisoned for three months. Without leaders, the possibility of real revolution faded. Although a Jew, Shinwell didn't appear to have much to do with the Jewish community in Glasgow. Certainly, his own papers tell mainly about his political life in the city rather than of any religious participation. For its part, the Jewish community probably didn't want to associate with such a troublemaker.

It is into these events that I throw Celia Kahn. She cuts her social activist teeth on the rent strikes, through which she gains a taste for female solidarity. She is witness to the violence in George Square on Bloody Friday. She may be a child of the Jewish community in the Gorbals, but it is the wider social issues that affect her deeply. It is the city's poverty with its attendant overcrowding and disease that move her to take action by trying to tackle the issue of birth control. Yet her Jewish socialist roots continue to beckon, and the idea of building a communal settlement in Palestine, away from the urban blight of Glasgow, is also a very seductive one.

"Do you think I should become a socialist then?" the young Celia asks her wise uncle at the beginning of the novel.

Uncle Mendel sucked on his pipe, drifted into some reverie as if the smell and taste of his inhalation had set off some sweet and distant memory.

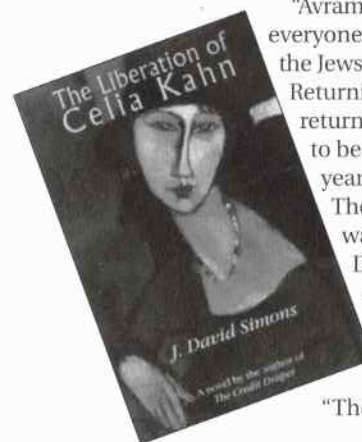
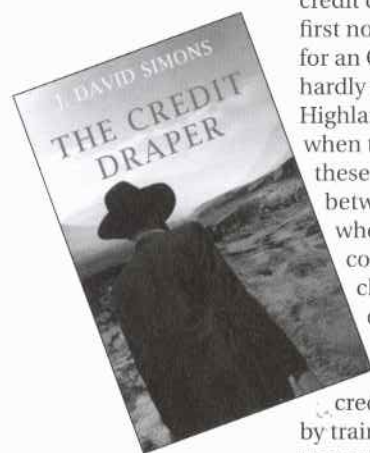
"A socialist is not something you become," he said eventually. "It is something you are. Here in your heart." He tapped the end of his pipe against his chest. "As it is written in the Ethics of the Fathers – if I am only for myself, what am I?"

"So what am I?" Celia asked.

"This only you can say. But if in your heart, socialism is what you find, don't tell your mother. A rich man she wants you to marry. A Kapitalist. A man who puts profit before people. A man who does not bring hunger, rickets or lice into the family."

J David Simons

The Liberation of Celia Kahn and *The Credit Draper* by J David Simons are published by Five Leaves, £8.99 each



WISEWORDS

Sylvia Pankhurst's eulogy to the anarchist Peter Kropotkin

"At his death he left so little money that it is tolerably certain that he was often exceedingly short of that commodity and hard put to it to make ends meet. A man born of high rank... who surrendered his position and became an exile in poverty to fight for the people's cause. He contrasts well with those who have climbed up over the backs of their fellows, to social and political prominence and affluence."

This eulogy was written in the *Workers Dreadnought*, the publication launched by the East London Federation of Suffragettes. Kropotkin, born of aristocratic background in Moscow 1842, and once a personal page to Tsar Alexander II, became an anarcho-communist. He lived mainly in Britain from the mid 1880s and frequently spoke at meetings organised by Jewish worker organisations in the East end. He returned to Russia in 1917, the year of revolution, and died there four years later.

I'M STANDING

REUBEN BARD-ROSENBERG challenges the assumptions behind the graphic headlines about "Asian Gangs" and sexual violence

"Asian Gangs, Schoolgirls, and a Sinister Taboo". This was the ominous headline in the *Daily Mail* last November. At the end of last year, the British media convulsed with reports of Asian men "targeting" white girls. As is typical of most heavily discussed racial panics, this issue was branded as a phenomenon "few dare to talk about" – with journalists revelling in the idea that they were standing up to some mythical PC Goliath.

The issue was sparked off by the conviction of numerous gang members – mostly of Asian descent – for raping large numbers of young women, and forcibly pimping them out. Many people spoke up to assert that criminals were not representative of the wider Asian community. Yet one point of fact remained relatively unchallenged: namely that the gang members in question were primarily targeting white girls.

The *Daily Mail's* Sue Marsh bemoaned the BBC's failure to draw proper attention to "the fact that the vast majority of the victims – 22 of the 27 mentioned in court – were white girls". A "controversial but relevant issue" she told us, was that "Asian men of Pakistani heritage often believe white girls have low morals". Yet the figures simply did not back up the idea that white girls were specifically targeted. Derby, where the gang were based, is 85% white. Meanwhile white women accounted for 22 out of 27 of the

victims or 81%. So the question, then, is why did the narrative of white girls being targeted become so dominant?

The idea of ethnic minority and immigrant groups targeting "our women" has a longstanding historical pedigree in the western world. Countless black men were lynched, right up to the second half of the 20th century, on these grounds. As was Leo Franks – the Jewish American immigrant famously lynched in Georgia after being falsely accused of raping and killing a gentile American girl. The incident was seen as having been fuelled by antisemitism, and led to the formation of the Anti-Defamation League. In Britain various waves of immigration – such as that of the Chinese to British cities in the early 20th century – have given rise to rhetoric about the possibilities of rape or "fornication".

These narratives are rooted, to some extent, in the way in which rape has traditionally been understood. Feminists have long argued that, typically, rape has been regarded not as a crime against women but as a crime against men who enjoyed some kind of proprietorial rights over them. The immigrant who rapes or fornicates with a young woman is seen as guilty, not only of sexual misconduct, but also of an act of larceny, committed against the native community in general. They are raping "our women".

The language of patriotism has always been gendered. The drive to war has typically been underwritten not only by conceptions of heroism, but also by the idea of defending our "women and children". Meanwhile the capacity to "treat women decently" has been invoked as a marker of civilisation, a point of distinction between "us" and "them", and as a justification for western hegemony. The never ending campaign in Afghanistan has, amongst other things, been justified in terms of chivalric fantasies – that by bombing the country into the ground our armed forces can save the nation's women from its men.

The behaviour of those Asian men convicted of rape has been characterised as an outgrowth of distinct cultural traits. Yet the manner in which they justified their actions – that their victims were "sluts" who therefore enjoyed few sexual rights – was not unfamiliar. The wife-whore dichotomy is hardly alien to British or Christian culture, long marked by the contrasting imagery of the fallen Eve and the virginal Mary. Yet by projecting "rape culture" on to outsider communities, we abdicate responsibility for the urgent need to look critically at the gendered culture within society at large, and thus the reasons for which rape remains widespread across all of Britain's communities.

TALES OF THE STREETS

This book is a good, exciting read. It is a corrective to the idea that fascism can be defeated merely by goodwill or even good politics. Fascists are a physical threat to communities. Part of their attraction is to present a pillar of strength for people who feel marginalised or whose relative privilege is being undermined, and want to associate themselves with a movement that controls the streets.

