

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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

Through this forum we aim to:

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

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

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

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JEWISH SOCIALIST

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BERLIN'S JEWISH RENAISSANCE

Saddam trial ■ Separation Wall ■ Global warming ■ boycott debate ■ poetry and fiction

EDITORIAL

The dramatic events that have shaken Israel/Palestine in recent weeks present serious challenges for progressives. Within Israel a realignment of forces has seen Ariel Sharon form a new centrist party – Kadimah (Forward). Evidently the butcher of Lebanon and the provoker of the Second Intifada considers Likud too right wing! He found an ally in veteran Labourite Shimon Peres, smarting from his recent defeat over the Labour Party leadership. Labour chose Amir Peretz – a trade unionist emanating from Israel's working class Oriental Jews. Their social and economic concerns are high on his agenda.

Kadimah's forward march reached an abrupt halt when its founder lay in a coma. As we go to press Sharon remains in this state, though his malady seems to have spread to those western political commentators who claim that only Sharon can deliver peace. Have they really forgotten every deliberate step he has taken in the last 25 years to engineer the terrible and hopeless situation that prevails in Israel/Palestine?

If Sharon's demise was unexpected, so too was the tremor in the Occupied Territories, where elections saw Fatah, the secular party long dominating Palestinian politics, defeated by the Islamist party, Hamas.

Formally established in 1987, Hamas is a social, political and military organisation rooted firmly in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. Its political charter not only confirms its position deep within Islam's fundamentalist wing but expresses too the extent to which it has bought into traditional European antisemitism. Any socialists here drooling over Hamas's radical challenge to the status quo in Palestine might stop to consider this charter statement (article 22):

'For a long time, the enemies have been planning ... they took control of the world media ... With their money they stirred revolutions.... They were behind the French Revolution, the Communist revolution ... With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons ... for the purpose of achieving Zionist interests. With their money they were able to control imperialistic countries ... They were behind World War I.... They obtained the Balfour Declaration, formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world.'

Hamas's backstory begins in the 1970s. Emerging in Gaza as the Islamic Centre, it gained legal recognition from Israel in 1978 – while most Palestinian initiatives were condemned as 'terrorists'. As a potential counterweight to the secular PLO, it won support and encouragement from successive Israeli governments. Its leader then was Sheikh Yassin, but his sponsors turned murderers. In 2004 Yassin was assassinated in a strike from a helicopter gunship. And Hamas had the most powerful martyr to boost recruitment.

Israel's consistent undermining of the Palestinian Authority, and Fatah's self-inflicted wounds as it failed to demonstrate democracy and accountability, allowed Hamas an opportunity.

Already popular amongst the poor for its welfare work, financed by Saudi Arabia, Hamas dressed its political challenge up in pseudo-radical rhetoric.

Losing faith in the Palestinian Authority, hundreds of thousands of oppressed and humiliated Palestinians voted for Hamas. Few could have voted consciously for its antisemitic and fundamentalist charter. But they ought to be informed of the real perspectives and goals of the movement's leaders. One left wing current here – Weekly Worker – has correctly identified Hamas as a 'reactionary movement of the oppressed'.

While the causes of this protest vote are easy to comprehend, the left also needs to be understand the consequences.

Media attention has focused on how it will affect Israel, but its impact will be felt first and foremost within Palestine – by women, by secularists, by all who don't want their struggles for freedom and self-determination swept into a vehicle for promoting Islam.

Behind the alarmist rhetoric, the Israeli right wing are surely satisfied. Running short of excuses not to talk with the Palestinian Authority, they can far more plausibly refuse to negotiate with those who don't recognise Israel and who send suicide bombers against its civilians.

But we must demand that the democratically elected Israeli government – right or left – must negotiate with the democratically elected Palestinian government – right or left. Without pre-conditions on either side.

If Hamas has indeed won an overwhelming victory it would be a defeat also for an ideal that the mainstream Palestinian movement has clung to since its inception: the demand for a secular democratic state. This demand united believers (Muslim and Christian) and non-believers within an equal, joint struggle against the Occupation and Zionism. This demand had its weaknesses. It was originally counterposed to the 'two-states' position which more accurately reflected the existence of a Hebrew-speaking Israeli nation alongside the Palestinian nation. The solution could not be reduced to religious coexistence. In current circumstances, though, whether we fight for one state or two, the democratic and secular nature of this state, or these states, must be paramount in what we work for and how we achieve it.

The extent of Hamas's victory has been exaggerated. Half the seats were allocated on a strictly proportional basis. Though Hamas was the largest single party, it won a minority of these votes. Fatah ran them a close second (around 3% fewer) while various secular independent groups picked up a total of roughly 12% of the votes. On the parallel system of regional personal candidacies, Hamas substantially increased its representation.

If the international left can recognise this reality and if Fatah faces up honestly to the internal weaknesses that drained its support, the democratic secular path can still be followed rather than the cul-de-sac of Islamic fundamentalism.

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News

The kids are all right

Children from a secular Jewish Sunday school in Massachusetts have taken to the streets in defence of workers' rights. The manager of Wal-Mart's in Framingham, Massachusetts called police to deal with a protest by the children whose spokesperson, 10-year-old Owen Weitzman said: 'This is the biggest and richest company in the world and they're using sweatshops.' The protesters held placards saying 'Stop sweatshops'; 'Give workers living wages' and 'Don't hide under bushes'.

The protesters attend a supplementary school organised by the Arbeter Ring (Workers' Circle). The children stood outside Wal-Mart's entrance, refusing to move until a letter of protest was taken to be sent to the company's Chief Executive. When the police asked the children to leave Wal-Mart's property, they complied, having made their point forcefully.

Website: www.workmenscircleboston.org

Stages of freedom

When the Israeli army invaded Jenin refugee camp in 2002, their trail of destruction included a children's theatre, which was established by Arna Mer Khamis (right), a lifelong campaigner for peace and human rights. Arna was born to Jewish parents in Palestine in 1929 and was awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize in Sweden in 1993 for her work, but two years later died of cancer.

Last August, friends and colleagues of Arna, community leaders in the refugee camp and local staff from a child rehabilitation centre, met to plan the rebuilding and revival of the theatre. Palestinian activists and artists from Haifa and the Galilee and Jewish activists from Sweden and Britain have contributed to this process.

On 19th February the



Freedom Theatre opened again with a performance of a play called Diab.

For further information on the theatre and ways to support this initiative visit www.arnafreetheatre.org

Ladino fever

In the last 20 years there has been a global revival in Yiddish music. Now another Diaspora phenomenon is asserting itself. Los Desterrados are a London based band playing Ladino music. Ladino is the language of Spanish Jews that migrated with them when they were expelled in 1492, and became infused with Arabic, Turkish, Greek and Slavic words from the lands of their destinations.

Los Desterrados have recently released their excellent new CD, 'Tu', and are planning to release a third album this year.

For further information and details of future gigs visit www.losdesterrados.com. A full review of 'Tu' is now on the JSJ website: www.jewishsocialist.org.uk



Rising Tide

Rising Tide is a grassroots national and international network comprising groups and individuals who take direct action to confront the root causes of climate change and promote local, community-run solutions to energy needs.

According to Rising Tide, 150,000 people are already dying annually from the effects of climate change and thousands more are becoming environmental refugees. Rising Tide looks to bottom-up campaigning rather than lobbying 'leaders', since those leaders 'still have their heads firmly buried in

the oil-filled sand', handing 'money to oil companies to build their pipelines, send troops off to fight their oil wars and keep the global economy on track for maximum corporate profit'.

It is critical of climate campaigns which limit themselves to winning adherence to the Kyoto Protocol, since Kyoto looks is if it might reduce greenhouse gas emissions by just 2%, while the United Nations' own scientists suggest the need to reduce emissions by 60%.

Rising Tide uses diverse and

creative tactics to spread information and unite people in action. It produces newsheets, runs information stalls at events and organises film nights and street theatre activities. It also has a website through which you can subscribe to a regular news bulletin.

Rising tide can be contacted at: 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES Tel: 07708 794665.

Email: info@risingtide.org.uk Website at www.risingtide.org.uk

See The Heat is On by Mark Levene on page 15.

FROM WHERE I'M STANDING

Religious hatred? Give us a break. Most of us will tolerate, if not respect, people's individual beliefs and try to avoid offending them, however wrongheaded we think they are. Despite being an atheist, I know I'm not alone in clinging to irrational ideas that tie me to my history and community; I've even been known to resort to superstition, in extremis, if not on a daily basis. But what we have witnessed in the passage of the Religious Hatred Bill through Parliament, the whirlwind of violence in response to the Danish cartoons of Muhammed, and the Chief Rabbi's morally barren reaction to the Church of England's decision to disinvest from Caterpillar, has nothing to do with personal beliefs and not much to do with freedom of speech. It is a battle for power, in some cases, as we have seen, to the death.

The Religious Hatred Bill, even in its amended form after the Government defeat, makes it an offence to stir up 'hatred against persons on religious grounds'. The trouble is, all 'persons' are not equal; indeed, some 'persons' get to speak on behalf of others. What's more, 'religion' can morph imperceptibly through 'community', 'culture', 'faith', 'ritual', 'beliefs', 'race' and a whole lot more deeply problematic aspects of human social life. And then there is the difficulty of defining 'stirring up hatred'.

In The Observer (12th February 2006) Andrew Anthony wrote of the cartoon of Muhammed wearing a turban shaped like a bomb: 'It's this image ... that is deemed the greatest insult to Islam and, by extension, the world's Muslim population.' That 'by extension', as Anthony goes on to point out, is rubbish. It is invoked to give credibility to individuals and organisations which claim to represent the 'Muslim community', but are, in fact, defining the territory they govern, drawing a boundary to keep out dissidents. Apart from the secularists and atheists who come from a Muslim background my friends include practising, believing Muslims who do not consider cartoons or representational art, or dancing or singing, or other activities forbidden by one particular group of Muslims to be wrong at all.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks is another fine exponent of weasel words. In his latest intervention, on the Church of England's decision to disinvest from Caterpillar, he said: 'The Church's policy will have adverse repercussions for Jewish-Christian relations ... it will reduce its ability to act as a force for peace between Israel and Palestine.' Excuse me? Let's untangle this.

1. The Church has decided to remove its not-very-hard-earned assets from a company whose machines are used to break international law and every moral law you can think of to mete out collective punishments by demolishing the homes of innocent Palestinian families. How on earth can this reduce its ability to act as a force for peace between Israel and Palestine?

2. The Church's overdue condemnation of Israel's illegal, immoral, violent and provocative acts in the Occupied Territories 'will have adverse repercussions for Jewish-Christian relations'. Just for Sir Jonathan's information, Jewish groups that have been at the forefront of the campaign against Caterpillar include, among many others: Coalition of Women for a Just Peace, Israel, Grandparents for Peace in the Middle East, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, The Parent's Circle, Israel, as well as many rabbis. As a result, many Jews, like me, are feeling uncharacteristically well disposed towards the Church of England, since it has, at last, taken a moral decision to champion Palestinian human rights and, in doing so, promote the prospect of a just peace.

The Chief Rabbi's arguments, like those of the Imams who claim to speak for all Muslim communities all over the world are either half-baked or dishonest. Of course, they're entitled to try and protect their interests and their power in whatever way they see fit, including the use of propaganda, but we're equally entitled to challenge them, however offensive they may find that. And if, in doing so, we break the new law, let them come and arrest us.

Julia Bard

You can add your name to a Jewish statement against Caterpillar via the Jewish Voice for Peace website at: www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/

VICTORS' JUSTICE

WAR CRIMES

'Hitler revisited' was Bush senior's response to atrocity stories about Saddam Hussein's regime in autumn 1990. 'But remember', he continued, 'when Hitler's war ended, there were the Nuremberg trials. America will not stand aside. The world will not allow the strong to swallow the weak.' He was echoing Thatcher as she drummed up support for the first Gulf War.

This rhetoric was necessary, given Britain and the USA's previous close relations with the Iraqi regime – selling arms, engaging in trade and encouraging its lengthy war against Iran.

Fifteen years later, the long process they kick-started is concluding. Saddam faces trial for the execution and disappearance of over 140 Shiites in al-Dujail in 1982. Further trials may deal with the mass murder of Kurds in 1988 and Shiites in 1991.

We have just passed the 60th anniversary of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, at which the surviving members of the Nazi leadership were tried. Attempts to hold state leaders to account for their crimes date back to World War I. The Versailles Treaty proposed a special international tribunal as a sop to febrile post-war public opinion and Lloyd George's slogan: 'Hang the Kaiser'. But the USA blocked it as it wanted good relations with Germany. There were half-hearted attempts to prosecute Turkish leaders for the Armenian genocide, but few were convicted and no recorded judgement was left. The crime remained airbrushed from official Turkish history: an early lesson in what happens if you botch the job.

Nuremberg created a precedent. Initially Britain wanted summary executions – fearing Nazi leaders would use the trial for propaganda or expose Allied war crimes. The USA, supporting a trial, won out, anxious that a reconstructed capitalist Germany should act as a block to Soviet dominance of the new Europe.

It was victors' justice, financed, run and judged by the four allied powers. There was no public embarrassment at Soviet participation, despite Stalin's recent responsibility for crimes against humanity and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Neither was there any mention of Dresden or Hiroshima, despite the deliberate targeting of civilians – a clear war crime. Consequently, no Germans were ever charged with aerial bombardment. And German Admiral Donitz had to be acquitted over submarine warfare against Atlantic shipping because US Admiral Nimitz had acted likewise in the Pacific.

Follow-on tribunals tried hundreds more. But as

the Cold War settled in, sentences became lighter and a system of clemency was introduced. By the early 1950s nearly all were free. German companies that had profited from the Holocaust and the war, flourished again. Nazi scientists and businesspeople were given immunity, as was Emperor Hirohito at the parallel Tokyo Tribunal.

Despite this history, Nuremberg's lasting testament was the international recognition of the Holocaust both as a fact and as a 'crime against humanity'. But even this legacy demands critical examination.

Individual Nazis were certainly criminally responsible but it has taken decades to explore the full range of causal factors. Aspects remain hotly contested, such as, to what degree was popular complicity relevant? Did German extermination strategies and concentration camps for the Herero in South West Africa at the turn of the century pave the way for Belsen and Dachau? Settling of accounts without getting to grips with underlying causes and beginning to tackle them, opens the way for repetition. Any criminal tribunal should be a spur to that process, not an obstacle.

The record since 1945 has been poor. Decolonisation was achieved only at the expense of mass atrocities by the British in Kenya and Malaysia and the French in Algeria. Three million perished in Vietnam and Cambodia at the hands of the US war machine. Washington was implicated in the death of a million Indonesian civilians during Sukarno's overthrow in 1965. Across the globe, brutal dictators have been propped up in a period dominated by precisely those states that dispensed justice at Nuremberg.

Some argue this has changed with the new International Criminal Court (ICC) and with the establishment, under UN auspices, of war crimes tribunals – bringing to justice those implicated in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

But the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), broke with Nuremberg and explicitly excluded 'aggressive war'. Michael Scharf, who drafted the UN statute founding it, candidly explained why: 'In the final analysis, the United States government, which had been accused by human rights groups and several governments of committing "Crimes Against Peace" with respect to recent military interventions ... did not want the ICTY to exercise jurisdiction over this offence, leading to precedents that might hamper similar US military action in the future.'

Some minor league thugs have been convicted by the ICTY, but Slobodan Milosevic, despite his

The anti-war movement has embraced the popular post-9/11 slogan of 'Justice not Vengeance'. As Saddam Hussein faces trial, **PIERS MOSTYN** asks whether this aim will be realised

TWO DEFENCE LAWYERS HAVE BEEN MURDERED; A THIRD HAS FLED THE COUNTRY FOLLOWING DEATH THREATS. THE US AND BRITAIN HAVE DENIED THAT THEY HAVE ANY DUTY TO PROTECT DEFENCE LAWYERS

brutal record, has discredited his prosecution by playing on this background and Western complicity in fomenting ethnic strife in the Balkans.

The Rwanda tribunal was overshadowed by evidence of Western complicity with or indifference to the slaughter of over 800,000 Tutsis in 1994 that gave rise to it. And despite efforts to bring Pol Pot, Pinochet and Sharon to justice, they and others have slipped the net.

As for the ICC, the refusal of major culprits (the USA, Israel and China) to ratify has been compounded by Washington's systematic intimidation of small, poor countries into signing up to agreements guaranteeing US immunity. The American Service Members Protection Act authorises the President 'to use all means necessary and appropriate' to release any American national detained on behalf of the ICC. Even the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution condemning the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad was delayed until all references to the ICC had been deleted.

States have long used a claim of defending human rights as a cover for military adventurism. The British justified its role in the 'scramble for Africa' as saving people from slavery. The USA declared war on Spain in 1898 'to put a stop to the intolerable conditions in Cuba', as President Roosevelt put it. A 'liberation' that Guantanamo detainees benefit from to this day!

And so to the prosecution of the former Iraqi leadership. Days before Saddam's first trial was due to start, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report described the origins of the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal (SICT): 'From an early stage, the US consistently opposed an international tribunal or mixed Iraqi-international court under UN auspices ... the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) insisted on an "Iraqi-led" process – without establishing a transparent process to consult Iraqis or assess Iraqi attitudes towards issues of justice and accountability. Instead the proposal for an "Iraqi Special Tribunal" emanated from individuals close to the CPA and the CPA-appointed Interim Governing Council. The process of drafting and revising the founding document of the (tribunal)

lacked transparency. Numerous requests of HRW and other human rights organisations and international experts to see and comment on the draft law were rejected. Difficulties in obtaining information about the SICT have persisted.'

Despite the prohibition of the death penalty by all such tribunals since Nuremberg, the SICT not only authorises it but stipulates that executions must be carried out within 30 days of appeals being exhausted. As a result, the UN has refused all co-operation. Capital punishment is therefore viewed as a higher principle than the imprimatur of international approval.

The decision to hold a purely 'national' trial breaks with previous tribunal experience. Thousands of Nazis were prosecuted in Germany, but only after 1959, when an independent criminal justice system had stabilised.

According to ICTY prosecutor Richard Goldstone, the Rwanda tribunal was based in Tanzania because 'no fair trials could have been held in the presence of millions of victims calling for blood'. And the Sierra Leone trial involved international lawyers, judges and procedure.

The political and social contexts of an ongoing war and foreign occupation raise fundamental questions in themselves. Who has the authority to conduct trials, on what basis and accountable to whom? The legitimacy of the Iraqi state structures remains fiercely contested. What has passed for 'democracy' is hardly credible in the presence of 170,000 foreign troops, with perhaps 100,000 killed and a near impotent regime in existence for barely months.

