



AJDS Newsletter

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The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

February 2010

Naomi Chazan, the NIF and the Zionist Council of Victoria

Nathan Cherny

A campaign by the obscure right-wing Israeli group Im Tirtzu against the New Israel Fund (NIF) complete with newspaper ads, billboards and demonstrations has already fallen on its face. The claims in the Im Tirtzu report that NIF grantees provided 92 per cent of the material in the Goldstone report have been well and truly debunked.

As it turns out NIF grantees have provided 92 per cent of the material provided by Israeli NGOs. But the bulk of the Goldstone report's material came from Israeli government statements, UN sources, Palestinians and even Israeli newspapers like Ma'ariv that have taken up the cudgels against the NIF. But even that does not tell the full story. One of the NIF grantees, A Different Voice from Sderot did provide information to Goldstone but that was about the suffering of residents from the Palestinian rocket attacks! Hardly an anti-Israeli activity.

But the best defence of the NIF concentrates not so much on the facts and figures but on the principles involved. Dr Nathan Cherny has taken up the comments made by Dr Danny Lamm, President of the Zionist Council of Victoria, whose organisation withdrew support from a local fund-raising meeting which was due to be addressed by Naomi Chazan, the president of the NIF.

From here in Israel, I am disturbed and distressed by Danny Lamm's claim that the kind of things the NIF supports are "so far from the Jewish community in Melbourne" so as to make them "unacceptable". Based in Washington and Jerusalem, the New Israel Fund has a thirty-year record of supporting non-profit organisations committed to building a more just and democratic Israeli society, the kind of Jewish society that I want for my children. Of the various funding organisations active in Israel, it is probably the most important supporting this vital agenda.

As a son of the community, whose Aliya was predicated on the values I learned growing up in the Melbourne Jewish community, I believe that the issues that the NIF has championed are exactly the kind of things that this community holds dear; an Israel that is just, that promotes equality and the right of its citizens and residents to live in dignity.

As much as I love Israel, and despite its many achievements, I recognise that Israel is a troubled country with a litany of issues that need urgent redress: corruption, inequality, disenfranchised minority groups and a fragile democracy. It is easy to criticise, but because I am a Zionist I am here to make a difference and to be a part of the many people to want to see a better Israel.

I cannot believe that the Jewish community of Australia (where I was born and where my father, brother and so many friends live) would not be interested in bridging social and economic gaps (now the second highest among all Western countries [the OECD says it's the highest]), in promoting equal rights for Arab citizens, in advancing the status of women, in fostering tolerance and freedom of religious expression, in increasing government accountability and the rule of law, in strengthening efforts to protect the environment and public health, in promoting peace with the Palestinians, and so much more. These are the agenda of the NIF!

Without the non-profit organisations supported by the NIF, many "invisible Israelis" would have no voice: from Ethiopians, to the impoverished Bedouin citizens of the Negev and the neglected development towns; the NIF believes that Israel has a special responsibility to uphold its founders' vision and traditional Jewish values of fairness and equity. Is this beyond the interest of the community?



Nathan Cherny

The NIF has championed equal access to education for all in Israel – whether for Sephardic girls segregated from their Ashkenazi classmates in ultra-orthodox schools, the Bedouin children who must walk to school on dangerous unpaved roads, or the Ethiopian immigrant pupils denied entrance to public schools in Petach Tikva. Is this what Danny Lamm calls "unacceptable"?

Without the non-profit organisations supported by the NIF there would not be a vibrant civil rights movement in Israel. In the past thirty years, nearly every judicial decision in Israel in the area of civil and human rights was achieved either by an NIF-supported organisation or by attorneys whose careers and skills were shaped by their experience and training sponsored by the NIF. These have been big issues ranging from the prohibition of torture in civilian interrogations to changes in the route of the separation fence in order to respect humanitarian concerns, the rights of people with disabilities, women's rights, minority rights, gay rights and the rights of Israeli-born children of foreign workers.

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***The views expressed in this
Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS.
These are expressed in its
own statements.***

What we stand for:

- Social justice and human rights.
- Opposition to the vilification and mandatory detention of asylum seekers.
- The struggle against racism, antisemitism in particular.
- Non-violent paths to conflict resolution.
- In line with this, the search for a negotiated solution to the Israel/Palestinian conflict.
- Equal rights, including land rights and justice, for Indigenous Australians.