Fascism's attraction to the ruling class is also about ruling the streets. So when Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and Red Action (RA) get criticised for being "squaddists", they can quote Trotsky back at their accusers. In *The Militia and its Opponents* Trotsky criticised as "political cowards" those who

argued "we need mass self-defence and not the militia. Without organised combat detachments, the most heroic masses will be smashed bit by bit by the fascist gangs." And he was correct. But for Trotsky this is predicated on the need for building a united front mass movement against the fascists. For Red Action and some others in AFA this went by the board because they saw everybody else as liberal wimps with whom they could not unite.

With that, my praise for the book ceases, because every event it describes which I know about first hand is misrepresented in a way that promotes AFA and RA and rubbishes everybody else.

Going right back to the battle of Red Lion Square in 1974, long before AFA was established, when

Kevin Gately was killed by a blow on the head from a mounted policeman, Birchall gets it wrong. He says "unwisely, police had allowed a National Front [NF] and an anti-Vietnam war demonstration to converge with fatal results..." There was no anti-Vietnam war demo that day. The NF were holding their Annual General Meeting in Conway Hall on Red Lion Square, and anti-fascists, led by the International Marxist Group, were determined to stop them. We charged the police lines and were battered by police on horseback. Has Birchall merely made a mistake or does he not want to admit that a Trotskyist group was prepared to get physical to stop the fascists?

Moving on a decade to AFA's second conference, Birchall claims that a resolution to broaden the boundaries of concern to include racism, and change the name to Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Action (ARAF), was attempting to turn the organisation into a liberal lobbying organisation. That was not the intention. We were concerned primarily with questions of community self-defence against racists of all kinds, whether or not they were organised or consciously fascists. We also wanted to take up the challenge of deportations locally.

Birchall says: "Bradford AFA departed and, along with the Islington branch, set up ARAFA and promptly disappeared into obscurity." I can't speak for Bradford, but Islington ARAFA remained active for 11 more years. We campaigned in the community to drive the fascists' music arm, White Noise (which became Blood & Honour), out of their base in a house opposite Arsenal football ground. We organised the campaign against White Noise using the Prince Albert pub, described in the book as AFA's campaign. We were grateful for AFA stewards on the night of our march and picket of the pub. White Noise moved on to the Swinton Arms and Islington ARAFA successfully campaigned to remove them from there too.

But the main activity of Islington ARAFA over the years was supporting families on estates under attack from racists who mostly were not organised in fascist parties. We visited families, leafleted estates and organised estate meetings. This work was physically dangerous; I got a beating from a gang on the Priory Green Estate. We would have welcomed support from more physically experienced comrades but AFA and RA had different priorities.

Birchall's coverage of the firebombing of Anna Sullivan's house is little short of disgraceful. Anna had been the principal organiser of opposition to the National Front's pitch in Chapel Market in Islington, described in the book. She was the prime mover behind Islington AFA and later ARAFA. She exposed and organised the opposition to the fascists in Avenell Road and the Prince Albert pub described above. ARAFA members remain certain that the fascists were responsible for this firebombing. Birchall brushes it off by conflating it with other issues concerning Anna's son. Nowhere is Anna's heroic work mentioned, which made her a marked woman in the eyes of the fascists.

The book highlights significant confrontations such as Charlton in 1987. My abiding memory that day is of a young black man being chased by fascists, nearly getting killed running into a busy road to get away from them. AFA were around the corner in the pub. When we found them, the

fascists were long gone. This is not how it is portrayed in the book.

The Battle of Waterloo was certainly AFA's initiative. A few of us were in the station making ourselves scarce even before the AFA advanced guard of stewards arrived. They and we were swept off the station by police and made our way to a pub, making no significant impact at the time. After an interminable hour in the pub we returned to Waterloo to find a riot in full-swing. Much later some of us were still around when we heard of Blood & Honour's second redirection point at Victoria. Many of us tried to make our way there and I was whacked over the head by a police truncheon en route. No AFA in sight. When we reached Victoria there were too few of us to safely do anything but go home. From the top of a bus we saw AFA enjoying a drink in a pub. Again not quite how Birchall tells it.

There are interesting omissions too. Nothing about the opposition to the two NF marches in Dover in 1997 when AFA acquitted themselves well. Maybe it was because at the second march, at which I was arrested, AFA, the Anti Nazi League and the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe (CAFE) stood shoulder to shoulder against the police who were trying to get the fascists through, spoiling a narrative in which AFA or RA always fought the good fight in splendid isolation.

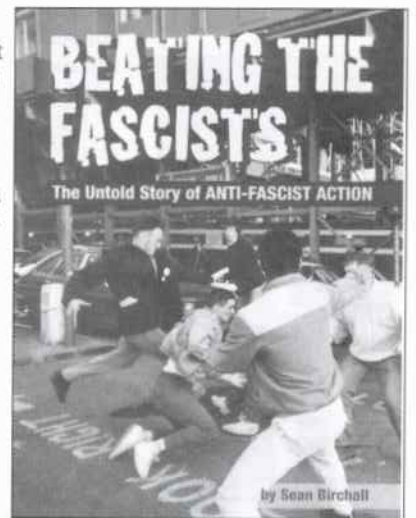
No mention of They Shall not Pass – the attempt to stop the NF marching on Remembrance Sunday 1992, which was boycotted by AFA. More significantly, there is no mention of CAFE's opposition to Le Pen's visit to Britain hosted by right wing Tories, including MPs. AFA boycotted this too. We nearly got through the police lines. With help from AFA's street fighters, who knows what might have happened?

An even more serious omission is discussion of the strong-arm tactics used by AFA and especially RA against its political opponents on the left.

The glee with which violence is described in the book is disturbing. I hate fascists but I can't take joy from descriptions of attacks with hammers and paving slabs. I suspect there is a great deal of bravado coming from many of the people Birchall has interviewed, but if half the things described here are true, particularly in relation to weapons, it is hard to understand why he is so outraged about the police wanting to close AFA down.

The creation of Anti-Fascist Action in the mid-1980s presented an opportunity to create a mass movement against racism and fascism, combining grassroots community and trades union organisation and militant anti-fascism and community defence. This was squandered by the sometimes physical sectarianism of Red Action against others in the movement, and their one-sided emphasis on physically fighting fascism. The separation of "militant anti-fascism" and the building of a mass movements remains a debilitating legacy. This book is an exciting, Boys Own kind of read but is, in the end, an apologia for this legacy.

David Landau



BEATING THE FASCISTS: THE UNTOLD STORY OF ANTI-FASCIST ACTION

Sean Birchall
Freedom Press, £15

THE MAN ON DEVIL'S ISLAND: ALFRED DREYFUS AND THE AFFAIR THAT DIVIDED FRANCE

Ruth Harris
Penguin, £14.99

A TANGLED WEB

"A conspiracy of injustice opposed by honour and truth," a "universal combat" between "two conceptions of the individual and the nation", with a happy ending in the triumph of "humanist values and respect and tolerance" – President Chirac's words sum up how for more than a century the world has seen the Dreyfus affair.