The Interim Governing Council installed by the US, drafted the original SICT statute and oversaw what counts for a judiciary and police force. It was mired in serious corruption allegations and the subject of repeated complaints by major human rights groups over involvement in disappearances, executions and torture.

The election of the 'transitional government' has brought no improvement. When American forces raided an Interior Ministry building in November to find 173 malnourished detainees bearing signs of appalling mistreatment and torture, this government simply denied all knowledge. What confidence can there be in a judicial system that is incapable of or unwilling to rein in such abuses?

The cost of the SICT has been underwritten by a US\$128 million budget under the control of the Regime Crimes Liaison Office (RCLO), established in 2004, headed by a Bush appointee and working from the US embassy in Baghdad under the authority of the ambassador. The New York Times has described the RCLO as 'the real power behind the Tribunal, advising and often deciding on almost every facet of its work, always behind a shield of anonymity.' Leading the team training the judges was the same Scharf quoted above, whose background as a US State Department lawyer includes time in the counter-terrorism section and a 25-year record of defending US interests.

The US-led occupation force's responsibility for SICT is particularly problematic given Western complicity with the Hussein regime during many of the worst atrocities. Will the truth be told about the derivative of Zyklon-B, (the gas used in the Nazi camps) supplied by German companies, which

gassed 8,000 Kurds at Halabja in 1988?

UN General Secretary Kofi Annan characterised the invasion as an illegal war. If so, it is a war of aggression, which the Nuremberg judgement described as 'the supreme international crime'. Then there are the bombardments and assaults on large civilian centres, like Fallujah, using white phosphorus and blowing up buildings with civilians inside. All such crimes are exempt from any consideration under SICT.

The US has admitted detaining 35,000 Iraqis since the invasion, of which only 1,300 have been charged and only half of those found guilty. The notorious detainee abuse scandals at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo led to worldwide condemnation. Leaked memos suggest these abuses were hatched at senior level with the involvement of US government lawyers. This, and the lies peddled to justify the war, make it impossible to have any confidence in the integrity of the processes involved in setting up and running the SICT.

And there has been widespread criticism over procedures for securing evidence relevant to crimes against humanity – particularly regarding witnesses, mass graves and documentation.

Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have both produced substantial dossiers outlining their numerous 'serious concerns' about the SICT, above all the absence of guarantees of a fair trial. These include the lack of a criminal burden of proof (conviction only requires 'satisfaction' of guilt, not beyond reasonable doubt); lack of proper access to defence counsel; no 'equality of arms' between prosecution and defence; inadequate means of

confronting and questioning witnesses, politicisation of control of the SICT and susceptibility of the judges to political dismissal.

Astonishingly the SICT's textbook of law and procedure was disclosed to the defence only days before the trial was due to start. And there have been persistent complaints about a failure to disclose the basic documentary evidence.

Two defence lawyers have been murdered; a third has fled the country following death threats. The US and Britain have denied that they have any duty to protect defence lawyers – which is bizarre given they run the country's security and this is one of the elementary preconditions to a fair trial. The Iraqi government claims to have offered 'protection', perhaps of the same type offered to the 173 unfortunates found incarcerated in the Interior Ministry basement.

The proper question, if Saddam Hussein is convicted, is not simply, 'Is this the right verdict?' But 'How will it match up to Justice Robert Jackson's challenge in opening the prosecution at Nuremberg?' He said 'We must summon such detachment and intellectual integrity to our task that this trial will commend itself to posterity as fulfilling humanity's aspirations to do justice.' If high profile trials cannot be conducted fairly, what chance is there for anyone else processed through Iraqi courts, or for the country's future as a democratic, fair and safe society?

These trials seem set to reflect their origins: tawdry and cynical, born of a criminal war of aggression. Real justice for the regime's victims may be as far off as it has ever been.

PULL DOWN THE WALL OF FEAR

What made you become an activist?

I'm 17 years old, and I've been an activist since I was 14 as part of a group of young Israelis, who demonstrated against the Occupation. We had phone calls from Mas'ha in the West Bank in 2003, inviting us to come and see for ourselves what was happening. That was the first time I was able to see Palestinian people as individuals rather than symbols.

Our camp was evacuated by the army after two months. We said: 'This is Palestinian land. What you are doing is a war crime. We won't obey your orders and we're going to stay here.' They arrested many people and finished building that part of the Wall.

We went back to open the gates at Mas'ha and an Israeli activist was shot and almost killed by the Israeli army. From that time we called ourselves Anarchists Against the Wall – most of us are anarchists – though there are also socialists and communists. We have a principle of non-violent resistance.

What's the anarchist perspective on this struggle?

According to anarchism you are not being organised, you organise yourself. No one tells you what to do, but you organise your society as you want to see it, according to your own interests. If we want a non-violent, democratic society, we have to do this ourselves without some people telling others what to do, without any hierarchy.

Are there debates in the resistance movement

between anarchists, socialists and communists?

There are not many differences in this struggle because all the Israeli activists have a common goal. We are not fighting for anarchism or communism but, as an anarchist it seemed to me that previously leaders were talking to each other but ordinary people were not. Now we are talking to each other.

Are there inequalities in the Israeli/Palestinian friendships?

We try not to let that happen. For example we really have made a rule that we will stay together on demonstrations and not operate as separate groups.

We are one of many groups of Israeli activists, including Ta'ayush and Gush Shalom, who will go to any village that invites us to come and fight against the Wall. We get a message: 'They are going to build the Wall on our land. Would you come to help us and see what's happening. We meet the people, the popular committees, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Communist Party, Fatah – we work with everyone.

Is it difficult to maintain the links with Palestinians?

They are not able to go to Israel, so we go to see them because it's important to us that the political solution comes from the bottom, from ordinary people. This means that Israelis and Palestinians see each other as human beings and not as icons or enemies. Israel can shoot rubber bullets and tear gas at us, which she does at every demonstration,

Israeli refusenik **MATAN KOHEN** talks to **SIMON LYNN** about the ideas and activities of Anarchists Against the Wall

At the Nuremberg Trials, 1945



but the solidarity between people is stronger than that – they have broken the limits of nationality and religion and so on, and are fighting together, demonstrating together and meeting as friends.

Because we fight in a non-violent way, the only way that the Israeli army can stop us is by shooting us. The only thing that can stop dialogue is war, killing people, and that's what they have tried to do.

What do you think is the meaning of the Wall?

A wall is a physical barrier but it is only a symbol for a mental barrier. As a physical barrier, the Wall means people cannot go to their land, they have no food, they can't go to school, to hospital and so on. But worse than this is the mental barrier that people must have in order to build such a thing. In the end we can tear down the Wall – it's only concrete – but the real problem is that they are prepared to shoot people who are fighting in a non-violent way.

We are fighting against the Wall from the Palestinian side, for human rights for Palestinians, but also for Israelis. This small society is building its own ghetto, which becomes more and more intense the more closed it becomes. The only common factor is army service, so that is a sacred duty.

Are the Palestinian Israeli citizens more marginalised in this process?

It's hard for them to participate in demos because they're under pressure and have their own problems. We have a lot of actions inside Israel and I would like more. We recently went up north to demonstrate for the 13 people who were murdered five years ago in October 2000 by Israeli police, as well as actions against house demolitions inside Israel.

Only a minority of Israelis are willing to put themselves on the line. Does this influence others?

We have been fighting for a couple of years and people are tired but they still have huge motivation. I don't necessarily want people to be activists; I just want ordinary Israelis to come and see what is happening because if you see it you have to change your mind, like I did. What are these huge piles of sand doing in the middle of the roads, blocking people's route from one village to another? What is this checkpoint doing here? How is it that I can go through and this person can't? How come I, as an Israeli, have to bring water and food to these people? I just asked questions. If others come, they will begin to doubt that the Wall is for our security.

It's a difficult process because war can push people the other way.

That's true, which is why non-violent struggle is important. Many Israelis think Palestinians only want to kill them. We want to reduce this barrier of fear, and show that Israelis and Palestinians can live together peacefully. The Israeli political leadership has an interest in maintaining this barrier of fear, this smokescreen, which makes people too afraid to see what really is happening.

I've met the leader of Hamas on the West Bank. He says he doesn't think non-violent resistance will bring down the Occupation, but he supports it.

So what you are struggling for now is for the Wall to be taken down?

When Israel began building the Wall it was going to take 20% of the West Bank. After our struggle and all our opposition to the Wall, it's going to take 9% – that means we've saved 11%. It's made a difference.

We're trying to stop the building of the Wall or at least keep it to the Green Line. They removed 8,000 settlers from Gaza but they've built new homes for 30-40,000 more on the West Bank, mainly on the land they've grabbed by building the Wall.

Can you tell me about great resistance at Bil'in?

Bil'in is one of the villages that is fighting. The Wall is to take 70% of their land and it's going to be used for more settlements. The village has been fighting a long time and it has become a really big symbol of non-violent resistance.

Do you see the withdrawal from Gaza as any sort of victory?

It's better than nothing, though the people are still not free. There's bombing from outside every day. It is easier internationally for Israel to do it from the outside: people cannot leave their houses, Israel controls the borders, the water supplies. It was ridiculous to see the settlers fighting the army, who didn't use any violence against them, whereas we do nothing and get shot.

I think the Government let that resistance happen because they want to keep a promise to the settlers to retain all the big settlements in the West Bank. This means there will be no Palestinian state, no Palestinian sovereignty. They are building more around Jerusalem to make it impossible for Jerusalem to be the capital of Palestine.

The Wall makes people's lives extremely hard, and because of checkpoints they cannot go from the north to the south of the West Bank. There are 600 checkpoints within Palestine itself, and they pull up the trees, take all the water sources.

Our main struggle is on the West Bank: to stop the building of the Wall and all building of settlements, to act for removal of checkpoints and to help Palestinians with their olive harvest when they cannot get their olives, which are their main source of income.

How optimistic are you?

We have a lot of hope. It's horrible every time they shoot us but if the only way they can stop us is to shoot us, it means they are really hopeless. In the end, though maybe not in the short term, we have the power to continue, because we believe in what we are doing; people feel they have nothing to lose because otherwise they won't have a life.

If I were a Zionist, the first thing I would have done would be to give the Palestinians a state. This would be in their own interests. While of course the Occupation is bad in the short term, in the long term it will bring the devastation of Israel as an occupying state because it will not be able to maintain its power. The Palestinians will be a majority and then people will have to choose between recognising each others' right to live together in a multicultural society or living in small ghettos of Jews or Palestinians.

Fear of a Palestinian majority is part of a racist demographic argument by the right. Do you think this contributes to the fears of some on the left who want two states?

It is a fear of those on the moderate left like Peace Now because they want a Zionist state but on the radical left no one talks any more about a two-state solution. We want to live together. So we can have two states and let us cross the border and live together, or we can have one state with everyone being equal citizens wherever they live. One of the

main achievements of our struggle is that people are acting together. We don't just share a view that the Occupation is bad, we want to *live* together.

That would mean removing the settlers from the West Bank because they do not want to live as equal citizens?

That's a tricky problem, which might mean that two states with open borders is preferable. You can't force the issue. If you have two peoples with national visions, they can have separate states and let them fall down as they discover there is no need to live separately. So I do support a two-state solution as long as all people have their human rights.

Fighting for two states means demanding that Israel pull back to the Green Line, but also that the border should be open?

I resist the Wall because I don't believe people should have walls between them, but if they argue that it's necessary for security, then it must be on the Green Line. As soon as there is peace it will be taken down but the mental barriers have to be removed first.

What about solidarity links outside Israel?

We really need international support for our struggle. We need money. Give us support and let people know what is really happening and don't buy the Israeli lies and propaganda that the Wall is to do with security. It has nothing to do with security.

There's more information about the campaigns discussed in this article on the International Solidarity Movement website: www.ism-london.org.uk

You can find out more and give support to the Refuser Solidarity Network via their website: www.refusersolidarity.net/

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

ON THE BORDER

by Michel Warschawski, translated by Levi Laub

Pluto Press, £14.99

In 1989 Michel Warschawski made a speech asserting that both the literal and metaphorical place for an Israeli left activist to be was 'on the border'. He made this speech after being sentenced to 30 months in prison for aiding illegal Palestinian organisations. The different meanings of the concept of 'the border' came to be central in his trial. The judgement itself was a warning to Israeli peace activists to stay away from the border, but Michel realised that it was the place he had chosen to live and fight.

This stance held the seeming contradiction of making him both a 'border runner' and 'a border guard'. As a border runner, hoping 'to contribute to the emergence of a pluralist, transnational and multi-ethnic humanity and a world based on the values of solidarity and co-operation', and as a border guard 'defending the sovereignty, self-determination and independence of (the Palestinian) people threatened by foreign aggression'. As a 'border guard' insisting that 'there is a border' (the meaning of Yesh Gvul, a play on words, which also translates as 'there is a limit') demanding the withdrawal of soldiers and settlers and refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories, and as a 'border runner' crossing the line in solidarity actions in defence of Palestinian people under occupation.

The concept of 'border' also applies to the internal process of being an Israeli activist, which means living on the boundary of your own society, acting to expand its democratic freedoms and understanding, rather than allowing these to contract by living in its more comfortable centre. It also means being the grit within a society and attempting

to disrupt its national consensus.

Only by being on the border are dialogue and co-operation possible between Israelis and Palestinians. This dialogue is impossible from within the defensiveness, fear and hostile assumptions that hold sway in the midst of Israeli society. Michel and other activists have made a conscious decision to be part of their own society but also to be as close as possible to the 'other'.

Also by not 'crossing the border' (or limit of the law) but placing oneself at the edge of legality, 'between the law and the forbidden', by being determined to occupy any space that is not explicitly forbidden, 'one broadens one's own freedoms; by slacking off and pulling back one loses them'. Michel, with his companion Lea Tsemel and others, as well as defending Palestinians directly, struggled to expand the democratic space for activists operating in solidarity with them. The defence of civil and democratic rights within Israel is crucial, particularly for counter-nationalist action in the face of societies (like Britain, today) that are obsessed with security and with preventing solidarity with those defined as 'the other'.

This book while being about acting from the Israeli side is clearly also a testament to the Palestinian liberation fighters and activists and those who have committed themselves personally and politically to building relationships of reconciliation from the Palestinian side, like Feisal Hussein and Hanan Ashrawi.

The founding in 1984 and continued work of the Alternative Information

Centre (AIC) by Palestinian and Israeli activists perhaps holds the key concern of Michel Warschawski's activist life – the desire to work 'for a common strategic vision, capable ... of mobilising Palestinians and Israelis in the same struggle for the future.'

This book, he says, is not a history, nor a study of the conflict, nor an autobiography, but is a story of an impassioned life 'on the border that separates states, communities and realities' in conflict.

The story takes us from his birth in Strasbourg within an observant Jewish family and milieu (his father was the Chief Rabbi of Strasbourg), his move to Jerusalem at the age of 16 to devote himself to Talmudic studies, his first encounter, in 1967, at the Hebrew University with the Marxist and anti-Occupation activists of Matzpen, and then to his own activist life.

He grows to value being a diaspora Jew, upholding an identity that has been disparaged in Israel, but which he believes Israelis need to reconnect with in the struggle for a future.

His book is hopeful and bleak, but always partisan. It is an activist's view of the Israelis and Palestinians who, through ups and downs, and presently in the most difficult circumstances, continue to work across the lines for a common future. Michel's hope within Israel lies with the young activists like Matan Kohen (interviewed above) but this book also shows the dedication of a now older group of activists who have stubbornly kept the spirit and practice of co-existence and equality alive since the 1960s, whatever the circumstances.

Simon Lynn

HITTING THE RIGHT TARGET

Last year's debate over a proposed academic boycott of two Israeli universities became very heated and divided progressive opinion. From different perspectives **MOSHÉ MACHOVER** and **LARRY RAY** (opposite) unpick the issues

In April 2001, six months into the second intifada, a small ad hoc group of mainly Israeli citizens published a call to launch a campaign to boycott Israeli exports and leisure tourism in Israel. As far as I know, we were the first to publish such a call. You can still find it at www.matzpun.com, with hundreds of additional signatures of supporters from many countries.

The justification for this campaign should be obvious even to liberals, let alone to socialists. Since the demise of South African apartheid, Israel is the last remaining active colonial settler state. Its treatment of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is, if anything, more brutal than that meted out to non-whites by the apartheid regime. As Israel enjoys the full support and protection of the United States, which it serves as chief regional partner and enforcer, other governments dare not take any effective measures to restrain the armoured monster bulldozers of Israeli expansionism that trample over the Palestinians, demolish their homes, steal their land and uproot their ancient olive trees. It is left to world public opinion and civil society to act in defence of the victims. The same arguments that justified the boycotting of the South African apartheid regime – accepted by all progressive people – surely apply in the present case.

The boycott tactic has the great double merit of being non-violent and a way in which every individual can express a moral commitment. This immediate mobilising effect on those who join the boycott is no less important than its real effect on the target in the longer term. Shortly after we issued our call, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in the UK launched its BIG (Boycott Israeli Goods) campaign.

Around that time, I was involved in private discussion among some radical academics about extending the economic boycott to the academic sphere. My position was – and remains – that a boycott directed against Israeli academic institutions is wholly justified, but a boycott of Israeli academics, as individuals, is unacceptable.

The arguments justifying economic boycott apply also to an institutional academic boycott. Israel's universities are part of the institutional structure of the Zionist colonial settler state and help to manufacture its ideological superstructure. True, a small minority of radical dissident academics are – barely – tolerated within these institutions; but surely the institutions as such cannot be judged by these rare exceptions.

On the other hand, being an Israeli, and in particular an Israeli academic, is not per se a punishable offence; so no one should be penalised merely for being an Israeli academic.

Moreover, an individual academic boycott would be impaled on the horns of a nasty dilemma: either it is a blanket boycott directed indiscriminately at all Israeli academics, or some exemptions are to be made.

In the first case, the boycott would target the righteous along with the wicked, punishing the small minority of beleaguered, courageous academic dissidents, as well as the few Arabs who, against great odds, have achieved positions in Israel's academe.

But if exemptions are to be allowed, then several

thorny questions must be faced. Are Israeli Arab academics to be exempt, on purely ethnic grounds? What would be the rules and procedures for exempting any individual? Who would be authorised to grant exemptions? What evidence of righteousness would need to be submitted by an individual wishing to be exempted? If an individual felt that s/he was unjustly denied exemption, how and to whom would s/he appeal against the decision? These and similar questions have no satisfactory answer. Begin to consider them, and you are reminded of loyalty oaths and totalitarian policing of thought. Any system of individual penalties is inherently iniquitous unless it is accompanied by a fair and transparent mechanism of adjudication.