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The NIF is the major promoter of the many moves to release Israelis from the ultra-orthodox stranglehold on religious life that causes so much distress and hardship here in Israel. The NIF is the largest funder of moderate Orthodox organisations that are courageously advocating for solutions for the thousands of *agunot* and women whose husbands refuse to grant them a *get*, protesting the degrading sex-segregated public bus lines in Jerusalem, and speaking out against gross expressions of religious racism (such as the recent publication of *Torah of the King* which argued that religious law permits the killing of any non-Jew who poses a theoretical threat, including children and babies).

The NIF maintains an ongoing struggle to allow true freedom of religious expression in Israel to allow all Jews to express and celebrate their Jewishness in a way that is meaningful and appropriate for them. I cannot believe that these things do not resonate with communities like Melbourne and Sydney, which have cultivated such rich diversity of Jewish life and religious expression.

I believe in "Tzedek, Tzedek tirdof", the imperative of actively pursuing justice as a core Jewish principle. Even in war, I want to be able to take pride in the justice of my country. If, and when, my country or its agencies stray through faulty decision making or command, I want a system that is ready to honestly investigate the claims and to candidly address them. This has been the approach of NIF-supported non-profit Israeli organisations (such as B'Tselem) calling for Israel to launch fair and independent investigations into some of the accusations arising out of Operation Cast Lead. Believe me, I want this not out of any self-hatred, but out of a profound sense of patriotism and love of my country.

That the New Israel Fund has come under attack from all sorts of extremist, rightwing, anti-democratic, and anti-pluralist persons and interest groups is not new. Among its most severe critics are the sorts of people who attack Israel's judiciary, who defend a rigid Orthodox hegemony over Jewish life, promote Israeli annexation of the West Bank and the expulsion of the Palestinian community; elements that represent the "dark side" of the national discourse. The recent attacks by the rightwing organisation "Im-Tirtzu" (which prompted Danny Lamm's commentary on the NIF) is only the latest attempt to silence the voice of civil society in Israel.

Paradoxically, when people attack Israel unfairly, the issues championed by the NIF are precisely the sorts of things cited by Israel's defenders when they rebut the claims of Israel's enemies and praise the vibrancy of Israeli democracy and the justice inherent in Israeli law!

While I recognise that trees, dams, parks and urban renewal (the sorts of things traditionally supported by the JNF, UIA and Keren Hayesod) are important, the promotion of civil society and social justice in Israel is even more so. Because I believe that these things are close to the hearts of the Jewish communities of Australia, I believe that the New Israel Fund should become as important a part of the philanthropic agenda of the Australian Jewish community as it is in the United States and in Europe.

When Danny Lamm claims that the agenda of the NIF is unpatriotic or anti-Zionist, he not only slurs the organisation, he slurs supporters like me and my wife Nancy and the kind of Zionism to which we have committed our lives and the lives of our family. We take personal offence.

Nathan Cherny is a Melbourne-born medical specialist who heads the Oncology Unit in Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Medical Centre. He sent this out to his list. Other than minor spelling and grammatical changes, we have left it as it is.

AGM elects fired-up executive

[Contributed]

The AJDS's Annual General Meeting marked a further turning point in taking the organisation in a more professional direction. This upgrading and updating of the organisation was a major theme in all the reports presented at the 7 February meeting. The new Executive is ready to fire-up all engines for the year ahead.

Giving a report on the past year, Les Rosenblatt started by looking at the international context and put the case that 2009 was a watershed year for Middle Eastern politics. He pointed to Operation Cast Lead as marking a change in attitude of many people to Israel. In AJDS terms, it was very much a year of change brought about not only by the presence of three new members of the Executive, but a greater recognition and involvement in the new media and a broader range of activities designed to appeal to younger people. Rosenblatt reported on a meeting with the Editor of the *Age* and a forthcoming meeting with the new editor of the *Australian Jewish News*. Among successful activities to come up in the report and discussion were the Annual Dinner with Dennis Altman and the Climate Change forum.