The scandalous framing of an innocent Jewish army officer for selling military secrets to the Germans, was followed by an even more scandalous five-year cover-up in high places involving the forging of evidence, perjury, and even collusion in allowing the real traitor to escape justice. The controversy split France down the middle, bringing down governments, and erupting into street fighting and attempted coups d'état.

The "affair" has been credited with the emergence of movements as varied as fascism, populism, Zionism, and the Popular Front. Its every detail has been pored over again and again, from documented court proceedings to memories of conversations and shouting matches in cafés, salons, parliamentary sessions, boudoirs and mass rallies, and in articles, pamphlets and memoirs.

Ruth Harris in this sensitive and fascinating analysis, brings out the complexities sometimes overlooked by the simplified version of the affair on which we have all been raised.

Not that she is in any way a "revisionist". On the contrary – her retelling produces even to those already familiar with the tale, an increasing incredulity at the lengths to which the high-ranking accusers of Dreyfus were prepared to go to frame an innocent man and perpetuate the cover-up. For the right-wing Catholic and Royalist traditionalists who still dominated the officer corps of Republican France, the suspiciously conscientious, hardworking, reserved and "unclimbable" Dreyfus – an outsider twice over, as a Jew and as an Alsatian – was an "obvious" suspect when a document was discovered by French military intelligence indicating that a high-ranking French staff officer was selling military secrets to Germany.

The only evidence against him at his trial was a sample of his handwriting which was claimed, despite disagreement among expert witnesses, to bear a resemblance to that on a letter recovered from the wastepaper bin of the German military attaché.

Amazingly, no attempt was made to take handwriting samples from any other potential suspects. And the difference between Dreyfus' hand and that of the document was explained by the supposition that Dreyfus, when called on to take dictation on the day of his arrest, had deliberately altered his handwriting to avoid suspicion!

As if this was not enough, a "dodgy dossier" of supposedly incriminating evidence, suitably "sexed up" with a running commentary, was quite improperly supplied to the military judges after they retired to consider their verdict, without having been shown to the defence.

Nonetheless the trial produced little questioning at the time. True, it was held in secret, but that was not necessarily suspicious in a case involving military secrets. Initially the only defenders of

Dreyfus were his wife and his indefatigable and courageous brother Mathieu.

What the trial did produce was an almost medieval antisemitic pogrom atmosphere. France was still recovering from the trauma of defeat at the hands of Germany in 1870. Two financial scandals, known as "Panama" and the "Union Générale", had ruined many small investors, and were blamed on high-profile Jewish financiers and on venal Parliamentarians.

The anti-republican right counterposed an imagined rural Catholic traditionalist and indigenous France to the cosmopolitan secular and liberal republic, which was seen as the cause of France's decline. The army, by contrast, and its heavily Royalist and Catholic officer corps, represented the "true" France as against the corrupt Republic of venal politicians, Jewish financiers, Protestants and Freemasons.

Before being shipped off to Devil's Island, Dreyfus was subjected to a humiliating ceremonial public military degradation, being stripped of his rank, decorations, buttons and epaulettes and his sword broken before a baying mob, to the sound of shouts of "Judas" and "death to the Jews" – cries taken up and echoed in street riots and antisemitic attacks across France.

The rest of the story is well-enough known – through the discovery in 1896 by Colonel Picquart, a senior intelligence officer, of a letter indicating that another officer was still selling secrets to the Germans after Dreyfus' imprisonment, to Zola's famous 1898 article "J'Accuse", exposing the cover-up in high places, to the 1899 retrial before another military court in which, bizarrely and contrary to the evidence, Dreyfus was again found guilty but given a reduced 10-year sentence on the grounds of unspecified "extenuating circumstances", followed by his Presidential pardon and release and then in 1906 his full rehabilitation, with reinstatement in the army and decoration with the Légion d'Honneur.

But Harris brings out the unexpected, complex cross currents and even apparent accidents which sometimes placed key individuals on the opposite side to that which their background and previous associations might have led one to expect. Colonel Picquart himself, a Catholic career officer with conventional antisemitic prejudices, was nonetheless shocked by his superior's reaction when he confronted him with the evidence that the spy was a certain Esterhazy, not Dreyfus. According to Picquart:

"What can it matter to you" said the General, "whether this Jew remains on Devils' Island or not?..." "But he is innocent!..."

"That is an affair that cannot be reopened: General Mercier and General Saussiere are involved in it ... If you say nothing, nobody will ever know it..." "What you have just said is abominable, General."

On the other hand General Mercier, the Minister of War who agreed to the initial prosecution, was known for his liberal inclinations. With a Protestant wife, he was suspected by the Catholic Right as he did not go to mass. He was also one of the new breed of meritocratic officers promoted on the basis of professional knowledge rather than valour on the

battlefield or traditional intangibles such as "character". He was the object of a campaign in the antisemitic press, linking military unpreparedness with Jewish subversion. For that reason he no doubt felt vulnerable, and under pressure to demonstrate the falsity of the insinuations by endorsing the prosecution. So he remained a central figure in the cover-up, and ended up a committed Royalist.

Bernard Lazare, an anarchist journalist and himself a Jew, had attacked the Jewish bourgeoisie and "Jewish finance" in terms which won applause from Drumont, editor of the antisemitic *Libre Parole*. But he also drew attention to the emergence of a Jewish proletariat, and championed the Jewish revolutionaries in Czarist Russia, whom he saw as continuing the prophetic tradition of social justice.

Jean Jaurès, like many other socialists of the time, bought in to the narrative of the power of "Jewish finance", and initially saw little of interest to the working class and the poor in the tribulations of the wealthy army officer son of a capitalist textile manufacturer. In one anticapitalist speech he proclaimed: "Yes, down with the Jews!" and went on, "but down with the Christians who are Jews."

But as he became more involved in the campaign, and as it developed into a mass movement, he became one of the foremost propagandists for the view of the affair as embodying the struggle against militarism, and for democracy and justice, all of which were in the interests of the working class, and of which he saw the workers as the most consistent champions.

The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme became a campaigning organisation, mobilising on the streets and through mass meetings against the mobs of the far right. But its founder, the former Justice Minister Trarieux, was an economically right-wing liberal, who was detested on the left for his anti-union laws and his repression and jailing of anarchists and other militants. Yet his sincere commitment to the rule of law was rocked by the violations of legality in the case and the contempt for law and justice of the right-wing conspirators. He ended up sharing a platform with anarchists he had jailed when a minister.

Dreyfus himself, essentially cautious, conservative, and reserved, also developed a certain sympathy for the socialist movement, while "deploring its excesses" according to Harris. Though criticised by some for his initial reluctance to be associated with some of the more radical campaigners on his behalf, on the death of Zola in 1902 he joined the militants of the movement in standing vigil over his coffin.

But these anecdotes and cross currents should not alter our view of the affair as at bottom a battle of right against wrong. Rather, they show how all sorts of people can be transformed by the experience of struggle. The affair showed with frightening clarity the brutal amorality of the military elite and the nationalist right, who were prepared to argue that whether "this Jew on Devil's Island" was guilty or not mattered less than the principle that the honour of French officers who had declared him guilty could not be called into question. As always, the cover-up did more damage to the political and military establishment than the original scandal itself.