On these grounds, I believe that sanctions such as the following are justified:

- Refusing to participate in academic conferences co-sponsored by the Israeli authorities or by Israeli universities.
- Acting within international scientific organisations so as to oppose them holding conferences in Israel.
- Acting against co-operation at the institutional level with Israeli universities.
- Opposing the award of grants by the EU and other international agencies to Israeli universities; refusing to act in any way (for example, as referees) to facilitate such grants.
- Refusing to collaborate with a person acting as a representative or on behalf of an Israeli university.

On the other hand, acts such as the following, targeting an individual merely on the ground that s/he is Israeli, are unjustified:

- Withholding scientific collaboration with an Israeli scientist who acts in an individual capacity.
- Hampering the publication of academic work by an Israeli.
- Refusing to act as a referee of a paper submitted to an academic journal by an Israeli.
- Dismissing an Israeli from the editorial or advisory board of an academic journal to which s/he had been appointed in an individual capacity.

According to press reports, this last action actually happened in June 2002. If so, I find it inexcusable. It is reactionary to categorise and treat individuals according to their nationality. If, as reported, the person dismissed was an opponent of Israeli policies, this only adds irony to the affair.

Three further points should be made. First, if you have evidence that an individual academic is guilty of a war crime, or even of propagating racist poison, then you may well wish to have nothing to do with that person. But this applies whether or not the guilty person is Israeli. No general academic boycott of Israel need be invoked.

Second, clearly, even an institutional academic boycott is bound to have some adverse side effects on individual Israeli academics, including the righteous minority. Unfortunately this is inevitable in any boycott. Even disinvesting in firms, such as Caterpillar, which supply Israel with instruments of oppression, may hurt some innocent people. This cannot be a valid objection to the boycott. Would we oppose a campaign for disarmament on the grounds that it would deprive some workers of employment?

But deliberately aiming punitive measures at individuals irrespective of their personal guilt is quite a different matter: it is morally repugnant.

Third, there are bound to be some borderline cases, where it is not quite obvious whether an Israeli academic is acting on behalf of an institution (in which case applying the boycott is justified) or in an individual capacity (in which case no sanction ought to be imposed). Most real-life demarcations are somewhat fuzzy. Such doubtful cases should be resolved by applying sound judgment and good common sense. But, most importantly, they must be resolved on the merit of the case – not on the merit of the individual.

On 6th April 2002, a campaign for an academic boycott of Israel was launched by a letter to The Guardian signed by 120 academics, headed by Hilary and Steven Rose. This letter noted that many national and European cultural and research institutions regarded Israel as a European state for the purposes of awarding grants and contracts. It proposed a moratorium on 'any further support unless and until Israel abides by UN resolutions and opens serious peace negotiations with the Palestinians, along the lines proposed in many peace plans'.

The steps proposed in the letter were clearly aimed at institutions rather than individuals. Moreover, they were of very limited scope, which is perhaps reasonable as a first step.

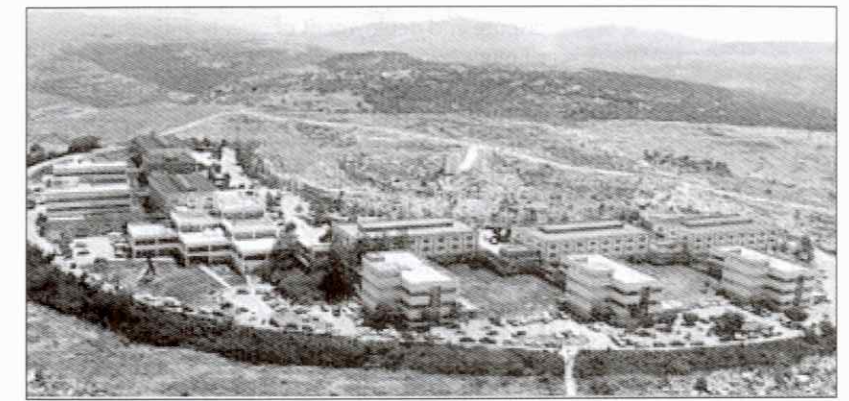
From then on, the academic boycott campaign gathered momentum. Several branches of the AUT adopted resolutions supporting it. It peaked on 22nd April 2005, when the AUT conference adopted as union policy the boycott of two Israeli universities, Bar-Ilan and Haifa, and a more limited action against the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. However, a vehement counter-campaign, orchestrated by the pro-Israel lobby, led to the overturn of this resolution on 26th May.

In my opinion, insufficient clarity in the April resolution may have contributed to its subsequent revocation. Although the main text of the resolution speaks in general terms of boycotting institutions rather than individuals, it relies for detail on an earlier Palestinian call for boycott. The resolution says: 'Council resolves: ... That the boycott should take the form described in the Palestinian call for academic boycott of Israeli institutions.'

This Palestinian 'call', quoted in the AUT resolution, also seems to intend a purely institutional boycott. The specific boycotting measures it demands are:

- i Refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions; Advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to

The boycott campaign raised a great many issues – rights to education in Palestine, academics' role in ending the Israeli occupation, Zionism, antisemitism, and academic freedom. At the outset of the debate, the pro- and anti- positions were not so far apart. Most active opponents of the boycott opposed the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (then still in force in Gaza). They also opposed the



The College of Judea and Samaria, part of the infrastructure of the Occupation

these institutions;

- ii Promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions.

Note the repetitive emphasis on 'institutions'.

However, the Palestinian text immediately muddies the water by making the following proviso:

- iii Exclude from the above actions against Israeli institutions any conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals opposed to their state's colonial and racist policies.

This proviso is clearly well meant, but it negates the institutional nature of the proposed boycott. If the boycott is purely institutional, as seems to be demanded by clauses i and ii, then the exemption of 'conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals' is totally irrelevant. And of course it raises all those unanswerable questions as to what would constitute sufficient proof of 'conscientiousness', what degree of 'opposition' is being demanded, who would be authorised to judge this, and what procedures would be used in the adjudication.

So the Palestinian text ends up being highly ambiguous as between calling for institutional and individual boycott. And the AUT 22nd April resolution inherited this ambiguity from the Palestinian text, which it incorporated and endorsed.

This made the resolution harder to defend than would otherwise have been the case.

Most damaging was the opposition to the AUT boycott resolution expressed by some of the Israeli academics who are known to be opposed to the occupation and active in defence of Palestinian rights. Although – as befits academics – they produced sophisticated theoretical arguments in support of their position, I am sure that at the back of their minds was the shocking feeling that the proposed boycott might face them with the unenviable choice between the sad irony of being wholly innocent victims of 'friendly fire' and the humiliation of having to prove (how and to whom?) their righteousness.

Of course, the overturning of the AUT resolution is by no means the end of the story. The struggle will go on, and it will no doubt have many ups and downs. I can only hope that the lessons of the past will have been learnt by the advocates of boycott. MM

checkpoints, roadblocks, violent settlers, closures of universities and schools and violent incursions by the IDF. Many of those opposed to the boycott also actively campaign against the Israeli Occupation and work with Palestinian academics towards greater co-operation. For many on both sides the issue was whether the boycott was right in principle and in strategy. However, the acrimonious nature of the

LARRY RAY argues for engagement rather than isolation

dispute and deployment of openly antisemitic allusions by some pro-boycotters has created greater divisions and animus than was there to begin with.

The effect of the pro-boycott campaign was to create divisions between those working for a just peace between Israel and Palestine. The proposed boycott was not only about Bar Ilan and Haifa universities but was a tactical manoeuvre in a wider campaign for the cultural and political isolation of Israel, based on the view that Israel itself is 'illegitimate'. This has not been the view of the PLO at least since 1988.

Although pro-boycotters claimed to be following a request from Palestinian groups, they were dismissive of other Palestinian voices that were opposed to isolating Israeli universities. These included the April 2005 Co-operation Agreement between Palestinian and Israeli trade union confederations, the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and The Histadrut, based on joint support for a peace plan based on the existence of two sovereign, independent and viable states. Al-Quds University likewise issued a statement against the boycott.

Similarly the ostensible reason for the boycott of Bar-Ilan was its validation of degrees of the College of Judea and Samaria, in the Occupied Territories (a link that has now ended as the College of Judea and Samaria is to receive independent university status). But again the boycott would have been counterproductive. The Israeli Council for Higher Education had not approved the changed status of the College and there was a huge campaign in Israel against doing so.

One of the most pernicious aspects of the boycott was what might have appeared to be a concession. 'Conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals opposed to their state's colonial and racist policies' were to be excluded from the boycott. So Israeli academics were to be allowed to function in the global academic community so long as they passed an 'anti-Zionist' test. This political test was wrong in principle and resonated with Stalinist anti-Zionist campaigns purging Jewish intellectuals. This test would further create distrust and fear in British universities as Jewish academics also feel pressure to declare themselves 'anti-Zionist'. Jewish campus organisations reported increases in antisemitic abuse during this campaign. This was not the intention of the pro-boycott campaign but it was its legacy.

An awful irony of all this is that the university sector in Israel is under attack from the right for being too liberal, especially on Palestine. Many Israeli academics need our support, especially in the surviving joint projects building co-operation across communities – such those between the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University (which is on the list for any future boycott) and the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah.

There is much work being undertaken on the history and politics which undermines many of the reactionary ideas that justify the Occupation, settlements and the Wall. There are Palestinian and Israeli academics working to build anti-racist strategies. Working with people positively is far more likely to create conditions that will end the Occupation than the boycott, which plays into the hands of the right wing in Israel and the growing body of antisemitism in Europe.

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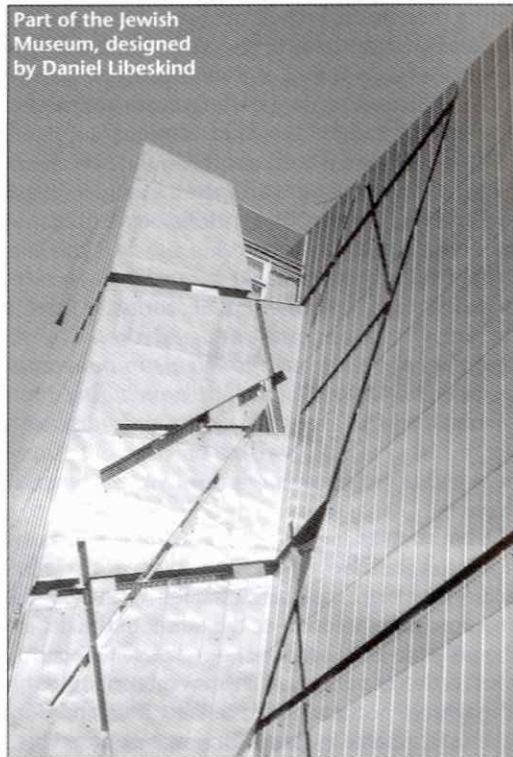
FROM RUIN

My grandfather, Werner von Biel, lived in Berlin throughout the Holocaust. His family considered him a scoundrel. He'd been a bad husband and an indifferent father. He'd been in debt. He'd been in jail. When he went to prison for fraud (he sank his yacht for the insurance money) my grandmother took their two children back to Hamburg, and left him to his own devices.

Prison changed my grandfather, but not quite in the way that the Nazis had intended. After his release (and before he was drafted into the Wehrmacht) he sheltered his Jewish friend, a young man called Manfred Alexander, who'd escaped from a concentration camp, and helped him flee the country. For this unexpected act of heroism, my grandfather was posthumously honoured as Righteous Among The Nations by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority, in Jerusalem last year.

That, briefly, is the source of my fascination with Berlin, and the reason why I've been back there more times than I can count since the Wall came down. In trying to retrace my grandfather's life (I never met him) and the life of the Jewish man whose life he saved (still alive, and living in New York) I found many relics of Germany's Jewish past scattered around Berlin. What I never hoped to find – and what warmed my heart far more than any memorial – was that after the near annihilation of the Shoah, Berlin's Jewish community is currently enjoying a remarkable renaissance. In fact, in what must surely be the

Part of the Jewish Museum, designed by Daniel Libeskind



TO REBIRTH

most fitting refutation of National Socialism, the city of the Final Solution now has the fastest growing Jewish community in the world.

Before the Holocaust, Berlin was the capital of secular European Jewry. Liberal and cosmopolitan, it was the New York of its age. Jews had lived here since the Middle Ages, and in 1671, when the Prussian Emperor allowed Jews expelled from Vienna to settle here, its Jewish population boomed. This influx helped Berlin recover from the devastation of the Thirty Years War and played a crucial role in its transformation from garrison town to metropolis. Jews like the poet Heinrich Heine and the painters Marc Chagall and Max Liebermann all left their mark upon the city. Jews founded Ka De We (Berlin's Harrods) and the Berliner Tagesblatt, Berlin's equivalent of The Times. When Hitler came to power, more than 170,000 Jews lived here, enjoying equal rights and regarding themselves as German as much as Jewish.

Everyone knows what happened next, but it still seems inconceivable, in a multicultural capital where Jews were far more integrated than in any other European city. Many were 'Three Day' Jews, who only went to Synagogue on the High Holidays of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana. Some had even converted to Christianity. My grandfather's Jewish friend had attended the local school, and had no idea which pupils were Jewish and which ones weren't – until the Nazis expelled them.

By 1939, 80,000 Berlin Jews (including Albert Einstein, Billy Wilder and Helmut Newton) had emigrated. From 1941, 55,000 more were transported to the death camps. By 1945, there were just 7,000 Jews in Berlin: 4,200 'privileged' Jews (mainly Jewish men who'd married 'Aryan' women); 1,300 who'd survived in hiding; and 1,500 who'd returned home from liberated concentration camps. Between 1945 and 1950 a further 200,000 Jews passed through Berlin, but most travelled on to America or Israel, and you could hardly blame them. The Jewish Berlin of Kurt Weill and Max Reinhardt was gone forever. Why would any Jew in their right mind want to settle in the ruined capital of the Third Reich?

During the Cold War, West Berlin gave sanctuary to Eastern European Jews fleeing antisemitic purges in Hungary, Poland and the so-called Democratic Republic in East Germany, but these refugees merely slowed the mortality rate of an ageing, dwindling population. By 1989, there were just 6,000 Jews living here, fewer than in 1945.

Yet in the first 10 years after the Berlin Wall came down, 50,000 Soviet Jews came to Germany, and 12,000 ended up in Berlin, tripling its Jewish population in a decade. Today there are seven synagogues, three cemeteries and several schools for

Berlin's Jews, but Berlin's Jewish renaissance is about something more than that. The city has rediscovered some of its original Jewishness, not just as a concession to a minority, but as a part of everyday life.

Wandering around Berlin today, the first things you notice are the memorials. 'Don't mention the War' may have been the watchword of Germany's first post-War generation, but today the memories of the victims of the Third Reich are everywhere. Arriving here for the first time, anyone with British or Jewish origins is bound to feel a bit uneasy, but you certainly can't accuse today's Berliners of trying to cover up their past.

Berlin's main site of Holocaust commemoration is Peter Eisenman's mesmeric Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe – a enormous, undulating field of obelisks, midway between a graveyard and a maze. Eisenman, an American Jew, is an architect, not an artist, but as you wander between these blank slabs of grey cement, which rise and fall in a hypnotic rhythm, like waves on either side of you, his sculptural meisterwerk feels closer to art than architecture.

There's an exhibition about the Holocaust buried beneath it. It's hidden from public view, but when I went, the queues stretched out into the car park. Inside, the ambience is intimate and intense. Rather than trying to overwhelm you with phone number statistics, this permanent display focuses on a few families, through letters, snapshots and home movies. However the most impressive thing about Eisenman's memorial is its location – right beside the Brandenburg Gate and a stone's throw from the Reichstag. Imagine we'd built a similar memorial, in the middle of Trafalgar Square. Any visitor to Berlin will encounter it, whether they want to or not.

There are other memorials all over town. On the Mirror Wall, in the suburb of Steglitz, lists of murdered Jews are etched on to sheets of stainless steel that reflect the faces of the people who have replaced them. On Koppenplatz, The Abandoned Room simply depicts a table and two chairs. One chair has been kicked over. At Grunewald Station, in the leafy outskirts, where the city melts into a myriad of lakes and forests, the details of each train that departed for the death camps is recorded along an entire platform: date, destination, and number of passengers onboard: 35,000, all told. One of them was my grandfather's Jewish friend, Manfred Alexander. Eventually, I found his train. It was the only one that left for Minsk, and he was the only one who escaped – although he had to leave both his parents behind. A sympathetic German gave him his swastika armband and smuggled him on to a train full of injured soldiers returning from the Russian Front. He hid under the coal. When the retreating Germans left the camp, they killed the 16,000 remaining inmates on one day. Mercifully, by then Manfred's parents had both

In the city of the Final Solution, Jewish life has risen from the rubble.

WILLIAM COOK describes Berlin's remarkable renaissance

IN WHAT MUST SURELY BE THE MOST FITTING REFUTATION OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM, THE CITY OF THE FINAL SOLUTION NOW HAS THE FASTEST GROWING JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD

Photos: © www.berlin-tourist-information.de

died. His father had a heart attack. His mother was shot while trying to trade a ring for food.

As well as the memorials, there are museums, most notably Daniel Liebeskind's astonishing Jewish Museum – like Eisenman's memorial, more art than architecture. But although Liebeskind's building commemorates the Shoah, its contents celebrate 1,000 years of German Jewish life. 'German culture would have been unthinkable without the Jewish contribution,' said Chancellor Schroder at the opening. 'It is still a wonder that Jews live in Germany, and still meet us as friends.'

My favourite museum, however, is a lot less spectacular – the Otto Weidt Brush Factory, at the scruffy end of Berlin's trendy Hakesche Hof. Weidt was a blind businessman who sheltered dozens of Jews in his workshop. Like my grandfather (and Oskar Schindler) he was awarded the title Most Righteous Among The Nations.

One of the Jews Weidt saved was a young woman called Inge Deutschkron. After the war, she wrote a book about her ordeal, which sold over a million copies. A few years ago, I went to see her in her pleasant apartment in a modern high rise block in the western suburbs of the city. She needed some reassuring before she'd speak to me about being Jewish in Berlin. Growing up in a secular, socialist family, being Jewish was an identity the Nazis gave her, not one she'd chosen for herself.

'Berlin has always been different,' she told me, as we sat in her panoramic apartment, gazing at the metropolis that lay spread out beneath us, like a map. 'If there was a symbiosis between Jews and non-Jews, it was here, more than in any other place in Germany.' She didn't even know she was Jewish until Hitler became chancellor, when she was 10.

After the war, as the German correspondent for

an Israeli newspaper, she was shocked by Germany's collective mental block. 'They simply didn't want to talk about the past because they all had a guilty conscience,' she said. But when she returned here from Israel in the 1980s, she found a new generation of Germans, determined to confront the past.