Larry Stillman reported on our website and said that it was very important that the AJDS had an online presence, particularly in appealing to young people who were not "joiners". It was not a matter of having one site, but

being picked up in as many places as possible. For example, the Middle East News Service was being picked up on the Scoop news site in New Zealand. However, we desperately needed the assistance of a multimedia volunteer to make the information appealing and truly multimedia as the work was falling on only a couple of people.

It was then the turn of the strategic planning report which was presented by Sandy Joffe. She paid tribute to Helen Rosenbaum for her work on facilitating the whole process, which had taken over four meetings. The governance subcommittee, which has gone further than the others, had done considerable work on a new constitution and its documentation will be presented to the entire membership shortly. It is envisaged that a special general meeting will be held to adopt the new rules.



Sandy Joffe

Everyone was determined to thank Rosenbaum for ensuring the success of the process, and in her absence, a special motion was carried unanimously to formally thank her..

The reports for this year's AGM and the new professional approach by the organisation mean that a more detailed account will be given over the next issues. The *Newsletter* report below is the first cab off the rank.

AJDS Newsletter report

Sol Salbe

If we look thematically at the *Newsletter* over the past year then the first theme that comes to mind is the way it has reflected the AJDS's march towards being a better set-up organisation. We have had more AJDS statements on the cover in one year than in the previous two or three. We have had more thematic articles like Harold Zwiwer's presentation of our stance on vilification. This needs to be the AJDS's first-class *Newsletter* rather than merely a first-class *Newsletter* paid for by the AJDS for its members.

The other thing to note in looking over the 11 issues produced in 2009 is that we covered what was important, often earlier than the *Jewish News*, the mainstream media and even many of the new media. Our coverage of Cast Lead was exemplary, with quite a few members rising to the occasion to assist in the task. We picked the main theme of the Goldstone report long before he was selected. We noted a conscious decision by the Israeli government and defence establishment to minimise Israeli soldiers' casualties by revising the rules of engagement and placing a lower value on Palestinian civilians' lives. We called it the "Georgia Rules", and pointed out that it was adapted from Russia. At the same time we strenuously objected to the comparison between Gaza and the Warsaw Ghetto, quoting Robert Fisk on our side.

We had a long list of members and friends who attended exhibitions and events to provide a nuanced account of what they have seen and heard. Whether Palestinian scholars, Afghan woman MP Malalai Joya, Venezuela-based Jewish Marxist economists or Israeli Iran special-

ists, we covered them as we did Palestinian demonstrations and the performance of Seven Jewish Children. We even had a friend attending the J-street gathering in Washington.

Our coverage also included some analytical work critically looking at such items as the antisemitism report presented to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and with Jeremy Kenner's analysis of the Jewish Community survey being the outstanding example of in-depth examination of the interpretation of the data.



New writer Joan Nestle

We were on the ball. While the AJN effectively boycotted the only Israeli feature at the Melbourne International Film Festival (they gave it about three lines) we had a whole page on Ajami which is a serious contender for the foreign film Oscar. We covered the dynamics and evolution of Hamas. And like everything else we did it without fear or favour.

We took advantage of the talent pool we have. Our member Joan Nestle is globally recognised as a writer on feminist and Lesbian issues. We enticed her to write about the case of Caster Smanya, homophobia and related topics.

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The AJDS and the AGM: first impressions

Carolyn Whitzman

As both the newest and youngest member of the AJDS present at its annual general meeting, the editor asked me to write up a few first impressions.

First let me explain how and why I have become a member of the AJDS. I arrived in Australia seven years ago from Canada. In Toronto, there is a large and vibrant progressive Jewish community. As member of a congregation that was egalitarian, progressive, and engaged in vigorous debate over Israeli policy, most of my Jewish community and spiritual needs were met. Then I moved to Melbourne, with both a much smaller and generally a more conservative Jewish community. I found a "shul" but still needed both a geographic and political community in which to contemplate Jewish issues ranging from 'tikkun olam' issues like climate change and racism, to the elephant in the room: Israeli policies and their connection with Jewish identity.

At two AJDS annual dinners, I found good debate (as well as good food!). Also, through Sol Salbe, who is a tremendous networker, I think I have met almost every leftwing Jew who lives north of the Yarra and west of Kew! He also asked me to give a lift to the AGM to an older member who lived in my vicinity, bribing me with what turned out to be an excellent barbecue lunch. Thus I arrived at the AGM as a chauffeur and relative outsider.