But is the corrupt figure of Jacques Chirac a fitting champion of the principles of justice

championed by the Dreyfusards? Did the apparent victory of their commendable principles not serve to cast an undeserved glory not only over their cause but on the French Republican state and its official secularist ideology?

The Republic reinstated Dreyfus in 1906 as a side-effect of a militant anti-clerical campaign which politicians took up as the best way of cementing the socialist left into an alliance with the bourgeois republican centre. But at the same time an official amnesty barred the conspirators from any prosecution for their crimes. And the machinery of that self-same state for the most part loyally served the Nazi occupation and its anti-Dreyfusard collaborationist agents.

Theodor Herzl was later to claim: "What made me a Zionist was the Dreyfus trial", which he covered as a journalist in Paris. Gabriel Piterberg in *The Return of Zionism* has cast doubt on this. But Bernard Lazare also for a time drew Zionist conclusions from the wave of antisemitism which accompanied the Affair.

The bourgeois assimilationist Herzl drew from the apparent failure of assimilation the ultra-assimilationist conclusion that the Jews should and could "assimilate" by creating their own nation-state so as to be "a nation like any other"

To the revolutionary anarchist Lazare, this was anathema. His rejection of assimilation was tied up with a rejection of the values of the society into which Herzl sought to assimilate.

This led him to break with Herzl's Zionist movement. As he wrote in 1897, "The Jew who today says 'I am a nationalist' is not saying precisely and essentially 'I am a man who wants a Jewish state in Palestine and who dreams of conquering Jerusalem'. He is saying ... I have the right to be treated as a human being with dignity. I want to escape oppression ... outrage ... the disdain that is heaped upon me."

And in 1902 in an essay entitled "Contre le nationalisme du sol", he wrote "You want to send us to Zion? We do not want to go ... to vegetate like a dormant little tribe. Our action and our spirit lie in the wider world; it is where we want to stay, without abdicating or losing anything."

In continuing to champion and defend emancipation and equality while rejecting the idea that bourgeois assimilationism should be accepted as the price, Lazare can be seen, as Piterberg argues, as a champion of a democratic conception of cultural pluralism which can serve as the effective counter to those who today would use a culturally monolithic concept of civic republicanism in the service of the French state.

In today's France, alienated Muslim youth may vent their rage in attacks on Jews, while politicians mobilise popular Islamophobia in the name of "laïcité" and of the "republican values" proclaimed by the Dreyfusards.

Perhaps the lasting lesson of the alliance brought together by the Affaire is that the classic principles of justice and truth proclaimed by the liberal and democratic Dreyfusards cannot effectively be defended without a dose of the anarchist suspicion of all states of Bernard Lazare and his comrades, and Jaurès' passionate belief in working people as those with the greatest interest in seeing those principles triumph.

Stephen Marks

THE TIMES THEY ARE

TURBULENT TIMES: THE BRITISH JEWISH COMMUNITY TODAY

Keith Kahn-Harris and Ben Gidley
Continuum,
£19.99

That a serious book about the Jewish community makes favourable reference to a project launched by Jewish Socialists and cites articles from this magazine would be reason enough to recommend it; but reassuring and gratifying as a bit of *nakhes* is, the book provides much more.

Turbulent Times takes off where Chaim Bermant's *Troubled Eden* left off, and the authors quote his bigger work on *The Cousinhood* that historically figured so large above Anglo-Jewish life, as well as from Professor Geoffrey Alderman, who has combined the roles of participant and academic chronicler of Jewish community politics. But Keith Kahn-Harris and Ben Gidley are neither humourists nor historians, they are sociologists, which is probably why at times I found this book heavy going, being unfamiliar with their terms and approach to arguments.

The community has not always been so reflexive. People have felt uneasy about discussing things "in front of the *goyim*". Since the time when Bermant was writing, though, the authors describe a shift in concern from insecurity to continuity. The community has funded institutions and employed researchers like Barry Kosmin and Tony Lerman to examine itself, though it has not always being happy to accept their findings.

At the heart of the matter is a mystery. A 1992 inquiry found the Jewish community in Britain was shrinking: from 460,000 post-war, it was down to less than 300,000, and would probably fall below 200,000. This was troubling to community leaders and political spokespersons like Greville Janner, who had assumed there were half a million Jews. It would be disturbing to anyone, religious or not, who didn't want to feel they were in a disappearing community, or felt there was something worth keeping in Jewish tradition for future generations.

But where had all those missing Jews gone? We're no longer having football-team size families as some of our grandparents did, but neither are so many dying young. The rate of aliyah to Israel has not risen so much as the vociferous influence of Zionism might lead one to expect. Those taking advantage of the Law of Return might almost be replaced by the number of incoming Israelis.

Had schools like the Jews Free School (JFS) been too successful in their early goal of turning immigrant children into English ladies and gents? Had this country provided not too little sense of security but too much? One might have expected the tragic events and disillusionments of the 20th century to have put a brake on assimilationist ideas, while Zionism – with or without religion – stepped in to provide a positive, Hollywood and popular press assisted Jewish identity, even if it implied you really belonged somewhere else.

There have been fewer Jewish marriages, but surely this is part of a wider secularisation in society? And if there is more intermarriage, doesn't that work both ways, when there is less pressure on people to hide their Jewishness or be baptised? Yet Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks sounded an alarm in

1994 with *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*, subtitled Jewish continuity and how to achieve it, and pitched at anxious would-be *bubbes* and *zeydes* rather than the supposedly errant young.

This followed a report two years previously by Stanley, now Lord Kalms, better known as chair of Dixons and treasurer to the Conservative Party, criticising the United Synagogue, not for its conservatism (naturally), outmoded attitudes or undemocratic leadership, but for inefficiency and poor financial management. That year also saw Fred Worms' report, "*Securing our Future*".

The result was the launch of Jewish Continuity, an education-focused effort supported by Chief Rabbi Sacks, chaired by Michael Sinclair, a doctor who had done well in the private medicine business. Jewish Continuity acquired Clive Lawton as its chief executive, formerly head of Liverpool's King David High School and deputy director of the Liverpool Education Authority. Sir Trevor Chinn and the Joint Israel Appeal threw their funding clout behind Jewish Continuity as well.

What kind of "continuity" does the Establishment maintain, however, under this show of unity? Despite his own education – Christ's College, Finchley followed by Cambridge – Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks can bow to the narrowest-minded Orthodoxy, as when he refused to attend the funeral of the respected (Reform) Rabbi Hugo Gryn, and yet be presented in the media as though he speaks for all Jewry. For a TV broadcast before the High Festivals a year or two back, Sacks was filmed at the Jewish school in Birmingham, which is able to keep up numbers by including Muslim and Sikh children among its intake. Much better than bringing more attention to the Jews Free School in London, which went to the High Court to defend its right to exclude an 11-year old boy whose mother, though a teacher at the school, was not considered to have had a sufficiently kosher conversion.