In the early 1990s, she received some antisemitic hate mail, but when this story hit the press, she was besieged by letters from contrite Berliners begging her to stay. 'If you ever need help or advice,' wrote a 7-year-old, 'come to us.' 'Germans have to find new ways to cope with this horrible heritage,' she told me. 'It's not easy, but they're doing it.'

But in the end, Berlin's Jewish renaissance isn't about museums or memorials, or even about the testimonies of survivors like Inge Deutschkron. It's about the way that Jewishness is slowly seeping back into the fabric of the city. The Hakesche Hof, where Otto Weidt had his brush factory, now houses a theatre that stages Yiddish plays and shows. There are cafés, restaurants and delis, all serving kosher food – both solid Central European and lighter Israeli cuisine. People don't eat Jewish food here because they're Jews but because it's a normal feature of the city that they live in.

For Jews (and sympathetic Gentiles) Berlin will always be a city of mixed emotions. It's the city of Moses Mendelssohn, the German Socrates, and his grandson Felix, the great composer. It's also the city of the Wannsee House, the lakeside villa where the Nazis hatched the Final Solution. And yet, against all odds, new Jewish institutions have gradually emerged from the rubble. The modern frontage of the Judische Gemeinde, which administers Berlin's synagogues, and the city's Jewish schools and cemeteries, incorporates a few intricate fragments of the old synagogue that stood on this site before the war. Across the street is the Kempinski, West Berlin's premier hotel. In the 1920s, it was the in place for fashionable Jews and Gentiles. It was 'Aryanised' by the Nazis in 1937 and blitzed by allied bombers. With the blessing of its original Jewish owners, it was rebuilt as Berlin's first postwar hotel, at a time when West Berlin seemed to many to be merely a temporary refuge on the way to somewhere safer. The firm's founder, Berthold Kempinski, is buried in Berlin's atmospheric Weissensee Cemetery. It's the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe, with over 100,000 graves.

Before I left Berlin, I went looking for my grandfather's old apartment, where he hid his Jewish friend. I knew it was on Grolmanstrasse, just off the Kurfurstendamm, opposite a police station. Far from being a liability, this made it the perfect place to hide. I found the police station, but the apartment wasn't there. It was destroyed during the war, while my grandfather was away fighting for the Wehrmacht. Where his home had stood, now there was a children's playground. On the site where his Jewish friend hid and rested up, and planned his escape from the Third Reich, German toddlers play on slides and seesaws, their happy shrieks and shouts echoing around an otherwise deserted square.

Berlin's Weissensee Cemetery – the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe, with over 100,000 graves



THE HEAT IS ON

Our future survival may depend on how we use the past, says **MARK LEVENE**, author of *Rescue!History*, a manifesto for the humanities in the age of climate change

A spectre is haunting the entire world: but it is not that of communism. If we were not aware of the spectre's import or what it signals for the future, then 2005's unprecedented hurricane sequence in the Gulf of Mexico should be our most firm, recent guide. Climate change – nature's payback for what we are doing to our planet – reveals itself daily. Not only in a welter of devastating scientific data and analysis but in the repeated extreme weather conditions to which we are all regular observers, and, increasingly, victims.

Yet, bizarrely, the majority of us remain in a state of denial. Or, hardly better, in a peculiar limbo of 'disconnect'. Surely all this talk of impending apocalypse is scaremongering of the very worst kind? Freak weather conditions and natural catastrophes do happen and anyway, can we do about it? This is something for scientists and experts: the people who can find 'the' solution to the problem. Or if not them, the politicians. To argue that we are involved in a struggle for our very survival, and that we must all respond accordingly doesn't simply invite unwarranted and unnecessary panic; it carries with it implicit challenges to the wisdoms upon which our very 'civilisation' is founded.

This manifesto begins by affirming the indisputable nature of anthropogenic climate change. The simplest, most observable evidence – beyond what is being measured and quantified in the Arctic, Antarctic, Amazonia and elsewhere – lies in the accumulation, on the one hand, of none too dramatic but significantly incremental seasonal shifts which we can all see and feel around us, and, on the other, of an accelerated frequency of truly extreme weather conditions.

Our climate is complex and dependent on so many variables, and scientists cannot predict an exact outcome. The impact, for instance, of temperature rises in the polar regions on currently moderating weather systems, such as the Gulf Stream, remains uncertain. But current evidence from sub-Arctic Siberia suggesting a permafrost thaw which is likely to release billions of tons of methane gas previously trapped beneath it, however, points to an irreversible tipping point. One of the most perspicacious commentators on the relationship between the geo-physical science and human consequence, Mike Davis, warns: 'We are living on the climate equivalent of a runaway train that is picking up speed.'

Whatever the exact trajectory, climate change, represents the most serious and potentially lethal challenge to humankind in its history. Unless, we can rapidly cut carbon and other greenhouse emissions as scientists ask of us, global warming will turn ever larger areas of the planet into uninhabitable desert, cause droughts, flood, famine, pestilence, refugee flows, and death through repeated heat or cold surges on an unprecedented scale, while heavily populated coastal and other regions on all continents will be harried by storm and/or inundated.

This situation, then, is much more serious – not to say inevitable – than, for example, the threat of nuclear war, not least because with the former, we had, at least in theory, the ability to put the genie back into the bottle. Once out of control, the forces of nature, by contrast, will be uncontrollable. We can now begin to imagine not only the environmental consequences in terms of the collapse of biodiversity, but the more immediate social, economic, epidemiological and political impact.

What then can students of a diverse human past offer, either to understanding, or positively responding to this? Contemporary society, prefers to look towards science for answers. But is there not a role, perhaps even more than ever now, for prescience, too; for a reformulated process of plotting the past with the foreknowledge that if we do not come to understand how we got into this utter cul-de-sac, there will be no historical future?

In many respects we have been here before: humanity has been

prey to many vicissitudes. Now, though, it is different: not just quantitatively, in the scale of the disaster awaiting us, but in what should be our awareness that we, ourselves, are utterly responsible for this, and that if we fail to understand the process by which we arrived here, and from that refuse to learn to respond – as part of a common humanity – we will go over the abyss.

Are we prepared to sleepwalk into that long night and abnegate all responsibility for the future? How will our children's children – to say nothing of perhaps a very last generation look on us from their increasingly woeful vantage point – at our craven failure? For all students of human life on this planet, it should be instantly recognisable as our last best chance to put our communities and societies on the road to survival and sustainability.

In the light of what we now know about climate change, the point of this manifesto is not simply to urge a rethink as to the terms of reference by which we study the past, but to make a clarion call for a new imperative. We must literally rescue!history for the challenge ahead.

What then is Rescue!history's immediate agenda? On a CND march in 1980, a banner read 'Historians for the right to work: We demand a continuing supply of history.' Rescue!history's purpose is the same. If humankind's future is threatened with foreclosure, and students of the past have a vested interest in preventing that, then surely we now have to approach that past with, at least, a recognition of the possibility of terminus, and either ask old questions anew but in a more forceful register, or perhaps alongside them add an entirely reformulated, if disturbing set of others:

How did we get into this mess? Was there some fatal wrong turning, associated with the rise of the West, or a predatory and globalising capitalism? Or is this itself to take on too many modernist and Western-centric assumptions; the inherent issue of humanity's relationship to nature demanding a much more long-term, more geographically diffuse approach? What resonances from the deep, or more recent past are inscribed in our present situation? Is it the case that human profligacy and overreach has led to the repeated destruction of civilisations? Should we now be paying more attention to those who, at the time, made the dread warnings, even though these usually entirely marginalised and despised prophets and visionaries sometimes bequeathed to us long-standing and durable world-systems? Or should 'lessons' on averting our own nemesis lead to historical consideration of much more instrumental efforts aimed at forms of political and social restructuring?

Yet, have not attempts to overcome limitations on what was humanly possible simply led to ever more lethal tendencies towards self-destruction? Are our own worst tendencies in recent times, imperial subjugation, total war, Auschwitz, genocide, ethnic cleansing, Hiroshima and the 'extremist' thrust of the nuclear arms race simply harbingers of where we are heading? Is it not, indeed, in the very nature of over-complex, urban-focused, essentially consumerist yet nearly always grossly unequal polities, over time and space, wherein lies our fatal Achilles heel?

Students of the past have an important role in responding to this ultimate challenge. Not to use our best endeavours to shed light on its unravelling would be a monumental abnegation of responsibility. This, then, is an appeal to all academics, teachers, students, independent researchers, journalists and members of a broader public who are concerned with how we arrived at this point, to join in the pursuit of rescue!history.

Rescue!history invites support from all who may be able to contribute ideas, research interests, contacts, and sources of funding. Contact Mark Levene, Reader in Comparative History, University of Southampton. Email: m.levene@soton.ac.uk

A complete version of the manifesto can be found on 'The Forum for the Study of Crisis in the 21st Century' website: www.crisis-forum.org.uk

MEMORIES OF MAJER

'He kept the dream of a better more beautiful world alive in the worst of times'

The veteran Bundist and Jewish Socialists' Group member, Majer Bogdanski, died in September 2005 at the age of 93. A packed memorial event was held in London in November. It was organised by the Jewish Socialists' Group, which Bogdanski joined in the mid-1980s. He spoke at many JSG public meetings and remained a member until he died.

Members of the audience, which included survivors of the Warsaw and Lodz Ghettoes, and a representative from the Polish Embassy, contributed warm personal memories of a lifelong fighter for social justice and for the development of Yiddish culture. Contributors performed music and poetry ranging from Yiddish workers' songs

through to Schubert's An Die Musik. Majer had himself composed music to hundreds of Yiddish poems.

Messages from America, Australia, France and Israel were read out. From New York University, Dr Gail Malmgreen wrote: 'Majer was a delightful person and an inspiration to many. He kept the dream of a better and more beautiful world alive in the worst of times.' The meeting closed with the singing, in Yiddish, of the Bund's anthem, Di Shvueh and the socialist anthem, the Internationale. In December a further memorial meeting was held in Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, by the Friends of Yiddish, a group, which Majer chaired for many years. We present some extracts from the JSG's memorial for Majer.

DAVID ROSENBERG, JSG NATIONAL COMMITTEE

I first became aware of Majer in the early 1980s. I was already a member of the Jewish Socialists' Group and our group was growing closer and closer to Bundist ideas and increasingly interested in Yiddish culture. I had made a personal decision to strengthen my own limited knowledge of Yiddish and I started to go to Yiddish evening classes. As part of my self-education I went with a friend in 1983 to a commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising organised by the Friends of Yiddish. We attracted some attention, being at least one generation younger than most people in the room.

We were both knocked out by the power and emotion of the event. My friend could follow some of what was said from studying German at school, I could follow some of the Yiddish, too, but most of it did not need translation. We could feel the loss, the mourning, the pride in resistance and the dedication to remembering. Nothing that night was more powerful than the songs of a short but striking looking man with white hair combed back – someone I had heard of but had not met. As he sang his face went red and a vein protruded on his forehead. His songs sent a shiver through me. Of course, that man was Majer. We were briefly introduced to him. He was pleased to see us but also a bit bemused to hear that young Jewish socialists, keen on Yiddish, really existed. The revival of interest in Yiddish among younger people in Britain had barely begun at that time.

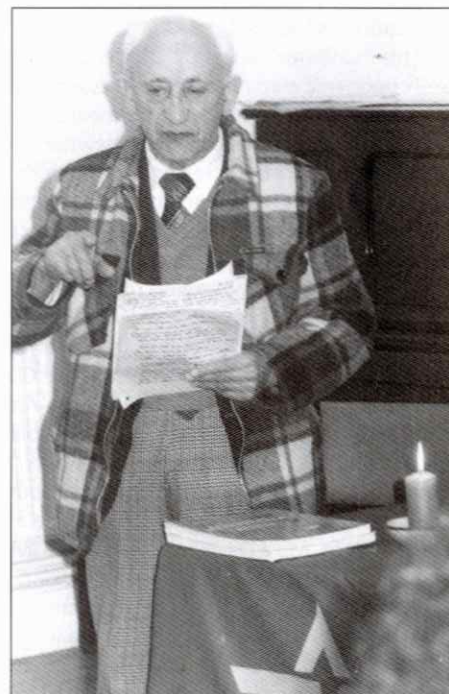
We stayed in touch, and a couple of years later, when the Jewish Socialists' Group had raised its profile, launched a magazine and, with help from Ken Livingstone's GLC, started to do its own work to promote Yiddish culture, we

invited Majer to speak to the group. I can hear his voice from that meeting as if it were yesterday. It was electrifying.

It was a life-changing meeting for us and also for Majer. We had a theoretical understanding of the ideas of Bundism but that is not the same as meeting a real life Bundist. He was a living link with a movement that had made a revolution in Jewish life and made such efforts to make a revolution in the wider society, only to be dealt a murderous blow by both Nazism and Stalinism.

Majer grew up in a time when for so many Jewish workers and even many of the more privileged educated middle class to be a Jew and a socialist was as natural as breathing the air. The post-War decades were not kind to those who survived with those values intact. The newly dominant forces in the Jewish community – whether those embracing capitalist opportunity, religious ghettoisation or a cultural reorientation through Zionism to Israel above all – all contrived to marginalise the Yiddishists, the socialists, the secularists, the internationalists, the Jews who believed in a common humanity.

Majer had maintained his values. Most of the movement he shared them with had perished. But he discovered that there was a new audience for these ideas and values. That was the beginning of Majer's association with the JSG. He was a loyal and active member for nearly 20 years until he died. He wrote for our magazine, he spoke at meetings – especially our own annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – and was a regular at our annual policy conference where he was always listened to with both respect and pleasure. He was argumentative and stubborn and persistent but always argued his point from principle and with honesty.



Growing up in the Bund he had the utmost respect for democratic ways of working. The Bund itself had made the most powerful strides forward in inter-War Poland, while maintaining two distinct political factions within it – the eynsers and tsveyers. When Majer disagreed with a view or a motion he never, ever, questioned the motives of the proposer but would argue a point purely on its intellectual and practical merits.

He was a delight at our group's social events – usually bringing a Yiddish story to share which he had painstakingly translated to maintain all the richness and pathos of the original language. He would also make sure that he spoke with the youngest people present – the children. He loved being around children – he wanted to hear their voices and know what they were interested in. But it was

also because children were the future and, while we learned so much about history from Majer, he was always concerned with the present and the future.

In our magazine he wrote a beautiful article about his time as a 21-year-old in the Bund, being put in charge of a very lively group of 10-16 year olds – Skifistn, the Bund's children's section. For Majer, one dreadful statistic that summed up the destruction of the world he grew up in was the handful of Skifistn that survived from a 750-strong group in Lodz in 1939.

Individually and with other members of the JSG I had many opportunities for long conversations with Majer and many opportunities to hear him speak and see the world through his eyes.

At the core of his beliefs was egalitarianism – a belief that all human beings are of equal worth. He would listen respectfully to those with more economic power than him or more educational qualifications but he never believed that made them superior; and neither were those condemned by lack of opportunity to play the most menial roles in society in any way inferior.

He loved learning but he said to me that Bundists strove to be educated workers. They did not aspire to join the middle classes but wanted the educational benefits they had to be available to all. He believed the best combination was to be determined to learn and study and being productive through labour.

He was at his most passionate as a speaker when speaking about the period of the Nazi genocide. A critical Israeli writer, Boaz Evron, once observed that two tragedies befell the Jewish people in the 20th century – the Holocaust and the interpretation of the Holocaust. Many Jews said: 'Never again will this happen to the Jews,' rather than, 'Never again will this happen to anybody.' Majer was one who stood apart from the mainstream and was determined to learn the lessons for humanity. Every time I heard Majer speak

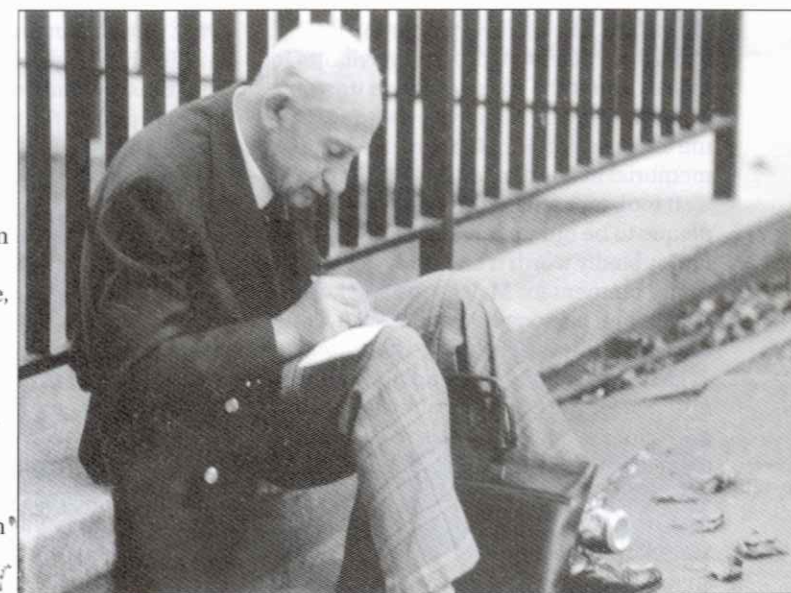
on this subject I heard him talk about how the Gypsies had been exterminated alongside the Jews and for the same reasons. I heard him say how we must build a world where, despite our differences, people had to learn to live in harmony and with humanity.

I heard him talk about pride and shame – his pride in the face-to-face Jewish resistance against

indescribable odds, not only in the Warsaw Ghetto but also in other ghettos and even in the concentration camps. And his shame that in the 1960s, while Eichman was being brought to trial in Israel, Israeli schools taught impressionable children that the diaspora Jews, the friends and neighbours of their parents and grandparents, had gone like lambs to the slaughter. He hated this lie and was not afraid to say so.

He was a longstanding Labour Party activist and perhaps more forgiving of the New Labour leadership than many comrades in the JSG who were or had been in the Labour Party. But what he couldn't stomach was when the Party turned its back on Clause 4 – the essential element that tied it to the needs of the working class.

He supported labour and socialist parties all over the world but he had some harsh words for certain individuals within the Israeli Labour Party. Majer never forgave Ben Gurion for an incident that happened during the war at a meeting where a Polish Jew gave an account in Yiddish of the atrocities the Nazis were committing. Ben-Gurion interrupted to



say he couldn't bear to hear this harsh grating language. That language – Yiddish – was Majer's mame loshn, mother tongue. He didn't think it was special; he wasn't sentimental about it; he was just determined to speak it and to preserve it when it came under murderous threats from Nazism, Stalinism, assimilationism and, ironically, even Jewish nationalism.