I have been very impressed by the range of information on Israel offered by the AJDS. Through translations from the Hebrew, a set of international networks, and some knowledgeable and thoughtful members, I find information that simply isn't available in the mainstream media or in the usual Australian Jewish media sources. I have also been impressed with the letters to the editor and other opinion pieces offered over the past year by the AJDS. They help extend debate by the Jewish community and combat the sense that we somehow speak with one voice on Israel. The 17 other people at the meeting were very warm and welcoming, and I want

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We took on some non-mainstream issues. The Israel/Diaspora divide on *Waltz with Bashir*, and Charles Darwin's anti-racist motivation for his work were two of the more unusual topics we tackled. We shone our torch on discrimination against Bedouin in Israel, media and Internet freedom, hate crimes and civil liberties. We also dealt with the spectre of fascism in Israel, the Global Financial Crisis and the treatment of asylum seekers both here and in Israel.

There were also many interesting cultural and historical topics, with features on Amos Kenan, Sara Alexander and the antisemitic component of McCarthyism in Hollywood.

The AJDS's friends were seen in the *Newsletter* with articles by Pablo Brait and David Spratt. There were also articles by a bloke called Barack Hussein Obama, although we have to confess that we don't know him personally.

to particularly thank the host, Tom Wolkenberg, for offering his lovely home for the AGM.

Having been to the two AJDS dinners, I was not surprised that the average age was... let's say, older. I can't remember the last time that as a person on the shady side of her 40s, I was the youngster of a sizeable crowd. Attracting younger people (and by this I mean everyone from teenagers to university students to people in their late 20s and 30s) is definitely a challenge for the organisation. Several of us were associated with universities, and that is a possible avenue to uni students. Another idea that was mooted was increasing our web presence, and possibly extending to Facebook and other social sites.

I was impressed with the discussion on climate change and other environmental issues, including work on indigenous preservation efforts in the Murray Darling (with Friends of the Earth). I was also a bit surprised and very happy to find an equal emphasis on anti-racism and other social justice issues. There is definitely a role for the AJDS here, perhaps in conjunction with more mainstream Jewish organisations and also with both secular and other faith organisations.

I'm not a particularly religious Jew, and I'm not particularly Zionist. Having said that, I do like being involved in a Jewish community, and there is little doubt in my mind that as a Jew, it is important to be engaged in the debate over Israel's future. This involves both working with and challenging more conservative elements of the Jewish community in Australia, and I am extremely grateful that the AJDS has spent 25 years taking on this role. I look forward to a generational shift in the organisation so that one day, I'm one of the old folks there!



Carolyn Whitzman

International Justice for TJ Day Memorial & Speak Out

on the 6th anniversary of the day TJ Hickey was impaled on a fence while being chased by Redfern police. You are invited to honour his memory, continue the struggle to stop all deaths in custody and demand an end to the practice where police misconduct is investigated internally by police.

10:15 am Sunday 14 February

Assemble on the steps of the Fitzroy Town Hall, Napier Street, Fitzroy.

Then march on the Fitzroy police station.

"Glaciergate": How the Murdoch press got it wrong

Damien Lawson and David Spratt

Recently, the Murdoch press have continued their campaign of climate change denial by giving front-page prominence to a story attacking the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predictions of glacial melt in the Himalayan-Tibetan ranges by 2035.

Drawing on a 13 January *New Scientist* story by Fred Pearce reporting on a debate among glaciologists about the IPCC's claim, the *Times* and subsequently the *Australian* and other Murdoch papers have tried to shift from a debate about timing to a questioning of global warming.

Opposition leader Tony Abbot has now used the reporting to attack Labor's climate policies and again questioned the need for climate action.

While there is unequivocal peer-reviewed science on global warming and its impact on the glacial melt in the Himalayan region, the IPCC left itself open to attack by basing its time frame for a major loss of the glacial ice sheets on a previous *New Scientist* reporting of "speculative" statements by an Indian scientist.