The JFS, as a state-funded school, cannot indignantly dispute the right of secular authority to interfere with rabbinical rulings. But such discrimination is not all that rare, it was only the publicity that was. Is such narrow segregation what most Jews have in mind when they think it would be nice for their kids to have a "Jewish education"? From a continuity angle, was Chief Rabbi Sacks' question about Jewish grandchildren a reference not to their affinity or the quality of their Jewish education but rather to whether the United Synagogue or even *frummer* rivals would stamp a *hekhsher* on them?

One reason, apart from encouraging a higher birth rate (by banning television?), why some Hasidic sects have been growing within a "shrinking" Jewish community, is that they know how to seem warm and welcoming, whether to less affluent families in Hackney or students wanting to try something different at Oxford. It won't work for all (thank God) but it makes more sense than entrusting leadership to authority figures who believe in excluding those they haven't already put off.

Some things have changed. When the Jewish

A'CHANGING

Socialists' Group launched the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project (JCARP), described favourably in this book, the Jewish cultural tradition in this country had not yet recovered from two negative steamrollerings, first the assimilatory Anglicising (or Scotticising!) of an earlier generation, then the Zionist focus on an idealised Israel. The idea of modern Jews wanting to learn Yiddish struck some people as outlandish, if not suspicious, yet nowadays people are enjoying a taste of Yiddish and Ladino culture in adult education classes and concerts, and what seems strange and inexplicable to them is all the fuss that was made.

JCARP was launched in the Greater London Council's Anti-Racism year, benefiting (as did other Jewish groups) from the GLC's policy of assisting ethnic minorities. But the late Dr Jacob Gewirtz, Defence Officer of the Board of Deputies, described the decision to fund the JSG as "a slap in the face to the Jewish community". For him, the left, including Jewish Socialists, were as bad as far-right antisemites, if not worse. That the GLC was led by Ken Livingstone, a pro-PLO hate figure, only made his point for him.

Our showdown with Gewirtz had actually occurred two years before Ken Livingstone appeared on the scene. A series of antisemitic incidents was causing distress and anger in local Jewish communities but the Board of Deputies told people to keep quiet, and avoid giving the perpetrators publicity. Seeing that similar incidents were occurring in several places, and probably linked to racial attacks on other minorities, the JSG challenged the Board to publish the information it had, so that people could see what we were up against. On Radio 4, Gewirtz defended the Board's reliance on discreet talks with the Home Office, accusing the JSG of "crying wolf", working with "extremists" (he meant the Anti-Nazi League), and trying to involve Jewish youth in "confrontations on the street".

Gewirtz has gone, and now we have the Community Security Trust (CST), which enjoys good relations with the police and government, evidently more enamoured of it than some of us might be, having experienced the security organisation's unaccountability and policing role. The CST publishes reports on the fluctuating levels of antisemitism (ever upward if you believe press reports and woe betide anyone like Tony Lerman who suggests the danger is being exaggerated). But a more basic issue is what is being measured? What constitutes an incident and defines it as antisemitic?

The CST, though, are models of objectivity and caution in comparison to some journalists who seem able to earn a buck by weaving what someone allegedly said at a dinner party together with the odd statistic and intemperate anti-Israel outburst to write alarmingly about the rising "new antisemitism". Of course there are antisemites who try to hide behind "anti-Zionism", and Arabs or Muslims who stray into Jew-hatred, even falling for classic antisemitic themes. What's new? It does not help that some of our self-claimed Jewish spokespersons and supposed

friends insist that Zionism and unquestioning support for Israel are essential to our Jewish identity.

More recently we have had right-wing Zionists and neo-conservatives rewriting history to pretend that Arab opposition to having a Jewish state planted in their midst and occupying yet further areas of land is motivated by age-old Jew-hatred. (Plainly those many Sephardic Jews who left the Europe of the Inquisition to find refuge in Islamic lands were misguided.) An American pamphlet even has the Mufti of Jerusalem persuading Adolf Hitler to organise the Holocaust. Obviously if you are going

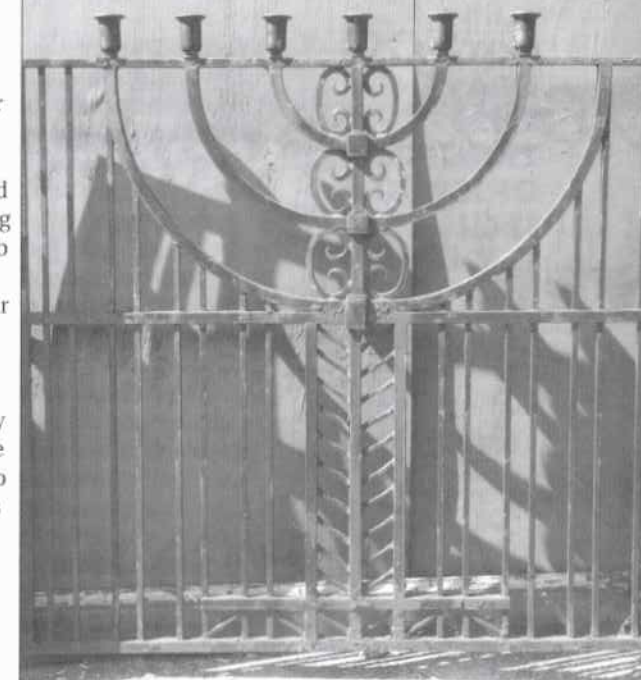
to rub shoulders with swastika-tattooed allies in the English Defence League and similar outfits, you have to look anew at the old antisemitism.

Kahn-Harris and Gidley do not deconstruct what they call the "discourse of new antisemitism", though they acknowledge that Brian Klug, one of the founders of Independent Jewish Voices, has challenged it (very effectively and logically, in my view). But showing how important the "new antisemitism" discourse has been in the Jewish community (recircling the wagons for security, and perhaps excusing alliances with old enemies, albeit of the respectable kind), they also point to its role in lobbying for Israel, in such varied institutions as the European Union, the National Union of Students and the Labour Party.

Going beyond this, however, the authors look at the growth of Jewish dissent, and people thinking for themselves, not just in the JSG, Jews for Justice for Palestinians and the more recent Independent Jewish Voices, whose limits they see, but hearteningly, beneath the surface unity of the "official" Jewish community. They note that the 2009 Israel solidarity rally during the "Cast Lead" Gaza operation ran into much reluctance and outright opposition in the community.

It would be impossible to read a book about one's own times and community without finding differences. My experience growing up in the 1950s, and joining *Habonim* as a teenager, was that Zionist youth movements were not mainstream; it was not till after 1967 that British Jews felt really safe about waving the flag for Israel. But all that is history. For a detailed study of the present Jewish community this book would be hard to beat and foolish to miss. Amplifying the thinking behind JCARP all those years ago, the authors see the future of Britain's Jewish community as being part of a multicultural society and able to appreciate diversity not only without but within its ranks.