His determination to be a resistance fighter for Yiddish was not just theoretical but practical – through the Friends of Yiddish, through talks to other Yiddish circles, through collecting Yiddish poems and putting them to music he personally made an enormous contribution to sustaining and developing Yiddish culture. At JSG conferences he would often lead us at the end of the meeting in singing the Internationale in Yiddish.

A period when I saw Majer quite frequently was when we were working together on an initiative to make a lasting memorial to another Polish Bundist – Szmul Zygielbojm – the Bund representative on the Polish Parliament in Exile in London, who took his life in 1943 as a political protest at the world's passivity in the face of Nazi extermination. The memorial was Majer's

Ryszard Stemplowski, former Polish Ambassador to Britain

Majer Bogdanski has passed away. But humans are never absolutely dead. Majer Bogdanski lives in our memory. We met him while in London (from 1994 to 1999) and have stayed in touch through exchanging letters, ever since – his letters always written in his impeccable Polish.

Bogdanski himself was a message to the Poles ... a plea for mutual understanding, tolerance, recognition, and for breathing new life into the historic Jewish-Polish togetherness. We have the audio tape he made for us and sent to Warsaw with Jewish and Polish folk songs. Later on, we received his official recordings of Yiddish Songs on CD. These were the folk songs of his childhood; indeed, a childhood of the generation of the Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, Germans, Ukrainians, and other people living within the old historic

borders of the Polish State – the generation that is no longer in this world, like the borders that are also gone. But, again, no generation is absolutely dead, as we all keep inheriting from them. So, let us cherish ... let us share, what was good of the experience of Majer's generation, not the poverty, antisemitic prejudice and discrimination he was exposed to, particularly during the first half of the 20th century.

Majer Bogdanski was a message that people should live together, not just walk beside each other ... as members of one community. We remember Majer Bogdanski as trustworthy, talented in music and languages, a wise member of our community of human beings, and a natural optimist ... He would not like us to weep. For us, we shall always associate his name with the song he recorded for us and induced us to learn by heart. It begins with the words: Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg (Never say you are going down the last road)...

idea in the first place. One year the JSG had asked Majer to focus on Zygielbojm in his talk about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. After the meeting Majer was chatting to me and he said: 'Should there not be a memorial in London for Zygielbojm?'

It took more than three years for a plaque to be put up but it was undoubtedly worth it and it was a very proud moment for Majer, who had known Zygielbojm personally. On the day it was unveiled, he was delighted to be among Zygielbojm's family who had flown from America for the occasion, but what also gave him great pleasure was the presence of the then Polish Ambassador, Ryszard Stempowski, and his wife, Irena. Before becoming Ambassador, Ryszard Stempowski had been an academic specialising in 20th-century history. He was interested in and knowledgeable about the Bund. Majer was completely at home with him and what strikes me now, nearly 10 years on from that memorial, which every year to date, has always had a representative from the Polish embassy, is Majer's admiration for Zygielbojm as a Pole, a Jew and a socialist, who was dedicated to building a new society in Poland. Majer was proud of his command of Polish, the second among many languages he spoke, and he was always completely at home among fellow Poles.

I want to conclude with a final memory of Majer, from four months before he died. I had gone to visit him in the Jewish Welfare Board home he lived in for nearly

a year. I found him in the dining room just finishing his lunch. He was very pleased to see me. As we came out of the dining room we passed through an empty lounge. I asked him, 'Should we sit here?' He shrugged, and smiled, and said, 'No, these seats are taken.'

So we went to his room, and somehow, within this very institutional set-up, he had made it an oasis. There was a music system, a busy bookshelf and photos and posters on the walls and cupboards – it reminded me of a student room. Anyway, we sat down to talk, when suddenly he seemed a bit concerned. 'How did you come here today?' he asked. 'By car,' I replied. 'But where did you park?' he enquired. 'It was OK today,' I assured him. 'It's a Bank Holiday – for May Day'. When I said those two words 'May Day', I saw a sparkle in his eyes.

We must have spent the next half-hour talking about May Day – and how I wish I had had a tape recorder with me. I asked Majer about the first May Day he remembered and, as if it were last week, he described May Day in Piotrkow when he was seven years old – how the market square emptied out and everything was removed, then people started to set up the platform for the rally speakers and the red flags; how later the crowds would gather in the square from all directions.

I remembered a conversation I had had with Majer some years earlier, when we were talking about Jewish observance of festivals, and he assured me that May Day was the greatest yontev. We talked about

May Day in the 1930s as the Bund became the most powerful force among Poland's Jews, eclipsing the Zionist and religious parties. He described their joint efforts with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and socialist groups of Poland's other minorities – Germans, Ukrainians, Lithuanians.

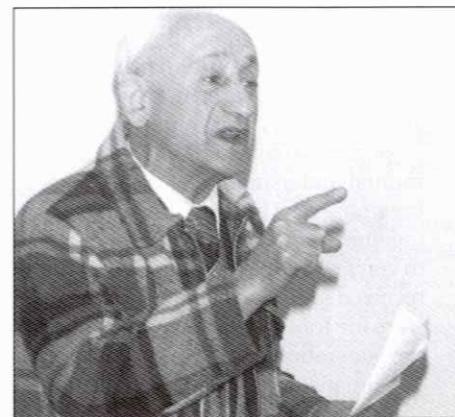
He told me of the May Day march at the height of antisemitic agitation and violence, when the Bund's children's organisation wanted to head the parade. The Bund were fearful for their safety but didn't want to say no to the children – who at that time they believed would be the leaders of tomorrow, not only of the Bund but of the wider Jewish and non-Jewish labour movement in Poland. Heavily stewarded, the children led the parade that year, and a few years later were led to their deaths by the Nazis.

He told me of one May Day towards the end of the 1930s when the police intervened to prevent the Bund and the PPS from marching together – they had to hold separate marches in separate parts of town. As an act of defiance and solidarity, stewards from the Bund went to help keep the PPS march secure, and stewards from the PPS did likewise for the Bund; and at the closing rallies a speaker from each would address the other.

It was very hard to have a conversation with Majer without learning something new, profound and challenging. We all miss him so much and hope that today's event will help to preserve the memory of a true comrade and a true mentsh.

received what he deserved. He maintained that he did not feel hard done by and that not only would such an award imply that he was due more than he had received, it would also undermine the decision of his commanding officers. In addition, it would not be fair to his companions in arms and would be conduct unbefitting both a soldier and a civilian. He had fought because it was his duty as a soldier – he would not accept anything and that was the end of the matter! Just one more example of his high class!

What a fool I was to have imagined he would react otherwise. But that was my Majer.



Malgorzata Zglinska, friend

He was a small, frail old man. Life was attempting to bend him towards the earth, but with a radiant smile on his face, a face so wonderfully smooth for a 93-year-old, he would bravely straighten himself up. He had the scampish grin of a happy child who had just won a lollipop (though such treats must have been rare or absent in his own poverty-stricken childhood), and he bestowed it generously on all around him, emanating a spiritual beauty that was difficult to resist.

The very first time I met him, I fell under his spell. He could come up with the most delightful surprises. Once, on leaving a Chanuka party, during which he had sung Jewish prayers in his fine, strong voice, he suddenly struck up the Polish patriotic church hymn 'Boze cos Polske'. 'Well,' he laughingly explained, on noticing my astonishment, 'during the war' (he had fought at Ancona and Monte Casino with the Anders Army), 'I had to lead my soldiers to Sunday mass, didn't I?'

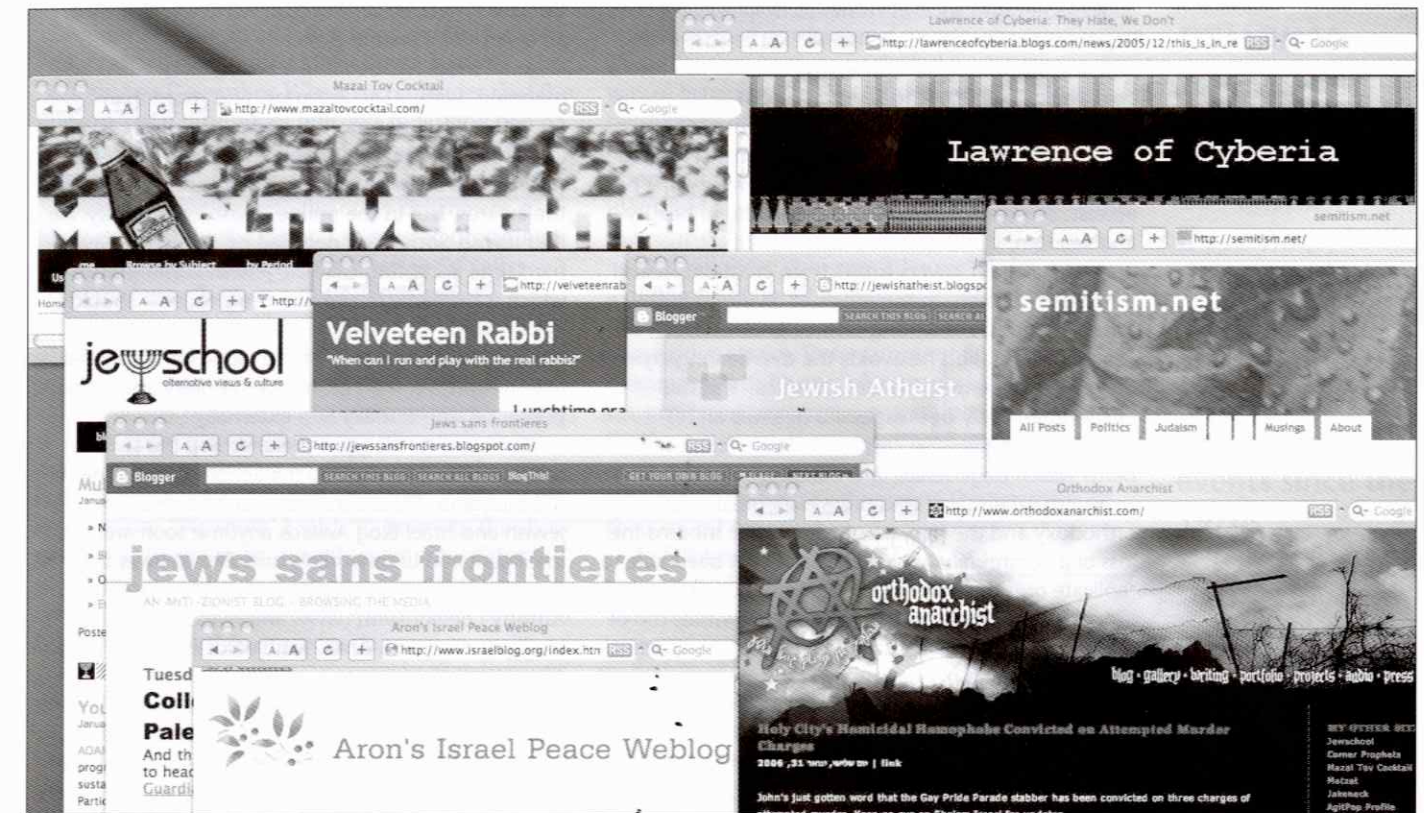
I loved him as if he were my own grandfather. He was a tsadik – the wonderful term used to describe him by a close friend at his funeral. He was good, warm-hearted and wise, accepting with dignity and

equanimity what fate had decreed for him. When he felt that his strength was beginning to fail and that he could no longer cope with the demands of daily life, he asked his friends to find a home for him.

Although he had had to leave behind his trusty piano, he continued to work indefatigably at composing music to harrowing poems about the Holocaust. He would painstakingly copy out his compositions by hand and ask me to send them to their authors – Jerzy Ficowski and Wislawa Szymborska. He wanted them to know that in far-off Albion an old Polish Jew had been touched by their poetry.

I wanted to commemorate him in some way, to raise him up and make a hero of him, since for me he was one, but in so doing I lost sight of the real Majer and what made him truly great. A friend persuaded me to write to the Polish Ministry of Defence and ask whether they would consider conferring some award or other on Majer. I did so and received a positive response: they wanted to promote him to the rank of second lieutenant and also give him an award to acknowledge his deportation to Siberia and the time he spent in the Gulag. When Majer found out about this, he was resolutely opposed to the idea. In his opinion he had

ONLINE BUT OFF-MESSAGE



The Jewish and Israel Blog Awards announced its winners on 7th February. Despite promising to 'showcase and increase awareness of the community's vast spectrum of bloggers', dissenting, left-wing or even moderately liberal sites were scarce among the nominees. Perhaps unsurprisingly, since the awards are sponsored by the Jerusalem Post and the right-wing blog israelcool.com, but some progressive bloggers have taken to their keyboards to challenge the bias and the inclusion of anti-Arab hate sites.

Leading the charge is Richard Silverstein's prolific blog, **Tikun Olam** (www.richardsilverstein.com/tikun_olam). He writes: 'Derek (Fattal, Jerusalem Post internet services director) can make the claim that it's a democratic selection process. But only because the nominees and those who nominate them are a self-selected group of hard-right pro-Israel bloggers.'

Contentious awards aside, blogs – online diaries and personal opinion websites – offer a way for dissenting Jews to communicate directly, bypassing community leaders and media outlets that often stifle their views. But the blogosphere throws up its own obstacles. Andrew Schamess had to rebuild his perceptive, humane blog, **semitism.net** (motto: 'Pro-Jewish. Pro-Arab. Pro-Peace.') in December following a series of hacking attempts.

Schamess is a practising Jew who mixes his political musings with a weekly portion of Torah. This

comes as a jolt for anyone used to seeing arguments framed between 'secular left' and 'religious right', especially over Israel and Palestine.

But he doesn't mince his words on Israel's occupation or on the revisionists painting Ariel Sharon as a man of peace. He writes: 'Sharon is one of the minor monsters of the last century – not a Hitler or a Stalin, but a ruthless militant nationalist in the style of Slobodan Milosevic and P W Botha. From the massacre of dozens of unarmed Jordanians in Qilya in 1953, to the bloody and useless engagement in Lebanon ... to the brutal seige of the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, Sharon has shown himself to be not a warrior, but a butcher.'

Being on the religious left in Bush's America can be a lonely place, and blogging can provide a release. Jonathan at **Torat HaLev – Leftorah** (www.leftorah.blogspot.com) was prompted to start his blog by his dismay at 'the degree to which Orthodox Jews have fallen for Bush hook, line and sinker', and hopes to use it 'to articulate, gather, share good news and creative, radical ideas for bringing about change'.

Rabbinical student Rachel Barenblat runs **Velveteen Rabbi** (www.velveteenrabbi.blogspot.com). Her defence of lesbian and gay rights – including gay marriage – caused a stir among some readers, with one quoting the Bible at her: 'With a male you are not to lie (after the manner

Dissenting Jews are finding a direct way to broadcast their views without being censored. CLIFFORD SINGER reports from the Jewish blogosphere

of) lying with a woman, it is an abomination.' Her response, '(Re)Reading Leviticus 18:22', is typical of her measured but persuasive style, using references ranging from political science websites to a gay orthodox rabbi to challenge her correspondent's translation and literal readings of the Bible.

Barenblat's website has put her in touch with other radical 'godbloggers' and she is involved in preparing the **Progressive Faith Blog Conference**, due to take place in June 2006 (www.progressivefaithblogcon.com).

If blog entries such as 'Torah to Help Prevent the Republican Apocalypse' (Leftorah) fail to convince, and any talk of religious observance sends you into a cold sweat, head over to **Jewish Atheist** (www.jewishatheist.blogspot.com), whose 'About Me' description puts his stance succinctly: '1) I used to be a Modern Orthodox Jew. 2) I am now an atheist. 3) I believe that Judaism has a lot of beauty and wisdom, but that it also causes harm.'

Jewish Atheist covers topics from creationism and 'Intelligent Design' to the ethics of giving to faith-based charities. His writing is forceful but never sanctimonious, and he avoids the overbearing style of one of his influences, Richard Dawkins. This has encouraged lively but respectful debates on his 'comments' pages – in contrast to other contentious blogs which degenerate into slanging matches.

Jewish Atheist also talks of his own break with orthodoxy and the pressures he faced. He mourns the loss of a community 'which I have not yet been able to replicate outside of Orthodox Judaism' but celebrates his personal and intellectual freedom. He writes too of overcoming guilt: 'Eventually, I came to the realisation that even though my parents were clearly embarrassed by me, it was not my fault. I was being true to myself and I had gone out of my way not to hurt anyone unnecessarily. If my parents couldn't learn to accept me as I was, it was their failing, not mine. It still hurt, but it didn't make me feel guilty any more.'

Blogs are an ideal forum for such explorations and they can be liberating for readers isolated within their communities. **Ba'al Tshuvah Anonymous** (www.offthederech.blogspot.com) offers a meeting point for Jews who have joined – and rejected – the kiruv movement, those 'outreach' organisations such as Aish HaTorah and Ohr Somayach that aim to convert secular Jews to orthodoxy.

Some contributors remain close to orthodox Judaism, others have abandoned it, but nearly all are scathing of the kiruv organisations, 'where the ends justify the means'. A common theme is that they hide a fundamentalist religious agenda behind hip graphics and a veneer of openness and tolerance. One contributor writes: 'The Kiruv Machines devour young searching Jews [who] are chewed up, blended, washed and bleached and then hung out to dry. The emphasis in places like this is changing your clothes, getting married and dropping out of society.'

Daniel Sieradski of **Orthodox Anarchist** (www.orthodoxanarchist.com) – another Aish HaTorah escapee – continues to wrestle with his Jewish identity. Despite 'being the scion of several esteemed hasidic rabbis', his parents were only nominally orthodox and his family were driven out of their New Jersey community when he was 10 years old. Sieradski writes movingly and intimately of his experiences of growing up and the struggle to reconcile his religion with his social and political convictions.

Perhaps these dilemmas are preying on his mind, for he appears to be a man who never sleeps. Now living in Jerusalem where he organises hip-hop concerts with Israeli and Palestinian rappers through the Corner Prophets project, he also edits the collective blog **Jew School** (www.jewschool.com) and is a leading light in the **Open Source Judaism Project** (www.opensourcejudaism.com), the newly launched **Radical Torah** website (www.radicaltorah.org), and the forthcoming encyclopaedia of Jewish radical culture, **Mazal Tov Cocktail** (www.mazaltovcocktail.com) – which deserves an award for its name alone.

Jew School has become a bastion of Jewish blogging, with 30 contributors and more than 50,000 readers per month, and is one of the few liberal sites nominated in the Jewish and Israel Blog Awards. Sieradski says the real problem isn't bias in the awards, but in the online Jewish community. He told Jewish Socialist: 'I get riled up because I have a hard time accepting that the Jewish community – which is primarily liberal and progressive – should appear to be so overrepresented by the religious right... The domination of the blogosphere by the Jewish right is a stain on our community and reflects poorly on us internally and externally.'