There is much to criticise in the IPCC's 2007 report, in particular their low predictions of sea level rise this century for example, for the report is based on old science (pre-2005) and is too conservative in its predictions of the timing and extent of many climate impacts. Hence the need for updates such as the Copenhagen climate science congress in March 2009

But instead of examining these problems, the *Australian* and the *Times* have chosen to focus on one unsubstantiated prediction contained in the report to throw into question concerns about the Himalayan big melt and climate change more generally. This is despite the unequivocal evidence of substantial glacial loss and warming in the Himalayan-Tibetan region.

Glacial retreat on the Himalayas/Tibetan Plateau is well documented from satellite observations and aerial photography. Glaciers around the world are melting and thinning at an increasing rate, according to the World Glacier Monitoring Service. Himalayan glaciers have been retreating more rapidly than glaciers elsewhere and has intensified in the last 10 years. For example, the Imja glacier retreated at an average rate of 42 metres per year from 1962–2000, but 74 metres per year 2001–2006. A study of 612 glaciers in China between 1950 and 1970 found that 53 per cent were retreating.

After 1990, 95 per cent of these glaciers were measured to be retreating.

Last year, we compiled a report for Friends of the Earth which reviewed the climate impacts in Australia. While it included a reference to the IPCC claim, it also outlined a substantial body of evidence on warming and glacial melt that is still valid. It also examined the catastrophic



Himalayan Glacier

impact on the Asian region of substantial glacial melt, in particular the threat to the water security of over a billion people. You can download the report: *Highstakes: climate change, the Himalayas, Asia and Australia*.

As climate policy analyst Joseph Romm said this week, "Good news: The Himalayan glaciers will probably endure past 2035. Bad news: If we don't reverse our emissions trend soon, their disappearance is likely to become irreversible before then."

Predictions about the timing of climate change impacts are the most imprecise of the many aspects of climate science. Ice sheet dynamics are particularly difficult. The loss of the Arctic sea ice, for example, is occurring seventy years earlier than IPCC predictions.

So while there is no doubt the IPCC got it wrong when it gave so much weight to this reference, we should not let a debate about timing undermine our acceptance of the fundamental threat of the loss of the Asian glaciers.

David Spratt is the author of *Climate Code Red* while Damien Lawson is in charge of climate change for Friends of the Earth Australia.

I saw AVATAR tonight. Great film.

M J Rosenberg

Great film. But it is the most anti-American major film ever. The bad guys are clearly Americans. The good indigenous bluish people are a combination of American Indians, Africans, native Latin and Central Americans, Vietnamese, Palestinians (the women ululate during battle), Afghans (when they fought the Soviets), pre-Holocaust European Jews, and pretty much any natives whose civilisation gets destroyed by more technologically advanced outsiders.

So the victims are an amalgam of exploited, colonised and sometimes exterminated people. But the bad guys seem to be...us.

Not to give anything away, but the folks in my theatre cheered every time an "American" chopper-like thing was shot down by the Third Worldish extraterrestrials. And when that Cheney/Rumsfeld/ Westmoreland guy....Well, you'll have to see it.

Am I getting this movie right? If I am, James Cameron is one subversive dude. But in a good way.

M J Rosenberg is the former Director of Policy Analysis for Israel Policy Forum (IPF). From 1982 to 1986, he was editor of Near East Report, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC's) fortnightly publication on Middle East Policy.

Gaza Freedom March: an eyewitness account

Vivienne Porzsolt

In December and January, I, along with about 15 other Australians, was privileged to be one of about 1400 internationals who converged on Cairo to break the cruel siege of Gaza imposed by Israel with support of the US, the EU, and Egypt. This siege has been relieved only by very limited humanitarian aid permitted by Israel. The ingenuity of the Palestinians has enabled other goods to be brought through the tunnels under the Egyptian border at considerable risk to life and limb. Funded by Israel and the US, Egypt is currently building a massive underground steel wall to block the lifeline provided by the tunnels.

The Gaza Freedom March (GFM), initiated by the American women's peace group, Code Pink, was one of a number of international efforts to break the blockade. I joined the March because I thought it was an important thing to build the resistance to the siege. It was never guaranteed that we would be allowed into Gaza. But I thought that one way or another, there would be significant demonstrations, either in Gaza or at the Rafah Crossing into Gaza that would draw world attention to the ongoing blockade. And so it turned out to be.