Charlie Pottins

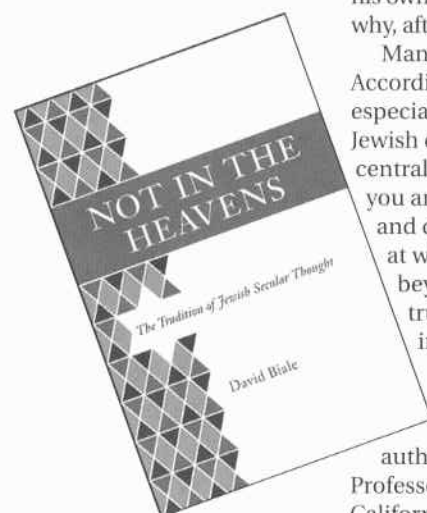


The gates of the defunct synagogue in Lea Bridge Road, London.
Photo: Simon Lynn.

Ancient texts with a modern twist

NOT IN THE HEAVENS: THE TRADITION OF JEWISH SECULAR THOUGHT

David Biale
Princeton University Press,
2011, £24.95



In *Two Thousand Years*, Mike Leigh's play about a secular, liberal-minded, labour-voting Guardian-reading Jewish family in Cricklewood, Danny and Rachel are shocked when, on returning from holiday, they discover their son wearing a kappel or yarmulke, laying tefillin and praying in Hebrew. They can hardly believe that their Josh, who got a first in maths, has got religion. "It's like having a Muslim in the house," observes Danny, while Rachel's mind is on more practical matters: "What's he going to eat?"

Danny is no Islamophobe. In the heyday of the Hare Krishna movement in the 1970s, for example, he might have said "It's like having a Hindu in the house" rather than "a Muslim". Or he could have said a Mormon. Or a Jehovah's Witness. Or whatever. From Danny's point of view, it makes little difference: these are just variations on the theme of believer. When he beholds Josh in his Orthodox gear, what he sees is someone religious and what he means is that his own son is like an alien under his roof. Which is why, after a pause, he adds: "Or a Martian."

Many people will be puzzled by this reaction. According to the standard picture, religion – especially Orthodoxy – is the bull's-eye on the Jewish dartboard, and the further you get from this central point, the less Jewish you are. Eventually you arrive at a position that is completely secular and devoid of any religious content whatsoever; at which point you are on the rim – if not beyond the pale. On this picture, Josh is the true Jew, while his parents are pallid imitations. Or visitors from Planet Goy.

David Biale's new book *Not in the Heavens* thoroughly subverts this conventional picture of Judaism. The author has a twofold interest in his subject. He is Professor of Jewish History at the University of California, Davis, with a distinguished record of scholarship that includes editing the three-volume *Cultures of the Jews* (2002). He is also, as far as I can tell, a Jewish secular thinker himself, someone who is part of the phenomenon he studies. His interest is both academic and personal.

"Secular" can mean more than one thing. Broadly, Biale means an outlook that explains the world without recourse to the supernatural and which expunges the theological from the realm of politics. Jewish secularists "responded with new answers" to questions that Biale groups under three medieval Jewish categories: God (chapter 1), Torah (chapter 2) and Israel (chapters 3 and 4). If there is one influence that dominates this landscape, it is Spinoza, whose "ideas about God as nature, the Torah as a historical artifact, and Israel as a political nation" set the tone and pointed the way – though Biale thinks Spinoza would never have thought of himself as a "Jewish secularist". (It is improbable that he would have thought of himself either as one or the other, let alone both.)

The subtitle alludes to the book's central claim: that there is a "tradition of Jewish secular thought" and that this tradition draws significantly (though

not exclusively) on old sources, generally regarded as religious, reinterpreting them in the light of modernity. One such resource, a passage in the Talmud about a disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua, gives the book its title. The disagreement turns, naturally, on the meaning of the Torah. When a heavenly voice intervenes to say that Eliezer is right, Joshua, who represents the majority opinion, retorts that the Torah is "not in the heavens". In other words, God cannot settle the argument; the question rests in human hands. Now, as Biale acknowledges, "this is hardly secularism avant la lettre". Moreover, the passage tends to reinforce the authority of the rabbis rather than challenge or undermine it. However, in shifting authority from heaven to earth, the passage lends itself to a radical interpretation, supporting the autonomy of human judgement and the rule of argument. By such means, Biale argues, Jewish secularists have given ancient texts a modern twist. They have not so much abandoned Judaism as adapted or transformed it, opening a new chapter in the age-old saga.

If this seems vaguely reminiscent of Isaac Deutscher and his essay "The Non-Jewish Jew", then it should. The introduction to the book opens with a reference to the Polish social revolutionary and his famous essay, from which Biale takes the following quote: "The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition." Biale rightly labels this a "paradox" (itself a feature of rabbinical argument) rather than a mere contradiction; and it is a paradox that he himself embraces: "Like Deutscher, I want to argue that Jewish secularism was a revolt grounded in the tradition it rejected."

But there is a difference. Deutscher's "non-Jewish Jews" include figures (such as Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg) who either did not identify as Jews or did not use Jewish sources – even if their origins left a recognisably Jewish mark on their thought and attitudes. They went to the border and crossed it, leaving Judaism behind. Biale's "Jewish secularists" are people who "engaged explicitly" with themes and texts in the religious tradition – even if employing them against that tradition itself. They have not so much crossed the Jewish border as redrawn it. Thus, the cases he discusses (other than Freud and Heine) are not on Deutscher's list: these are Jewish Jews with a secular orientation such as Einstein, Kafka, Herzl, Lazare, Arendt, Scholem, Dubnow, Ahad Ha'am, Ben-Gurion, Bialik, Berdichevsky and Oz.

"The majority of Jews in the world today," Biale remarks in the epilogue, "are, in some sense, secular." It is a fact that flies in the face of the conventional picture of Judaism, where Orthodoxy lies at the heart. *Not in the Heavens* chronicles, in an accessible and fascinating way, the intellectual tradition that reflects this change. But let us not forget the Joshes of this world: they remind us that you don't have to be secular to be Jewish. Or to be Martian.

Brian Klug

Brian Klug is author of *Being Jewish and Doing Justice: Bringing argument to life, a collection of essays written between 1983 and 2009, published by Vallentine Mitchell, £40.*

Testimony, memoir, fiction and truth

In this fine and thoughtful book, Franklin discusses representations of the Nazi Holocaust through literature, focusing on testimony and memoir on the one hand, and fiction on the other, but arguing there is not always a clear line separating these narrative forms.

Readers want to know whether they are reading fiction or testimony and Franklin argues that 'it is up to the author to guide the reader in his or her definition of the category'. She cites Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact', in which 'the autobiographer commits him or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to represent his or her own life'. It is this pact that Binyamin Wilkomirski broke in 1995 with his initially lauded, but later discovered to be fraudulent memoir, *Fragments*, in which he had posed as a Holocaust survivor. Franklin examines the context that throws up someone who fakes a Holocaust memoir, rather than presenting his work as fiction. She says: 'The real surprise is that it did not happen sooner. For the pathetic fraud perpetrated by Wilkomirski was the inevitable consequence of the way Holocaust literature has been read, discussed and understood – in America especially, but also in Europe....'