Some radical bloggers prefer to skip the spiritual angst and head straight to the action of Israel-Palestine (IP) blogging. Three sites that won't be receiving Jewish and Israel Blog Awards anytime soon are the intelligent and unashamedly anti-Zionist **Jews Sans Frontiers** (www.jewssansfrontiers.blogspot.com), **Antony Loewenstein** (www.antonyloewenstein.blogspot.com) and **Anti-Zionist Notes** (www.jazzy48.blogspot.com).

Other IP bloggers have created the **Israel-Palestine Forum** (www.israelpalestineforum.com), which brings together progressive Jewish bloggers and their Palestinian counterparts such as **RafahPundits** (www.rafahpundits.com), with the aim of promoting dialogue and presenting a variety of pro-peace views in one forum.

Tikun Olam and semitism.net were among the founders, and there are several other well-informed blogs among the contributors, including **Cal Tzedek** (www.caltzedek.blogspot.com), **Aron's Israel Peace Weblog** (www.israelblog.org) and **Dennis Fox** (www.blog.dennisfox.net).

Another Israel-Palestine Forum contributor, **Lawrence of Cyberia** (www.lawrenceofcyberia.blogspot.com), has set a yardstick for IP blogs with her mix of witty writing with sharp analysis. A former GCHQ translator and analyst now living in the US, her site includes a bundle of useful maps and resources, and a series of self-penned in-depth biographies of leading Palestinian politicians. Her serious intent – footnotes abound – is tempered by headlines such as 'Olmert Hopes To Resume Talks; I Hope To Win Lottery', 'God Slams Partition Of Palestine; Favours One State Solution' and 'Does This Uzi Make My Ass Look Fat?'

If such sites inspire you to rise to Daniel Sieradski's challenge and start your own blog, take a look at **Blogger** (www.blogger.com) and **Typepad** (www.sixapart.com/typepad), two blog creation tools that will get you started without needing technical know-how. Blogger is free and Typepad is inexpensive so you have nothing to lose (except your free time). Just don't expect to win any prizes.

THE BENEFIT OF BENEFITS

Ten pounds was the planned ticket price for the comedy show arranged to raise money for Jewish Socialist at the Red Rose Club in north London last December. When you consider that the line-up had a number of fine acts including the renowned Jeremy Hardy and Radio 4 poet Mike Rosen, it was pretty good value for a tenner.

But, at a meeting with the other organisers, a few weeks before the event, I suggested dropping it to £8. 'The reason,' I said to my Jewish Socialist comrades was, 'benefit fatigue'. The comedy benefit, I argued, had become an over-used means of raising money; the days when people would just turn out to support any cause, irrespective of who was on at any ticket price, had long passed.

I was very concerned that people wouldn't come in the numbers we wanted. 'We should no longer refer to it as a benefit,' I said, 'but treat it as a celebration.' 'We want,' I said, 'to promote the show positively, focusing on the achievements of the magazine, and also to extend the length of the string on which Jewish Socialist is produced. After a brief discussion the comrades deferred to my 20 years' experience working in comedy. 'Celebration!' became the title and £8 the ticket price.

Why was I so nervous? Why benefits? And more importantly, who benefits? Comedy benefits became popular in the 1970s. They were considered a political event where the principle aim was to signify an expression of solidarity between performers and audience. Although these left-wing jamborees were often badly organised, overran for hours and were artistically inconsistent, they were invariably well attended and joyfully received.

To organise, perform at, or attend a benefit was, in itself, a political act. They boosted the morale of the political foot soldiers, increased political consciousness and raised support for socialist campaigns. The venues were usually low to middle scale, the performers self-selecting and the audience mostly lefties.

The advantage to the groups using them as a way of raising funds was that they were relatively easy to organise. Unlike music or theatre, the technical requirements are simple and the number of personnel involved small. One act and a microphone and that's 20 minutes covered. Another person and that's another 20 minutes – you don't even need another microphone.

The appeal to the performers was the shows were an opportunity to be seen as something other than just a nightclub jester, while the audience experienced the delight of hearing radical stuff you'd never get on TV.

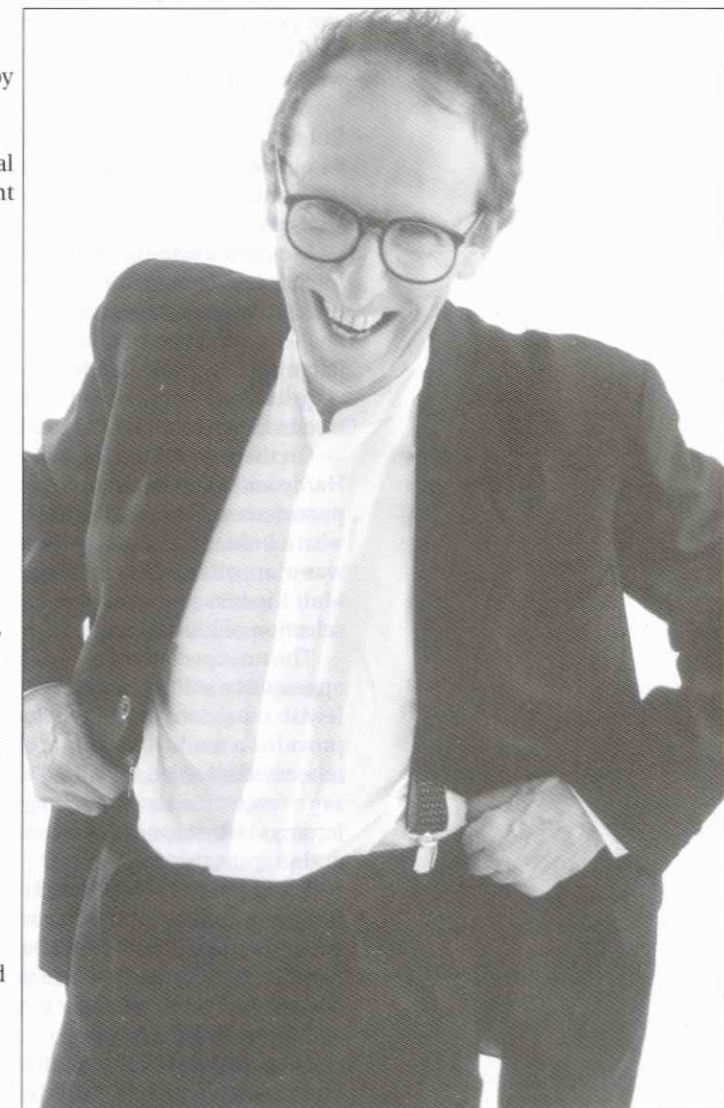
But the success of these events didn't escape the attention of commercial interests. Live Aid, Comic Relief and the Secret Policeman's Ball discreetly transformed the benefit show from a political event

to a marketing opportunity. Tightly organised by 'much-needed' professional promoters, often with a TV tie-in, they became packaged as an inexpensive way of bringing together large numbers of top performers at one time, and enabling the famous to have useful exposure. They also provided an opportunity for up-and-coming artists to be identified alongside the more celebrated colleagues they one day hoped to displace.

With all these commercial possibilities apparent, a hierarchy of benefits evolved in which the most popular performers appeared only at the most prestigious shows. Entertainment and cause no longer fused but were deliberately blurred to keep the power brokers in the entertainment industry firmly in control. If any one dared to criticise this arrangement they were dismissed as 'whingers' who would be better off praising the 'sacrifice' of their moral superiors.

In fairness, most comedians are easy to deal with and are happy to do benefits. They're not fools: they know a refusal to support the fight against Aids or to support Children in Need doesn't look too good on the CV. Neither have they been slow to cotton on to their value. Today, any well-known professional left out of a big show for a fashionable cause at a prestigious venue, would ask serious questions of their management. They'd be wasting their breath, because any manager worth their salt would have already tried to get them on. The exposure would be too good to miss and the public approval impossible to resist. It's a magic

IVOR DEMBINA, who organised a brilliant comedy show for Jewish Socialist in December, looks at the changing politics, purpose and significance of these fundraising events since the 1970s



There are links to all the sites mentioned in this article at: www.jewishsocialist.org.uk. Jewish Socialists' Group member Charlie Pottins recently launched his excellent blog, RandomPottins at www.randompottins.blogspot.com



Reg D Hunter made the show real

combination. The audience gets cheap entertainment, the performers get to be seen and the cause picks up a few quid.

The trouble is, the politics don't go away. There have been some laughable contradictions, with performers turning up one day to do their 10 minutes to raise money for miners' wives and the next day jetting off to the Falklands to joke with our boys. There's also a well-known story of one comedian who begged to get on the bill for a Nicaragua benefit claiming that he'd always cared about Africa! And, less funny, at the recent Live 8 show, the BBC was badly shown up during the concert by refusing to show a film about the causes of poverty, claiming it was too political, despite public exhortations from one of the artists on stage for them to screen it.

As principal organiser and self-appointed compère of the Jewish Socialist gig, what lessons did I draw from all this? Well, first and foremost I wanted to produce a good gig. Harvey Goldsmith would probably have said the same about Live 8. But the difference was that I wanted to do something where the artists themselves reflected the two central tenets of this magazine – its Jewishness and its socialism.

I wanted a line-up that would have its own integrity and not simply pander to the need to sell tickets. I also wanted good comedy that would challenge and provoke, and not casually wave the left-wing flag. I also needed a couple of acts that were less well known, who might spark a bit of interest in anyone who felt politically jaded.

On the whole, I think I did quite well. Jeremy Hardy and Mike Rosen set out the Jewish Socialist parameters of the gig. Reg D Hunter made it real, with a brilliant bit about whether the word 'cunt' was more offensive than 'nigger'. And fresh-faced Matt Kirshen gave the show a strong opening with a selection of his best material.

The unexpected hit of the show was the appearance at interval time by a group of young Jewish musicians called the Rock 'n' Rollmops who provided a rendition of some of their newly rehearsed klezmer. Julia Bard also took the stage to say a few words about the magazine, and local MP Jeremy Corbyn spoke for a few minutes to praise and support the event.

Some 150 people attended and over £1,000 pounds was raised. What's more, I came up with a good new joke: 'There won't be much spent at the bar tonight because firstly, Jews don't drink much and secondly the ones here tonight are socialists and they share them.'

OK you had to be there, but it was a good night and, yes, you're right: I should have charged a tenner.

LITTLE SNIP

'He cuts 'em off.'

Along my skin it worms, trickling to a bead at the tip of my finger. And its danger has me shivering under its silence.

Peeping through a crack in the door of my parents' bedroom (that's the way to find out things in our house), I saw my mother hiding the key in the dressing table. Norman Bargitt and I use the key to open the drawer in the bureau while my parents are out. Every Wednesday afternoon they go together to their class, where my mum and dad do writing for personal improvement. My mum gives me the front door key, and leaves me syrupy prunes. I hate prunes and their wrinkly skins. Proooooons. Ugh. My mum tells me they'll make me want to go the toilet more often. 'You don't go enough', she says, 'and when you do I don't know what you do in there. We could all have gone to the moon and back by the time you come out.'

We keep all sorts of different books in the toilet: my mum has a poetry book with some of our country's greatest classics. She says I should try and memorise the poems while I'm sitting there waiting for something to happen. Help me get to grammar school. My favourite books are the 1965 Littlewoods football omnibus, Believe It or Not, which has all sorts of fantastic facts about things like the man who grew the longest fingernails ever and the man who put the people he killed in baths of acid, and a book on great executions. I keep them under the bed where my mum can't find them and I take them into the toilet with me. My mum says she hates those books.

My mum and dad aren't back until after six – they visit old Mr Greenblat on the way – and Norman Bargitt always comes home with me straight after school before they return. Inside the drawer of the bureau are papers from Gillbrook Insurance Co with bits about 'contingencies' in case of the 'demise of' my dad, a little book with my dad's photo and foreign writing in it and my dad's cigar in a metal case that looks like one of those bombs dropping from planes that they have in the war stories in the Victor. German soldiers with large jaws and steel helmets. Blown up in the end. Always yelling Achtung! We take out a small box. In the box there is a folded piece of paper with Hebrew and English writing and a little knife. I run my finger along its edge, feel skin upon steel.

'Your dad,' says Norman Bargitt. 'He cuts off the willies of little Jew boys. My dad told me.'

Norman Bargitt's dad is right. Norman Bargitt's dad knows everything. My mum told me not to play with Norman Bargitt. 'Don't bring that boy into this house. He's a nasty piece of work.' But I like Norman Bargitt and I like his mum and dad. They have crispy rashers of bacon on squares of white toasted bread. McVitie's bread, soft, pure white, regular, square; bread that I have savoured, not lumpy and brown. Brown bread. Jew bread. For tea, they have Wall's ice-cream with a band of pink down the middle. My mum gives me boiled fish and healthy carrots and potatoes. 'You've got to finish it up!' my mum shouts, and then her hair rises prickly and aggravated when I ask her why she doesn't give me nice things to eat like Norman Bargitt's mum does.

'Don't you dare go into that house again,' she says. My mother says that I should listen to my father because he's very wise. She whispers to my father in the hallway and I know she's telling him what to say to me. Stop playing with that horrid boy next door. Stop reading all those comics. Stop this. Stop that. 'Your father wants to have a talk with you.' Then in his slow strange English he'll repeat to me what I've heard my mother whispering to him. That's what my mother calls wise.

Norman Bargitt's dad is useful. He wears oily trousers that stick out from under his car. He's always under cars so he knows lots about them. Norman Bargitt's dad calls Norman Bargitt, son.

'Son. The spanner. Quick.'

'Right, dad.'

Inside their house, with her head in a dome, is Norman Bargitt's mum. She's smoking a cigarette and reading a magazine.

'Twenty Stuyvesant, love. And ask Fred if this week's Reveille's come in.'

'Right, mum.'

Norman Bargitt's mum is 'doing her hair'. She is beautiful. Her hair is straight, white (blonde, love) and swoops off her forehead. It's perfect.

There's a man down our street with a brand new Ford Zephyr. It has white tyres and wings that flare at the back like an angel's. Norman Bargitt's dad stands next to the owner. His hands are on his hips then he scratches his chin and peers through the window. Tools dangle from his belt. Norman Bargitt says the owner of the car is going to let his dad take Norman Bargitt and his mum for a drive in it. When I walk past the Ford Zephyr with my dad I tell him how quick it reaches 60 miles an hour from being stationary. 'Oooo- aaah,' says my dad, but he's only pretending to be impressed. My dad doesn't have a car. He doesn't even know how to drive. My mum says, 'Can you imagine your dad driving a car?'

'I've got one,' I tell Norman Bargitt. 'So how can my dad cut them off?'

'He's left yours on 'cos he's your dad,' says Norman Bargitt.

My dad wears a black hat and a black jacket and a grey tie. Whenever he sees a lady in the street he touches his hat and says Good Morning to you. Mary Morgan, who my mum says has a screw loose, said to me that they don't make them like my dad any more. That's because my dad's old and polite and very clerical and doesn't do much work now. My dad's eyes wink because there's a joke inside them but when I catch him just looking, sometimes, they're full of sadness.

Norman Bargitt's mum calls my dad 'that Jewish gentleman' which is a funny thing to call him because he's my dad.

'So how do they go to the toilet?'

'They don't.'

'I'll ask my friends.'

'Go on then,' says Norman Bargitt.

My dad doesn't know anything about football. When I'm reading the back page of the Daily Mail at breakfast he asks me how Arsenal are getting on. It's the only team he's heard of and he should know I hate Arsenal. Norman Bargitt watches his dad play football on Hackney Marshes every Sunday morning. His dad can tell you the names of all the Leyton Orient teams ever and he once had a kick-about with Dave Dunmore.

A short story by RALPH LEVINSON

Saturday afternoons, when Leyton Orient play at home, Norman Bargitt and his dad leave their house wearing their blue and white striped scarves. Bye mum. Bye son. Bye dad. Up the O's. Come on you O's. Got the flask, dad? Nose flattened against the window in our front bedroom I watch them go. Pit in my stomach. Hate my dad. Sabbath. We can't do anything, can't go anywhere. Boring. Borrr. Ing. Cold things to eat. Cheese, salad, tomatoes. Come to the synagogue, learn some Talmud, says my Dad. Go with your father, says my mother unfolding the paper in her lap. Be thankful you have such a father. So wise. So kind. All right for her with her newspaper and afternoon snooze then her friend, the lady with the no-good son, who comes round when they have tea and those chocolates with the soft centres which she keeps in a tin behind the bucket in the broom cupboard under the stairs where my mum thinks I'll never find them.

In the synagogue with my dad and the smelly old books, I wonder how the Orient are getting on. Five minutes into the match. My dad's always in the synagogue or on his way to the synagogue. When my mum complains that he's late for dinner he says that he had to check the Torah scrolls. He's there first thing in the morning praying, and praying last thing at night. He even prays when he walks along the street, his lips puttering rapidly. I look in shop windows pretending he's not my dad. Whenever I ask my dad for pocket money he points to his lips. Mustn't disturb his conversation. Always talking to God.

'Wonder where he puts them,' says Norman Bargitt.

'Nowhere.'

'Got to be somewhere.'

At one end of the synagogue is the Ark with its blue curtain where all the Holy Scrolls are kept. I go up to the Ark with my dad where he stops, groans and grabs the folds of the curtain. He's shaking without making any noises and his knuckles are dead white where he's gripping the velvety material. The silence and my dad's knuckles are scary. My dad is angry with God.

Norman Bargitt asks his dad if he'll take us to see Leyton Orient play Scunthorpe United on Boxing Day. No festival, no fast, no Sabbath so it should be all right. His dad says he will take us. He says to me, 'Football matches don't cost nothing, you know. You'd better ask your dad to get out all that money that he keeps under his bed.' Norman Bargitt's dad winks at Norman Bargitt's mum and she puts her fingers to her mouth and makes a noise like a sparrow coughing. I didn't know my dad kept his money under his bed.

'They'll be hidden in the kitchen,' says Norman Bargitt.

'What will?'

'Your dad's willies,' says Norman Bargitt. 'He puts them in vinegar to keep 'em from smelling.'

Norman Bargitt's dad stands outside the house, combing his hair, watching me and Norman Bargitt kicking a ball against the wall on the other side of the road. When the ball passes me and pounds the bricks Norman Bargitt raises his arms above his head, twirls and cries: 'Oh yes, and Greaves scores.' 'Traitor', I yell. 'Greaves plays for Spurs.' 'And England,' says Norman Bargitt. Across the road comes Norman Bargitt's dad still combing his hair. 'Defend, son, come on, defend. Watch the ball, watch the ball,' he says as he dribbles

beyond Norman Bargitt's feet and mine and touches the ball neatly between the goal posts. He turns away and flicks his hair with the comb. Norman Bargitt, puffing, looks at his dad's back like his dad really is Jimmy Greaves. Norman Bargitt's dad's a brilliant footballer.