The action began before we left Australia. Prior to our departure, we were contacted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, strongly advising us of Gaza's "do not travel" status. They stressed that the Egyptian Embassy had warned that no visas would be granted to people entering Egypt for political demonstrations. We took these various approaches as efforts to deter, which, of course, we ignored.

Corralled by cops

By law in Egypt, no more than four people can congregate together. But we were able to push the boundaries. We developed a modus operandi with the police. They corralled us into a restricted part of the footpath, surrounding us with rows of young cops. So long as we did this, they gave us little trouble. They handled us internationals with kid gloves compared with what they mete out to their own people. However, they were pretty rough to those of us who challenged the restrictions.

Through the week we demonstrated at a range of places round the centre of Cairo and, despite police efforts, made a considerable impact on the locals, who responded positively to our presence.

Hedy Epstein, an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor, led a group of 20 grandmothers in a hunger strike. She was a widely publicised icon of the march.

We were told early in the week that there was no way we would be permitted to enter Gaza; we would not even be permitted to go to Al Arish, the coastal town on the way to the Rafah Crossing. However, Code Pink has an ongoing relationship with the Egyptian President's wife, Susan Mubarak. We were offered permission for two buses with 100 people to take humanitarian aid into Gaza. This offer caused considerable controversy among the marchers, and it was left up to individuals whether they went or not. I got off the bus in response to the reported views of the Gaza partners. However, others stayed on the bus and joined the march in Gaza.



Outside the Cairo World Trade Centre. Vivienne Porzsolt is on the right

Later in the morning, Plan B for demonstrating was implemented. We were to gather in Cairo's El Tahrir Square. It was an inspiring sight – at a given signal we all flooded into the road with our placards. We stood there while the police determinedly began to move us. I went to the footpath when pushed by a cop, but others made of sterner stuff sat down in the road. But the Egyptian police knew their job and cleared the road in 15 to 20 minutes. We maintained the demo for the rest of the day, corralled as usual by the police.

Two demos

So the upshot was that some internationals joined the march in Gaza and a very successful demo was staged in Cairo. I consider this a great success as the two demos were complementary and focused far more attention on the blockade of Gaza and the supine role of the Egyptian regime in relation to the US and Israel.

Overall, the Gaza Freedom March achieved very positive outcomes. It raised the profile of the siege of Gaza worldwide and supported the Palestinians with its solidarity. While the western media gave it scant attention, the Arab media and the electronic media gave it good coverage.

The impact on the people of Egypt was, I think, significant and confronted them with the restrictions they suffer. The restriction of the bulk of the marchers in Cairo had this unintended consequence that may be more important than if we had all succeeded in marching in Gaza. This could increase the inherent instability of the regime.

Another significant outcome was the adoption of the Cairo Declaration. This was an initiative of the South African COSATU delegation calling for international support for Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions against Israel. While I do not necessarily agree with some of the analysis in the Declaration, it marks a major step forward in the international BDS movement. It sets a number of concrete steps that supporters will take.

Overall, it was a privilege to participate with the cream of global civil society in this struggle for justice.

Gaza and Goldstone

Jerry Haber

The last few months have seen quite a bit of discussion and debate on the Goldstone report. American-Israeli blogger Jerry Haber analyses the debate as it stands now. His conclusion is particularly telling. I would personally give Israel a bit more of the benefit of the doubt but to make up your own mind it is wise to read a whole range of views; this is a point of view you do not run across too often-- Ed.

I see the conclusions of the Goldstone Report, especially the notorious one about Israel's deliberately targeting the Gazans' lives, as reasonable inferences, given the testimonies that the mission heard, what they themselves saw, and the unwillingness of Israel to cooperate with the mission. I should add that the members of the Goldstone mission possess a professional expertise that all their critics so far have lacked. It is one thing for the intelligent layperson to go through a report and raise questions. It is quite another for those criticisms to be raised by people with the proper credentials, who can compare the situation in Gaza with other places, and with knowledge of the law. We have not yet heard criticisms by non-partisan experts in international humanitarian law.

Axiomatically wrong

For some critics, the conclusion of deliberate targeting is especially unreasonable because they accept, as a bed-rock axiom, that the deliberate, planned punishing of a population is simply not what the Israel Defence Force would do. This axiom is, I believe, debatable. But the debate certainly cannot be settled simply by recourse to circumstantial evidence. We would have to have greater access to the actual planning of the Gaza operation, for example, then we have. And it will be decades before we have that, if we ever do.