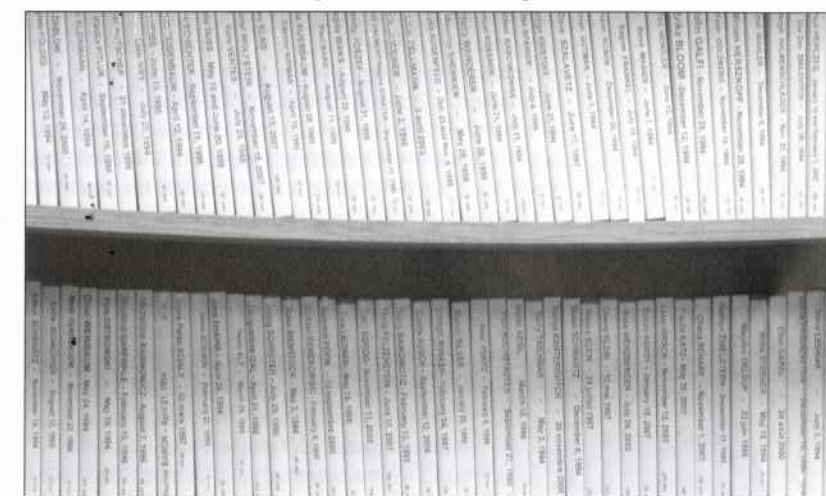
Franklin's argument throughout this book is for us to be more critical readers of Holocaust literature, and here she leads by example. She also discusses other examples of lying, as well as some more ambiguous blurs or breaches of the border between testimony and fiction. She seeks to counter the pressures that have come to privilege testimony over fiction, and challenges the arguments of Elie Wiesel and others who have said that fiction about the Holocaust is illegitimate. In this vein, Franklin is sharply critical of some second generation advocates who argue that they are the only ones who can inherit the mantle of telling about the Holocaust.

Franklin argues for literature about the Holocaust, 'not only because testimony is inevitably incomplete, but because of what literature uniquely offers: an imaginative access to past events, together with new and different ways of understanding them that are unavailable to strictly factual forms of writing'. Moreover, Franklin makes the case for reading memoir as literature, being attentive for example to authors' choices in selection and editing, and she brings this close reading to Wiesel's *Night* and Primo Levi's *If This Is A Man* (here given its US title *Survival in Auschwitz*).

A real strength of this book is that, whatever literature you have read about the Holocaust, Franklin leads you to reread and explore further. As well as examining particular authors and texts in depth, she makes a wealth of connections. The book's opening and closing arguments provide a good frame for the in-depth discussion of the work of different authors, organised in two main sections, 'The witnesses' and 'Those who came after'. In 'The witnesses', besides Levi and Wiesel, she discusses

Tadeusz Borowski's *We were in Auschwitz* and *Sunrise over Hell*, Piotr Rawicz's *Blood from the Sky*, Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* and Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*. Franklin devotes a chapter to discussing each author's work, pointing to the 'vast thematic variety which runs from Borowski's rage, to Levi's rationality to Kertész's irony and beyond'. In the rather more fragmented second section, 'Those who came after', the standout work she points to is WG Sebald's, who Franklin lauds 'for his profound understanding of the ethical conflicts in representing another person's life story', in contrast for example to Bernhard Schlink, of whose work she is severely critical. Personally, I missed in this section a discussion of Anne Michaels' great novel, *Fugitive Pieces*.

This is a beautifully argued book, whose author is unafraid to advocate for literary fiction against those who insist there is no place for it in writing



Testimony on tape.

about the Holocaust. Franklin, along with Eva Hoffmann, challenges these critics – for example, some second generation writers who seek to determine who can convey the history of the Holocaust. She cites Hoffman saying 'Writers of the second generation cannot count on the primary power, or persuasiveness of their material, on which survivors memoirs often rely.'

Franklin argues for an openness, not only about who, but what forms of literature, can address this subject matter. She offers tools and confidence for critically reading Holocaust literature, not least as a preventive approach to Wilkomirski-style duping. While she clearly values testimony and argues for reading testimony as literature, Franklin also calls throughout for the validity of fiction. She places her case in a wider context, saying: 'It is no accident that those who oppose the idea of literary representation of the Holocaust tend also to be those who argue most forcefully for the Holocaust's uniqueness. For literature, whatever its specific details, ultimately makes a case for universality. Art makes comparisons; it encourages empathy; it awakens the imagination.'

Simon Lynn

A THOUSAND DARKNESSES: LIES AND TRUTH IN HOLOCAUST FICTION

Ruth Franklin
Oxford University Press,
£18.99

ON THE SHELF

RAF SALKIE recommends three books that explore uncomfortable truths and offer new perspectives on the 20th century in the form of memoir, fiction and analysis

A friend survived the Nazi slave labour camp Dora at the age of 14. He came to our Seder this year, which gave special meaning to the prayer written by inmates of Belsen, apologising to God for eating bread during Passover. The Holocaust – like the exodus from Egypt – can sometimes seem an important but remote story. As well as having a survivor at your table, good memoirs bring it all to life. One such is Thomas Buergenthal's *A Lucky Child* (Profile, £8.99), written calmly and without a jot of self-pity. Every so often, he simply writes something like, "That was the last time I saw my father" (he was 10, in Auschwitz). Or, when his train stopped at a freight station in Berlin, as the Nazis evacuated surviving Jews to Sachsenhausen, he overheard a German woman outside say loudly "Es stinkt schön wieder von Juden" (It stinks of Jews again). I hope she's rotting in hell, but I doubt it. It's good that the Holocaust is studied and researched as an academic subject, though a bit of raw emotion every so often is good, too.

Still in that general area, *The Language of Silence* by Marilyn Moos (Cressida, £9.99) is a gripping story about a woman struggling to unearth the secrets of her parents, one dead and the other with Alzheimer's disease. They were refugees from pre-War Germany, and gradually the tragic details of their early lives are revealed. The novel cuts back and forth from the 1930s to the narrator's childhood in Durham to the present in London, increasing the mystery and then revealing more details in a beautifully paced way, which had me desperate to read on. The interactions with her mother in hospitals and care homes, and with her surly teenage son, are painfully accurate. This is a gem of a book, which I strongly recommend, especially if you are the child of left-wing parents (or, for that matter, one of the parents).

Tony Judt was a Jewish historian who died last year after a horrible illness. Originally from the UK, he worked in the US for many years. His book, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (Vintage, £11.99), is a rich collection of essays and articles from the *New York Review of Books*, *The Nation* and other publications. They are wonderfully written, erudite but readable. Judt writes with authority on a huge range of subjects, including the political situation in