A lady walks by with high heels and little footsteps. Norman Bargitt's dad gives a low whistle behind her back and I can tell she's smiling even though she doesn't turn round. He takes out his comb again, flicks back a loose hair, returns his comb to his back pocket, and runs his hands down his trouser legs.

In her fluffy slippers on the doorstep comes Norman Bargitt's mum. Folding her arms around her chest she calls Teezupdad.

Dadsonmum. Mumsondad. Sonmumdad. Maddonsum. Dumsadmon.

'When your dad drinks his tea I have to go out the room,' says my mum, spraying breadcrumbs on greasy cod. 'An elephant is better company.' My dad drinks his tea out of a glass. His tea's as black and sad as earth and he dips a lemon slice in it. He puts a sugar cube into his mouth and trawls his tea through it. I look up from the murders in the Daily Mail; there's a sound like water rushing through a drain pipe. That's when my dad winks at me, there's just the two of us, me with my murders and him with his tea from what my mum calls the old country.

Strip cartoons, last page but one. Carol Day, Rip Kirby, Fred Bassett, Flook by Trog. Tintin. Only old dead people live in the old country which is why my dad's so old and trees are bent and everything is broken and in black and white. Back page now. Greaves out of England squad. I must tell Norman Bargitt. Ha ha. Won my bet. Sixpence he owes me. Liquorice allsorts and I'll probably share them with Norman Bargitt anyway.

'Vinegar bottles,' says Norman Bargitt. 'Wonder where they are.'

The words on the paper from the little box are square like tombstones.

'Va-e-avor alayich,' I read aloud the Hebrew.

'What's that when it's at home,' says Norman Bargitt. There's the English underneath.

'And I passed by thee, and I saw thee weltering in thy blood, and I said unto thee, in thy blood live. Yea, I said unto thee, in thy blood live.'

'Told you,' says Norman Bargitt, his lips glistening.

In the hallway stirred by sunbeams are my dad's old slippers, the stuffing's coming out of them. Norman Bargitt's chopping the knife through the air, making whooping noises. Seeing my dad's slippers I feel a stranger in my own home, sad and alone. Alone with the strangeness of my dad.

'Give me the knife,' I tell Norman Bargitt. 'My mum'll kill me.' He carries on carving the air with my dad's knife but he stops when he sees that there are tears on my cheeks. I grab the knife from him and that's when I see the first drop of blood.

'You'll die,' says Norman Bargitt. Forever I look at the drop on my finger and it seems to look back at me like we're a mum and a baby. I hear Norman Bargitt telling me that I'll need a plaster for that. 'No,' I say, returning the knife and paper to the box.

I raise my hand, outstretched, smeared in blood. 'Golaaaaaa,' I cry.

'Goal,' yells Norman Bargitt in our hallway grasping my hand in his, and the sounds float forever like motes in the air.

OF COURSE WE HAVE THE ANSWER

My dad phoned this evening and we discussed the meaning of peace. Cynical ideology in low pitched tones modelled on fictitious news announcers generically coded to be holier than thou. I fail to compete with the desperate optimism, playing first violin in the orchestra of hope, loss and re-imagined pain.

I practice my speeches, admire my rhetorical flourishes and dream of stardom. My fists bang silently on the table, lifeless parody of the political games across the sea. Drama reduced to cliché, agony reduced to synonym and argument reduced to gunfire.

Perhaps it's easier to talk of miracles when the serpent of rationality has not hardened your secular heart, re-wiring your arteries, so the gates remain locked.

Maybe it is easier to talk of universal morality when the pages of history do not force-feed carcasses bled dry by experience, by unending repeats.

Always it is easier to speak wisdom from a distance, when the audience cannot hear you through the gunfire and tanks - too busy dying to damn you with their knowledge, praise you with their tears.

Miriam Moss

THE LIMITS

In 1992, when Ariel Sharon was still building settlements in the West Bank, Oslo was the capital of Norway rather than part of the political geography of the Middle East, and there was no Separation Wall, I took part in what purported to be a walk from Haifa to Jerusalem. In preparing for the walk I spent three days in a girls school in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem. The walk was ultimately stopped near the border of the West Bank, so we never got to Jenin or Nablus. But crossing from West to East Jerusalem, and to the West Bank, I quickly learned about the invisible boundaries in Israel and Palestine.

This came back to me when I was reading A B Yehoshua's *The Liberating Bride* (translated into English as *The Liberated Bride*). During the course of the book, the protagonist, Yochanan Rivlin travels from Haifa to the West Bank, to Ramallah and to Jerusalem, from Arab village to university seminar rooms.

The novel is set in 1998, five years after Oslo and before the second Intifada. Professor Rivlin, a noted Orientalist, is a Jewish professor of Arabic studies at Haifa University. The book starts in an Arab village near the Lebanese border. Rivlin is invited by an Arabic student, Samaher, to her wedding in the village. Through the book Rivlin is drawn back to this village, when he engages her to translate some Algerian popular literature of the 1930s. Through this, he hopes to be able to come to an understanding of the violence that took hold of Algeria in the 1990s.

DOG-WALKER

Miroslav Jancic (Bosnia)

After all is said and done
I'm about to apply for a dog-walker post
Advertised in the Ham and High;
But let me consult a fellow expatriate first
Who already has experience of the craft.

Well, it's so and so
It depends on the breed of the dog
And his master;
It's also much better
If these kinds of jobs
Are undertaken while one is young
As Rudyard Kipling or Jack London did,
Says the former theatrolgist.

But hasn't everything turned upside down,
I argue
No one becomes a celebrity first
And finishes as a part-time waiter or so;
For instance
I have a lot of magisterial works
And to walk somebody's dog
Might round up my fruitful career nicely
In accordance with the alternative culture of the
nineties.

What are we waiting for, then?
A friend from Sarajevo urges me
And he is right:
Whilst I had been buying a piece of advice
The post of dog-walker was filled up
Probably by a member of some academy of science.

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

Translated by Damjana Finci

From Diary of an Exile, London Notes

I had my trepidations for a long time.
But yesterday, I could wait no more.
I went to the phone and dialled a number: my
number!
At the other end of the line, in my house, I heard an
unknown voice saying that I wasn't there. I asked
him if he knew what had happened to me, where I
was, and he said that he had moved in recently
and that he didn't know.
I know perfectly well where I am, but I wondered
whose head was on my pillow, who was browsing
through my books, who was looking at the pictures
on my walls...I wanted to know who was picking
fruit in my garden and what had happened to my
plants.
And I started thinking.
What does he dream about while resting on my
pillow?
Is he afraid he might choke when biting into apples
picked in my garden?
Does he feel uncomfortable in my bed?
What does he say when he hears someone knocking
at the door?
What does he see in the pictures on my walls?
My books, he doesn't read, I know that!
God have mercy on him!
And this is the way things are: I am not really here,
and over there, I am no more.

The poems
reprinted on
this page are
from *The Silver
Throat of the
Moon* by writers
in exile who
were forced to
flee their
countries in
recent times.
The writers
have formed the
group *Exiled
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OF SOLIDARITY

Samaher uses her cousin, Rashed, to transport her translations to the professor. He finds himself being taken within the West Bank to listen to an Arabic singer in a church and to Ramallah for a cultural event between Israelis and Palestinians.

The novel was published in Hebrew in 2001, long before the recent boycott controversy. Yehoshua portrays the different staff in the Arabic Studies department, for example the religious head of department who focuses on what he sees as Arab defeatism or the young post-modernist lecturer who sees national identity as an artificial construct. But in Yehoshua's academic community the Jews are the lecturers in the Arabic studies department and Arabs are the students. It is not exactly a community of equals.

Yehoshua trains a satirical eye on his Jewish characters, for example the Israeli translator of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry who has never set foot in Ramallah and asks for a telephone number in fluent 7th century Arabic. Yet there is a sense of possibility, as when she takes part in an improvised translation competition from Arabic into Hebrew. The Palestinians also put on a scene from Anski's *The Dybbuk*. Yehoshua believes that one way of breaching the gap between peoples is through cultural bridges.

But he is also very conscious of boundaries. Rivlin tries to find out why his son's marriage broke up, against the wishes of both his wife and the son

himself. In doing so he is drawn to another of the novel's critical locations, the Jerusalem suburb of Talpiot, where his ex-in-laws run a hotel. And it is this stress on boundaries which is problematic. Crossing boundaries, Yehoshua is saying, may be a dangerous thing. Perhaps it is safer for the boundaries to remain in place.

Rivlin understands and speaks Arabic, but he is an Israeli, a member of, rather than a critic of his society. Rashed's sister, born in the Galilee, cannot return home from the village where she lives in the West Bank. Rivlin tries to help her through the bureaucracy, but that is as far as it goes. Some of the boundaries are real, others are self-imposed.

The Oslo period already seems a long way off now; before the second Intifada, the siege of Ramallah, the death of Yassir Arafat and the election of Hamas. Would a similar cross-cultural evening be organised in Ramallah in 2006, and would Israelis go to it if it was? The Israeli Separation Wall has been erected, an even more tangible boundary. Why was the hope of Oslo not fulfilled? Perhaps Yehoshua is saying that hope and cultural understanding is not enough. Commentary on the novel has pointed to the importance of the concept of boundary, and of Yehoshua's ultimate conclusion that each has to stay within their own boundary. In the end Yehoshua may be seen to provide a justification for why boundaries should be there, rather than a road map for getting rid of them.

Michael Heiser

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IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

FIVE YEARS IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

By Bernard
Goldstein

AK Press/Nabat Books,
£13

Holocaust memoirs, recalling the most painful experiences, provide an invaluable resource to counter 'historical revisionists' – those who either deny the Nazis' genocide of the Jews or seek to exonerate individuals accused of complicity. These memoirs say loud and clear: 'This is what happened to me, my parents, my children, my community, in my home town. I saw it with my own eyes.'

Professional historians have contributed an endless supply of tomes forensically examining what happened to Jews and other victims of Nazism in the 1940s and attempting to understand not just historical, but also political, psychological, cultural and economic processes through which such calamitous events were able to unfold. The basic facts are broadly agreed, but interpretations differ greatly and constantly throw up new questions. Could the Holocaust have happened without Hitler? Was his strategy always genocide, but only made possible in the context of total war? Could more Jews have been saved, and, if so, how? Why did a higher proportion of Jews survive in certain countries under occupation?

Historians regard personal memoirs as vital source material, but treat them with caution, as they are inevitably subjective. The geographical scale of the Nazi destruction means that each individual memoir can tell only a tiny fragment of the story, whereas historians, even when they home in on a small part of the story, have to operate by understanding the big picture.

There are problems with memory, too. How you see, remember and understand something as a five-year-old may be completely different to how you see it as a 25-year-old. Many memoirs have been written by survivors who were very young at the time. Some have not been written until decades after the events

they describe. This does not make their memories unreal. But it is inconceivable that the authors of memoirs written in the 1980s and '90s have not been influenced by their reading and internalisation of the perspectives disseminated by Holocaust chroniclers in the intervening period.

Is it possible to find a memoir written by someone mature enough at the time to interpret as well as observe? It needs to be someone who can move beyond the terrible personal experiences they have suffered, in order to understand the wider context that influenced the motives and actions of the perpetrators, the victims and the bystanders. Indeed, someone who had the physical and mental strength to write it down while the wounds were still fresh, rather than wait until they have some emotional distance.

Probably not. Yet Bernard Goldstein's book might be the nearest we will get. Written originally in Yiddish in 1947 and published in English two years later, thankfully, this gem is available again. Nabat Books specialise in retrieving memoirs not of the famous and decorated, but of the ordinary heroes, and especially the 'rebels and outsiders' whose experience history marginalises. Through this memoir Goldstein also tells the story of several other unsung ordinary heroes who did not survive to recount their acts of courage.

Goldstein was a 50-year-old Bundist when the Jews of Warsaw were forced into the Ghetto. His next five years tested to the limit his physical and mental endurance and his long-held political values. He was not a passive victim, but an activist seeking to bring both his individual and the Bund's collective influence to bear on the massive events that were unfolding. And among those suffering the violent Nazi oppression directly, he had almost unique access to the bigger picture.

Goldstein joined the party as a teenager in time to take part in the attempted revolution against the Czar in 1905. He had decades of political experience as a trade union organiser, street campaigner and fighter, which earned him the respect and admiration of Jewish and non-Jewish workers and activists. This gave him the contacts and intermediaries who assisted his personal survival under Nazi occupation. It also enabled him to maintain communication with Bundists suffering in other ghettos far from Warsaw. Throughout this period he saw events through the eyes of the Jews who were especially oppressed and, as a socialist and internationalist, through the eyes of wider humanity. And unusually, because of a background steeped in class struggle, he could describe powerfully the social stratification and class conflict that occurred within the Ghetto walls.

Purely in terms of a personal survival story against incredible odds, it is completely riveting. Like the mythical cat with nine lives, he evaded his captors and cheated death several times. Smuggling himself in

and out of the Ghetto, procuring arms for the Ghetto fighters, exchanging illegal newspapers with the Polish underground resistance, emerging from hiding places to get food, taking part in the Polish uprising of 1944, he endured great risks every day. And, of course, he wasn't the only one. I was amazed to find, through this memoir, that after the total destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, 500 Jews, including Goldstein, managed to live an underground existence, hidden away in the heart of Warsaw, until the 1945 liberation. Moreover, these Jews used every possible means to help thousands more survive, hidden in buildings and in forests on the city's outskirts.

Historians, with hindsight, have been increasingly confident in ascribing consistent motives to categories of people, whether on a political or national basis. The Zionists did this; the Communists did that; the Poles did this; the Nazis did that. Goldstein's memoir punctures these sweeping statements and presents a complex, shifting landscape, in which people rarely acted with total consistency over time.

The supposedly deep-rooted Nazi ideology held by the guards of the Ghetto wall could often be undermined by bribery. Goldstein owes his personal survival partly to a half-Polish, half-German couple who sheltered him sometimes. The wife had older brothers serving in the Nazi army but she risked death to hide one of the most wanted members of the Jewish resistance. The book contains other vignettes. A Jewish ghetto policeman enthusiastically hunting down other desperate Jews. A few blocks from the starvation that saw corpses littering the ghetto streets, Jews working directly for the Nazis dined well with their bosses at the finest establishments.

Many historians have given credence to a view that the Poles were complicit or at least acquiesced in the Nazi slaughter of the Jews. Goldstein reveals the activities of the Shmaltzovniks, who hunted Jews for financial reward, and others who betrayed Jews purely out of hatred. Yet every chapter of the book cites individual Polish non-Jews who repeatedly put their lives at risk to save Jews. No doubt this will surprise some readers. It was, though, no surprise to Goldstein himself, who lived and worked for decades with non-Jewish Poles in pursuit of a brighter common future.

As Pilsudski took Poland on a decisive shift rightwards from 1926, religious Jews left it to God to decide their fate. The Zionists remained at best indifferent to the daily fight against antisemitism, and at worst collaborated ideologically with Polish antisemites who wanted to remove Jews from Poland. The Zionists concentrated most on recruiting the young and fit to their emigration project. Despite claims by Zionists today that only they foresaw the holocaust, their 1930s counterparts in Poland planned their exit over a 25-year period.

Meanwhile, Bundists like Goldstein worked each day with Polish socialists to defend the Jews in the here and now. Goldstein knew that, in the worst of times during the Nazi occupation, he could count on the support of the Polish underground. Sometimes they failed him, as circumstances worked against them. But mostly they came through for him and many other Jews who also survived this terrible period.

The examples of basic humanitarian assistance across ethnic and cultural divides, that Goldstein describes, are thrilling and uplifting to read. Yet his lowest moment was still to come. With the liberation of 1945, conflict over food, shelter and basic survival erupted. Freedom from the Nazis ushered in a Hobbesian war of all against all. And though there were hardly any Jews, antisemitism spewed out. Goldstein knew it was the hunger and degradation that was talking and inflaming passions. It was, however, almost impossible to bear.

Eventually, with regret and bitterness, he left Poland – but not for Palestine. Individual Zionists shared some of his Ghetto experiences. Yet for all the post facto rationalisations by Zionism that serve to portray the Holocaust and the creation of Israel as logical links in a chain of persecution and redemption, to the exclusion of alternatives, Goldstein's memoir is a scathing condemnation of narrow nationalism from whichever quarter it emanates. It is a celebration of human generosity and solidarity that transcends the walls and borders people erected then, and still erect now.

David Rosenberg

Destroying the Ghetto



EVERY CHAPTER CITES INDIVIDUAL POLISH NON-JEWS WHO REPEATEDLY PUT THEIR LIVES AT RISK TO SAVE JEWS. IT WAS NO SURPRISE TO GOLDSTEIN, WHO LIVED AND WORKED FOR DECADES WITH NON-JEWISH POLES IN PURSUIT OF A BRIGHTER COMMON FUTURE.

RESISTANCE WAS NOT FUTILE

THE TWENTIETH TRAIN

by Marion Schreiber,
foreword by
Paul Spiegel

Atlantic Books £8.99

A LIFE IN SECRETS, THE STORY OF VERA ATKINS AND THE LOST AGENTS OF SOE

by Sarah Helms

(Little, Brown, £20)

It's some years since I was at a cabaret social organised by the Union des Progressistes Juives de Belgique (UPJB) one fine Brussels evening. The food was Vietnamese, the beer of course excellent. The trio on stage singing in Ladino, the conversation around in French, Dutch and Yiddish. How was it obvious I was English? I was the one looking at the woman in a sleeveless frock a couple of tables away, with a tattoo on her arm. Not a fashion-item, just a number. No one else saw this as out of the ordinary.

Thanks to the Channel, and to an older generation, we were spared some of their experiences. We think we know from books and films about the War and the Nazi genocide, but we need to learn from those who were there, and from those who have talked with them. Especially, with those who resisted.

In Belgium, more than half the Jews whom the Nazis had intended to deport to the camps escaped and survived, thanks to the boldness of a few, and the quiet but equally determined resistance of the many. Marion Schreiber, a German journalist, has interviewed people who were involved, and gathered their tales.

On 20th January 1943, a lone pilot peeled off from an RAF reconnaissance squadron, and winged in low over the Brussels boulevards to strafe the building at 453 Avenue Louise with rockets and machine gun fire. Thrilled Bruxellois gathered on the cold street to gaze in delight at the wrecked RSHA, Nazi security police headquarters, and watch the ambulances speeding off. Later news added pride to their pleasure – the brave pilot with such precise aim had been a Belgian, Jean de Selys Longchamps.