The mainstream Jewish reaction to the Goldstone Report, especially to that conclusion, has been vicious and vitriolic. I can understand why "talkbackers" and blind partisans react in that way, but I am at a loss to understand how intelligent, reasonable, people use phrases like "traitor" "evil, evil man", "crime against the Jewish people", etc. Much more reasonable is the response of such Israeli NGOs as B'Tselem and Breaking the Silence (Yehuda Shaul), which have reservations about the deliberate, planned targeting of the civilian population, which do not see the evidence for this – but nonetheless are highly respectful towards the Goldstone Report, and endorse many of its other conclusions. Yet the partisans continually misrepresent the viewpoints of these NGOs as rejecting the Goldstone Report. B'Tselem, *pace the Jewish Telegraphic Agency's* Ron Kampeas, does not view the Goldstone Report as "deeply flawed." The NGOs may or may not express some reservations, but they are, on the whole, supportive of the report. Even the Goldstone report talks about "*possible crimes against humanity.*"

The real line to be drawn is not between supporters and detractors of the Goldstone Report, but between those who call for an independent investigation, thereby accepting the main recommendation of the Goldstone Report, and those who do not think that such an investigation is necessary, now that the IDF has responded to the UN.

Even Alan Dershowitz, who has come in for some mighty big criticism on this blog and others, has called for an independent investigation (although I am not sure whether he still does). If Israel decides on such an investigation, and if the government does not pack the panel with IDF-friendly voices, then it will be only thanks to the Goldstone Report and the reports of the Israeli and international NGOs.



Richard Goldstone

My personal view of what happened in Gaza, on the basis of my own experience of living in Israel, and of following the news, and the reports of the NGOs, is what I would call almost-Goldstone. I believe that the IDF prepared for a major operation that would not only stop the rocket fire but send a message to the Gazan population that support for Hamas is costly. This means that sufficient attention was not paid to the principle of distinction; the rules of engagement were often not observed, and these widespread phenomena suggest, but do not indicate conclusively, a deliberate policy by the higher-ups. *At best*, there was gross and criminal negligence on the part of the higher-ups and the commanders in the field. And, of course, there was a misunderstanding of what Israel's responsibility was towards civilians.

Nowhere to go

For example, Israel thought that by distributing leaflets, or by roof-knocking, it was discharging its obligation to warn the civilians. If, despite the warning, there were still civilians found there, that would be their responsibility. Does this constitute deliberate targeting of civilians? It doesn't have to, because one achieves the same effect no matter what the intention is – which is to teach the civilian population the lesson that they are entirely powerless, that they have no recourse but to run (to where?) And what moral distinction is there?

This gross, wilful negligence, which is well-documented in the Breaking the Silence testimonies, does not amount to a planned strategy of targeting civilians. It is more like a culture of neglect, a realisation that "Now we are going to show them, and we aren't going to be so particular about the rules." I don't know at what level in the chain of command this came in. But there is sufficient and credible evidence for this culture. Of course, this does not mean that accidents didn't happen. But that raises the question of whether such accidents could have been foreseen, and if so, why were those risks taken?

This is precisely why the IDF cannot investigate itself; why an independent judicial commission with subpoena powers is necessary.

If Israel could do it after Sabra and Shatila, what possible justification does it have for not doing it now?

Jerry Haber is the pseudonym of an Orthodox professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His blog is called the *Magnes Zionist*.

The wars in Yemen: more complex than we are told

Carl Bloice

It was one of those strange coincidences. First, there are news reports about the involvement of Saudi Arabia in attacking tribal rebels along the Saudi-Yemen border. Then, a young Nigerian somewhat mysteriously eludes security and tries to blow up an airliner heading into Detroit and it is said he was trained and equipped in Yemen. Next, the US is bombing elements of Al Qaeda in Yemen. Undeniably it was a fortunate turn of events for the regime in Sana'a, faced as it has been for some time with a separatist campaign in the south of the country and a growing insurgency in the north, both of which are domestic movements and not directed at the US or any other foreign country.