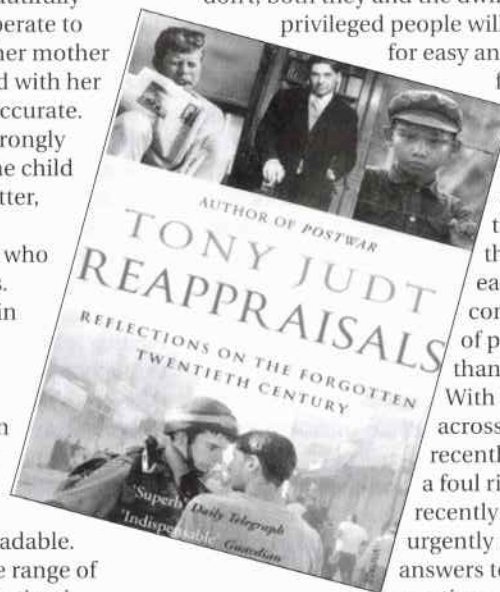
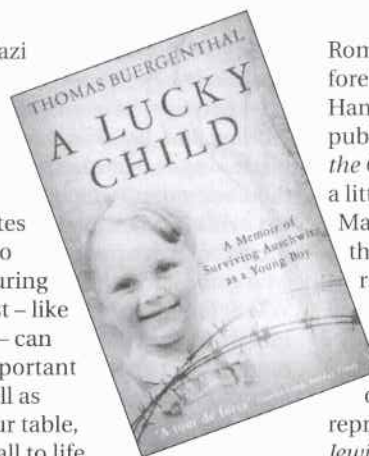
Romania and Belgium, French history, American foreign policy, and figures such as Arthur Koestler, Hannah Arendt and Manès Sperber, a writer and publisher. Sperber's major work was *Like a Tear in the Ocean*, of which Judt says: "Its subject matter is a little like that of the early novels of André Malraux." If there is a reader out there for whom that is enlightening, please let me know at rsalkie@yahoo.co.uk.

Judt unleashed the usual storm of abuse from the US Jewish establishment when he wrote some critical essays about Israel. One of them, 'The country that wouldn't grow up', is reprinted in this volume. This is familiar ground for *Jewish Socialist* readers, so let me highlight instead the spirited defence of social democracy in his final essay, entitled 'The Social Question Redivivus' (an annoying word, but never mind). It summarises the ideas laid out at greater length in his book *Ill Fares the Land*. His basic point is that the economic landscape in Europe and North America has changed so much in recent decades that traditional socialist parties, based in the industrial trade unions, are no longer viable. So what is the left to do? Judt is scathing about New Labour, which he calls "an empty vessel, clanging noisily and boastfully", and overall he dismisses social democratic governments in Europe as "the advanced wing of reforming market liberalism". He insists, however, that we have to accept the reality of global capitalism. The left's task, he claims, is to reinforce national institutions, which can protect the vulnerable from its worst excesses.

So, for Judt, we have to work within – indeed, strengthen – the state in order to help what he calls "the losers – the deskilled, the unskilled, the part time, immigrants, the unemployed", as well as "young people with no long-term job prospects, the homeless and the inadequately housed". If we don't, both they and the dwindling group of

privileged people will turn to the far right for easy answers when they look for someone to blame.

There's a lot wrong with this analysis, but there is an uncomfortable truth in his argument that the left finds it easier to construct a convincing story in times of prosperity and growth than in an economic crisis. With nationalists doing well across Europe – most recently in Finland – and with a foul right-wing government recently elected in Canada, we urgently need to find better answers to these difficult questions.



SHAMIR CAMPAIGN

While the court was deciding whether to send Wikileaks founder Julian Assange back to Sweden, a BBC *Panorama* programme on Wikileaks drew attention to his Russian connection, Israel Shamir, formerly of Jaffa, also known (in Sweden anyway) as Joran Jermas, mentioning his association with a far-Right Russian nationalist magazine, and the prosecution of his publisher in France, over alleged Holocaust denial and antisemitism. I missed any mention of Shamir's previous work for the BBC Russian service, but this wasn't a programme about him.

Panorama said Shamir passed on American cables about the opposition in Belarus, information which President Alexander Lukashenko could use to put away opponents. Well, Shamir/Jermas likes to pass on information. A Birmingham academic, seeing him refer to his "friend Martin Webster", wondered whether he knew who this man was. By mistake she said the former National Front leader was in the British National Party.

"My message got forwarded back to Shamir, who in turn sent it – complete with my work contact details – to Webster, who was swift to email me to correct my inaccuracies about his political affiliations and sent me a long account of how the BNP wasn't racist enough for him. Shamir has refused to apologise for forwarding my details to a known Nazi."

LIEBERMAN V LIEBERMAN

Meanwhile in Minsk, strongman Alexander Lukashenko must be wondering which Lieberman to worry about. Senator Joe Lieberman, the Connecticut Democrat who became a double act with Republican John Caine, has been calling for tough sanctions against Belarus, as well as increased support to the opposition there.

Israel's Russian-born rightist Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, told Belarus not to do so much trade with Iran. But he promised improved Israeli links, including \$500 million investment to develop Belarus' electronics industry. It was Avigdor Lieberman who persuaded Israel to reopen its embassy in Minsk, when he was a minister in Ariel Sharon's government. The ambassador, Ze'ev Ben Aryeh, subsequently rose to be Lieberman's top aide in the Foreign Ministry.

Now he is helping the Israeli police with their inquiries into Lieberman's alleged acceptance of money from businessmen, failure to report income to the tax authorities, and laundering sums through banks in Belarus. The police had requested help from Minsk, but say: "The ambassador, who was supposed to pass the request on discretely and directly to the authorities in Belarus, kept one copy for himself."

When Lieberman arrived in Belarus on a visit (during October 2008), [Ben-Aryeh] copied classified information from the request, [and] handed it over to Lieberman illegally when they met.

"The investigation also deals with Lieberman's involvement in the advancement and job appointments of Ben-Aryeh in the Foreign Ministry in recent months."

Lieberman could be arguing for ethnic cleansing or a new "loyalty" oath in the Knesset when he is lifted. Supporters say this is no way for a country to treat its Foreign Minister. Such is Israel's political culture these days, I have not heard anyone asking whether the country should be represented by a crook.

THE WRONG POLICY

That article on massacres in Armenia in the last Jewish Socialist missed a couple of angles. A work by Harytum Sarkissian says the you-know-whos were behind it all. Entitled *Zionism from Theodor Herzl to Lord Rothschild and the Armenian Response*, it traces the conspiracy back to the 18th century, before Herzl or political Zionism were born. If the covert Jews in Enver Pasha's Committee of Union and Progress were balanced by pro-Armenian Jews like US ambassador Morgenthau and the writer Franz Werfel, well that just shows how clever we were. Or something.

Not to be outdone, a right-wing Zionist group in America (where else?) has published a pamphlet arguing that Haj Amin el Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem, who briefly served in the Turkish Army, as a junior artillery officer at Smyrna, before defecting to the British, thus acquired the Holocaust idea which he passed on to Hitler. Why the Führer needed advice from a cleric of inferior "race", when he already had Nazi racial theory, and half his general staff had served in Turkey, during the onslaught on Armenians, I don't know. Nor how the German colonial troops managed to commit genocide against the Herero in Namibia, without having a mufti to advise them.

Still, if you are going to ally with swastika-tattooed lumpen with a habit of raising their right arms outstretched, you can be more comfortable telling yourself it was "the Muslims" wot dun it.

Meanwhile a US Federal appeal court has ruled out an attempt by an Armenian in California to sue an insurance company for payment on life policies held by relatives killed in 1915. Not only would this precedent cost insurance firms lots of money but it conflicts with US foreign policy, which has not recognised the genocide, the court says. So forget grandad's policy, and forget the "Law of Antecedence". Whether he was killed back then depends on what the diplomats are up to now.