It was a sign that the ordeal of occupation would not last. For Youra Livshitz and Robert Maistriau, seeing it was a spur to their own action.

Before the war Belgium had taken in Jewish immigrants from Poland and Romania, and then refugees from Germany and Austria. When the doomed St Louis was turned back from America's shores, it was little Belgium that first offered shelter to its desperate refugee passengers.

When the Nazis occupied Belgium they appointed Kurt Asche, an SS career bully who'd earned his spurs on Kristallnacht, as Judenreferent at Gestapo headquarters. Step by step, through 18 anti-Jewish measures, he tried to divide Jews into 'foreign' and Belgian-born, exclude them from professions, trade and education, isolate and stigmatise them with the Yellow Star, and prepare their deportation.

To make things easier, respectable Jewish community leaders, businessmen and academics, were drafted into the Association Juivae en Belgique (AJB), presided over by Chief Rabbi Salomon Uhlman. Telling themselves that co-operation would be better than letting the Germans handle it themselves, they drew up the lists for deportation. People were told to pack warm clothes and blankets, bring working boots and food for a fortnight, and report to Mechelen transit camp with their ID and ration cards, ready for labour in the Reich.

Many people accepted that this was all, and refused to believe what the collaborationist paper L'Ami de Peuple called 'Bolshevik horror stories' as to what awaited the Jews in the east.

But from the start there were Jews and Belgians, who refused to co-operate, and found ways to resist and help those being pursued.

Some, including left-wing volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, had military training and formed armed groups. Young people made amateurish but occasionally successful attacks on military supply dumps. Claire Prowizur's Trotskyist group circulated clandestine papers to Belgian workers and German soldiers, helped prisoners, and spread word about the Nazis' plans.

Others put their pre-War background and ordinary jobs to use. Town hall officials provided fake papers. Postal workers intercepted letters to the Gestapo, and warned those denounced to go into hiding, before delivering the resealed letters two days late. A sociologist who had helped Italian immigrant miners integrate before the war now used her contacts in the mining areas to find homes for Jewish children. Nazi posters warned of the penalties for helping Jews, and some brave people paid the price in St Gilles prison or the camps. But resistance and assistance continued.

The resistance too exacted penalties. They failed to get one notorious Gestapo spy, but Robert Holzinger, the Jewish council official who drew up deportation lists, was gunned down outside his office in Anderlecht.

On the night of 19th April 1943, as the Warsaw Ghetto erupted in revolt, the 20th deportation train from Belgium was heading for Auschwitz with 1,631 Jews on board. 'It was Pesach,' recalls one of them. 'We wept and thought of the Jewish festival, and above all of our hidden children whom we had to leave in Belgium.' But suddenly the train stopped, doors were flung open, and there was shouting: 'Get out, save yourself!' It was Robert Maistriau. Armed with pliers, a hurricane lamp and a pistol, Maistrau, Youra Livshitz and Jean Franklemann had carried out a plan the partisan leaders thought too dangerous – they held up the train. The German guards opened fire but 17 prisoners had escaped, and before the train reached the German border, another 214 got away.

On my trip to Brussels I stayed with an old couple, UPJB supporters, and over breakfast got talking to them about the war and resistance. When I mentioned that I'd heard about a train being held up so people could escape, they laughed. 'She was on that train,' explained the husband, nodding at his wife. 'Yes, I escaped thanks to the Resistance,' she said. 'But I must tell you that the reason I survived through the War was that ordinary Belgians, working people, took me, a Jewish girl, into their home.'

Paul Spiegel, head of the Jewish community in Germany, reveals that he too was hidden with a Belgian family. Of 56,000 registered Jews in Belgium, 30,000 survived. Kol kavod to the resisters, often left-wing and nowadays slighted by the Establishment (just as they were then), and all honour to the Belgian people too.

If Britain's security establishment had had their way, Vera Atkins might have spent the War interned as an 'enemy alien', being Romanian-born, of German-Jewish parentage. As it was, she had an important job in the Special Operations Executive

(SOE), whose mission was to 'set Europe ablaze'. Through her office on Baker Street passed agents and wireless operators who would be secretly flown or parachuted into France. Among them were remarkable women like Violette Szabo, a former shop assistant (played by Virginia McKenna in *Carve Her Name with Pride*), Odette Sansom, Sonya Olshanezky, who had narrowly escaped deportation from Drancy as a Jewish girl, yet returned to France; and the first woman parachuted in, Noor Inayat Khan, brought up in Ghandian pacifism but determined to do her bit.

Vera Atkins often went to the airfields to see her protégées off, feeling responsible and even guilty perhaps that her post remained at a desk. After the War, rather than relax into civvy street, she went out

on the trail of those who had not come back, to find out what had happened to them in Nazi hands. Britain's regular intelligence service MI6 resented the upstarts in SOE, with their unorthodox ways and suspected left-wing politics, and could not wait to see the back of it. Much of this hostility was directed at Vera Atkins, and no wonder. In her quest to find out what Vera and her agents were really like, interviewing relatives and former colleagues, and perusing previously classified documents, Sarah Helms reveals a scandal that Vera Atkins discovered, concerning a wanted Nazi whose 'death' was faked so MI6 could employ him in its anti-Communist war. Sarah Helms' investigation has produced a monumental book, a serious piece of history, which makes a fascinating read.

Charlie Pottins

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

This really is a remarkable book. Two among its many photographs sum up its story. One is Derby Street, Cheetham, early one morning in 2004; no cars, no people, patched road, once-busy Jewish raincoat factories now mostly import warehouses of more recent, Asian immigrants. The second shows people assembling with the banners of Sedgemoor peace group and Bridgwater Trades Union Council, to demonstrate at Fairford airforce base. At the front, Helen, 19, from Mears Green farm, near Taunton, is pushing Henry Suss from Cheetham, now 90, in his wheelchair (below right).

Henry was youngest of nine children of a Galician-born peddler who doubled as shammas (beadle) at a Strangeways shul. His mother came from Russian Poland, probably for an arranged marriage. At Derby Street Jews School Henry won prizes for religious studies, at home they spoke Yiddish. The boys played cricket and football in the street, running when a window broke. Like others of his generation of Manchester and Salford Jews, Henry went into the clothing industry, becoming a skilled tailor, and eventually a well-known activist in the Tailors and Garment Workers' Union.

Seeing poverty and injustice, Henry thrilled to hear speakers like Harry Pollitt, who seemed to know his world yet convinced him a better one could be built (even was being built) in this life. With their immigrant background and family links (many of his relatives were to perish in the Holocaust), Jewish workers like Henry could not confine their outlook to the workplace or neighbourhood. Pals like Judd Coleman went to fight in Spain. Henry raised aid to Spain, even persuading his religious dad to contribute.

There were also fascists nearer home, and Henry saw them throw a heckler from the balcony in the Free Trade Hall. He joined a left-wing theatre group performing anti-fascist plays. With his girlfriend on a trip to London he met Paul Robeson at the Unity Theatre. These are the ways the political loyalties of Henry Suss to the working class and the hope of a better world for all were shaped, and he never left them.

In 1964, despite the disillusionment with Stalinism and hopes of Labour, Henry Suss, living in Swinton, an area with more miners and engineers than Jewish garment workers, was elected as a Communist

'councillor because of his work on local housing issues. Eventually, the old campaigner came off the miners' picket lines to find that, though he had not left the Party, it was leaving him. According to *Marxism Today*, the class struggle was passé.

Today, in a home for the blind at Burnham-on-Sea, Henry Suss is far from blind to past mistakes, and will not abandon his vision of a better future. Dave Chapple, a Somerset postman and union activist of Welsh parentage, sharing neither religious background nor party affiliations with Henry Suss, asks him a long series of searching questions, producing a dialogue of great warmth and closeness between left-wing generations.

Profusely illustrated with photographs, leaflets and cuttings from Henry's life, it is also rich in detail, humour and anecdote. Readers from Manchester and Salford will learn amazing new stuff about familiar old



names. (I never knew my school pal Dave Askins' mum once clobbered Mosley with a brick in her handbag!) But you needn't know the area or people in Dave Chapple's book to acquire its respect and understanding for a previous generation. Whatever mistakes they made (don't we, too, albeit different ones?), we owe them, and can learn from them.

Charlie Pottins

HENRY SUSS AND THE JEWISH WORKING-CLASS OF MANCHESTER AND SALFORD

Interviews with
Dave Chapple

Somerset Socialist
Library, Bridgwater

Available £10 waged/£5 unwaged from Manchester Jewish Museum, or the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, or by post (add £2.50) from Somerset Socialist Library, 1 Blake Place, Bridgwater, Somerset, England TA6 5AU

RAF SALKIE reviews books that break the boundaries

On the next to last day of 2005, riot police raided a square in a wealthy suburb of Cairo where several thousand refugees were camping. As they 'cleared' the site, 27 residents were killed, including 11 children. The police continued to beat people while they took them away to be deported, according to an Associated Press reporter on the scene. Most of the victims were from Sudan, which has several million refugees in Egypt fleeing the civil war.

Events like this are predictable for anyone who has read Carolyn Moorhead's **Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees** (Chatto & Windus). The book begins and ends in Cairo, where huge numbers of people from all over Africa live precariously in an appalling limbo, punctuated by occasional horrors like the recent police raid. Moorhead also describes boat people drowning off the coast of Sicily, Mexicans dying in the Arizona desert, and racist attacks against asylum seekers in England. It's a brilliant and compulsively readable account of life as a refugee today.

Not that we should single out Egypt as particularly brutal towards its foreign population. Egypt is one of the Third World countries like Pakistan and Tanzania which have vast numbers of migrants from nearby conflicts. If the UK had to cope with several million refugees, no doubt the scenes from Cairo would be repeated here a hundredfold.

My point is rather that the mistreatment of refugees exposes the whole apparatus of borders, passports, visas and travel restrictions as a massive con-trick. It isn't just crude nationalism that is iniquitous because it treats one special group of people as better than everyone else. The very idea of a 'nation' is profoundly discriminatory because it inevitably gives more civil rights to its 'citizens' than to the rest of the

world. We see this clearly whenever we cross a border into, say, Vulgaria and there is one queue for holders of Vulgarian passports and another for everyone else. Once you accept that 'everyone else' is a legitimate category, you are agreeing that refugees have fewer rights than ordinary citizens. This puts you on a slippery slope which inevitably leads to immigration police, refugee camps and the carnage in Cairo.

In short, the fundamental axiom in any civilised moral code and in progressive politics is simply to reject the distinction between 'citizens of X' and 'everyone else'. If you were thinking that this smacks of anarchism, it won't surprise you that I recently read Emma Goldman's autobiography, **Living My Life** (Dover, 2 volumes). This Jewish anarchist (right) emigrated from Europe to New York as a child and was a major figure on the American left from the 1880s, supporting workers in struggle and opposing US involvement in the First World War. She was eloquent, courageous, and uncompromising (like the current Chief Rabbi, only more so).

Naturally Goldman spent a lot of time in jail, with the threat of expulsion hanging over her because she wasn't born in America and therefore fell into the 'everyone else' category. In 1919 she was deported to Russia, where initially she tried to set aside her political disagreements with the Bolsheviks. Gradually she became convinced that the revolution was being betrayed. The last straw was the Kronstadt uprising of 1921, where she desperately tried to mediate to prevent bloodshed. Lenin and Trotsky were not willing to give ground, and crushed the rebellion with hideous brutality. Goldman fled the country with the Secret Police on her heels – an object lesson for anyone who

believes that 'state' and 'socialism' can ever go together.

Rage against state stupidity lays behind Thomas Keneally's outstanding book, **The Tyrant's Novel** (Hodder and Stoughton). The story starts in an Australian prison for refugees, who are 'detained and isolated there as a virus too toxic to be released' in the author's scathing words. Most of the action takes place in an unnamed Middle Eastern dictatorship, but to stop us from thinking of its citizens as 'everyone else', Keneally gives them all names like Andrew, Sarah, McBrien and Mrs Carter. It's a

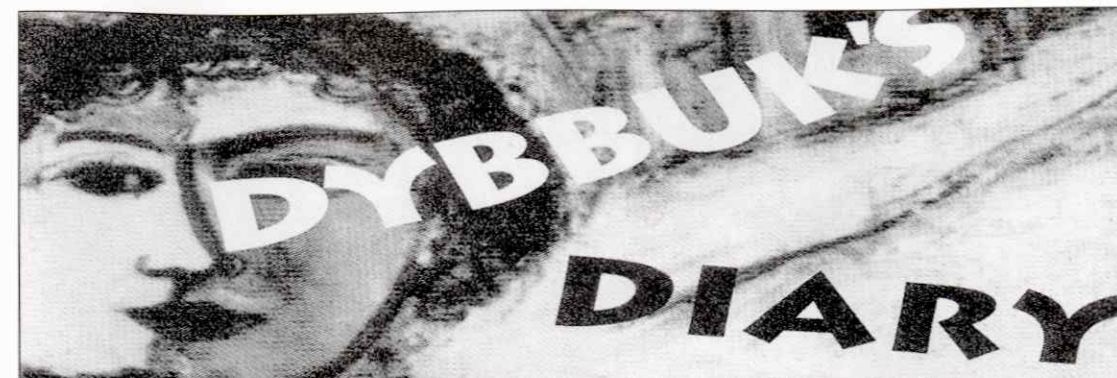


simple device, perhaps simplistic, but it worked for me.

Finally, Barbara Lovenheim's **Survival in the Shadows: Seven Hidden Jews in Hitler's Berlin** (Peter Owen) tells how a large network of people successfully sheltered members of three families for two and half years until the end of the War. Lovenheim asks how come the rescuers behaved honourably and with extraordinary courage when millions of Germans supported the Nazis or acquiesced quietly. She doesn't know the answer, but part of it was surely their refusal to distinguish between 'us' and 'them'. It's that vital moral axiom again, so vital, in my view, that we should 'repeat it to our children ... and write it on the doorposts of our house, and on our gates'.

Alive and kicking in cyberspace

The Jewish Socialists' Group website has been redesigned and relaunched. It provides information about the group and its history. It has details of forthcoming activities and carries links to other organisations we campaign with – in the antiracist movement and in the fight for peace and social justice. Check it out on www.jewishsocialist.org.uk. But before you head off into cyberspace, make sure you've read Clifford Singer's article on page 19. And don't forget to come back to Earth.



MARKET FAECES

Time was, literary Nazis could only find classics like the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion by trawling ads in their own journals. But now, while people pursue reported sightings of the Protocols in some Islamic shop, or protest about its serialisation on Egyptian television, it has been made widely available on the internet, and by a Jewish-owned storechain.

An investigator for the anti-fascist magazine Searchlight was horrified to find a whole range of hardcore Nazi material for sale on Tesco's website. Besides the Protocols, originally published as conspiracy-lit by the Czar's secret police for those pogromchiks who could read, and taken up by Hitler, there was Henry Ford's *The International Jew*.

These were among 22 books from US publisher Liberty Bell, along with works from American Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell, and Romania's Iron Guard fascist leader Codreanu. Blood and Honour were so impressed, they posted a link to the Liberty Bell list on Tesco's website. 'Great stuff,' wrote 'Admin', 'so what if it's a yid firm, we'd starve to death if we didn't put some money some yid's way at least once in a while, who makes the profits on petrol for instance?'

From Britain's own Nazi stable there were books by Oswald Mosley, William Joyce ('Lord Haw Haw'), John Amery who recruited for the SS, and Arnold Leese, the fascist who thought Mosley too soft on Jews, and first advocated extermination chambers. A note warned: 'We cannot guarantee delivery in time for Christmas'.

Tesco say they don't know how such material got into their lists (I hope they're more careful with their foodstuffs), and they have taken steps to remove it. Which only then leaves Amazon.

DAME FORTUNE

Talking of Tesco, I see stores heiress Dame Shirley Porter's old Tory chums on Westminster council are maintaining standards of fairness and propriety. So much so, they took Labour councillor Paul Dimoldenberg to the local government Standards Board last year, for 'bringing the council into disrepute' (sic). He had allegedly breached confidentiality by telling the BBC Today Programme that Westminster was dragging its feet collecting the £42 million surcharge Dame Shirley owed for her part in the 'homes for votes' gerrymandering scandal.

In the event, despite pleading poverty, the billionaire coughed up £12.3 million. Dimoldenberg was cleared by an adjudication panel which accepted he had acted in the public interest. But this left the Labour councillor with £46,000 in legal costs. Then he remembered that in 1998, Westminster found £240,000 to reimburse three Tory councillors who, though criticised in the district auditor's report, had been found not guilty of 'wilful misconduct'.

Councillor Dimoldenberg wondered if the council might be generous enough to pay half his legal costs. No way, said Westminster's standards committee, including Melvyn Caplan who was council leader when the 1998 payment was made. Well, we can't have them being accused of favouritism.

EXCLUSIVE BRETHREN

No matter how they lament the shrinking of the Jewish community, some leaders are determined to keep people out. David and Kate Lightman married in 1988 after Kate spent two years in Israel converting to Judaism. They were married by an Orthodox rabbi. Mrs Lightman is head of English at Jewish Free

School (JFS) in Kenton, north west London, and has also taught Religious Education there. But when the Lightmans tried to get their 11-year old daughter into JFS, the Chief Rabbi's court, the Beth Din, said no. It was the second time in six months they'd made such an exclusion.

Edgware-born Rabbi Chaim Simons should be pleased. When he was in charge of Jewish Studies at Liverpool's King David school he was shocked to find the head not only admitting children of 'mixed marriages' but letting them sit with others in Jewish Studies classes. 'This could lead to intermarriage', Rabbi Simons thought. He knew his duty. Appealing over the head for rabbinical backing, he questioned children about their parents, and asked to see their ketubot (marriage certificates).

When he had to teach pupils he did not consider proper Jews, he tried to ignore them, refused them Bar Mitzvah tuition, would not assist a boy with his tefillin (donned by males for morning prayer), and made sure the rest of the class knew why. But discrimination was not always easy. A problem arose when a 'non-Jewish pupil' was doing well in Jewish Studies, and might win a prize, 'I therefore did some "mark manipulation" ... I felt this manipulation to be perfectly legitimate, since this non-Jewish pupil was not entitled to be in any Jewish Studies class. If he had been awarded the prize, he would have deprived a Jewish pupil from receiving it' (extract from *My Fight for Yiddishkeit: Reminiscences of a Director of Jewish Studies at the King David High School, Liverpool, in the 1970s* (www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/7854/)).

But what about King David's Moabite bubble? The Bible doesn't mention Ruth's ketuba so he probably wouldn't have been accepted at JFS!