One thing is clear. With Al Qaeda now in the picture and linked to an attempted physical attack on the US, the Obama Administration, obsessively carrying on the "war against terrorism," has suddenly become enmeshed in still another civil war. That entanglement could last a long time and involve all kinds of consequences.

US role not new

And, don't think the US just suddenly stumbled into the situation. Back in May, *New York Times* correspondent Robert Worth reported that the unrest in the country had "prompted an unusual statement of concern" (unrelated to any threat from Al Qaeda) by the U.S "affirming American support for a unified Yemen and urging all parties to engage in dialogue to identify and address legitimate grievances." That message was delivered in person by General David Petraeus, the US military commander responsible for the Middle East, following which the *Times* noted that the Yemeni regime "is battling separatist movements and is eager to have the use of American technology."

Now the people at the *Times* apparently aren't reading their own back issues and go on blithely reporting as if that history has only just begun and it's pretty much all about Al Qaeda.

"The most recent round of violence began last Tuesday, when government troops established an additional checkpoint in the town of Radfan, in the southern Lahij Province," Worth wrote on 4 May 2009. "Angry local men attacked the checkpoint, killing two soldiers and injuring others. In the days since, demonstrations and violence have broken out in other towns, with three people killed in gun battles on Sunday.

"In recent weeks, a number of political figures have begun openly demanding independence for the formerly socialist south, which was autonomous until the two Yemens unified in 1990. A brief civil war in 1994 left many southerners resentful of the north, and in the past three years grievances have steadily grown. These have been fuelled mostly by economic disparities and the demands of retired southern soldiers who said they had not been paid their pensions."

Like Lebanon

"Yemen has all the explosive ingredients of Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan," Patrick Coburn wrote in the *Independent* (UK) last week. "But the arch-hawk Senator Joe Lieberman, chairman of the Senate Com-

mittee on Homeland Security, was happily confirming this week that the Green Berets and the US Special Forces are already there. He cited with approval an American official in Sana'a as telling him that, "Iraq was yesterday's war. Afghanistan is today's war. If you don't act pre-emptively Yemen will be tomorrow's war. In practice, pre-emptive strikes are likely to bring a US military entanglement in Yemen even closer.

"The US will get entangled because the Yemeni government will want to manipulate US action in its own interests and to preserve its wilting authority,"

Coburn went on: "It has long been trying to portray the Shia rebels in north Yemen as Iranian cats-paws in order to secure American and Saudi support. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) probably only has a few hundred activists in Yemen, but the government of long time Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh will portray his diverse opponents as somehow linked to Al Qaeda.



President Saleh of Yemen

"In Yemen the US will be intervening on one side in a country which is always in danger of sliding into a civil war. This has happened before. In Iraq the US was the supporter of the Shia Arabs and Kurds against the Sunni Arabs. In Afghanistan it is the ally of the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazara against the Pashtun community. Whatever the intentions of Washington, its participation in these civil conflicts destabilises the country because one side becomes labelled as the quisling supporter of a foreign invader. Communal and nationalist antipathies combine to create a lethal blend."

Coburn didn't delve into the long history and US involvement in Yemen and its collusion with Saudi Arabia in trying to shape events in that country.

Cold War

Actually, it's only the latest in the ongoing saga that began during the Cold War. Washington and Riyadh team up to crush any left, secular or socialist movement or government, the Saudis provide the money, the US comes through with arms, military training and logistical support and desperate or religiously driven young men are recruited for what they are told is holy war.

In the late 1980 I was in South Yemen, then known of as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen [previously known as Aden and home of a substantial Jewish community – Ed]. It is stunningly beautiful territory, home of warm and engaging people. The leaders of the young socialist regime faced some of the same problems faced by the leaders in pre-Taliban Afghanistan and committed some similar colossal blunders, including violent inter-

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

necine conflicts that set back the revolution. They were secularists in their orientation and knew well what they were up against. The same forces that gave rise to groups like Al Qaeda actively sought to undermine the PDRY.

In 1990, President Ali Abdullah Saleh presided over the Arab League arranged union of North Yemen and the PDRY. At the time the latter faced a situation similar to that of Cuba following the collapse of the Communist USSR. Saleh "also welcomed tens of thousands of Arab fighters returning from the jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, many of whom had been barred from returning to their home countries," wrote Worth. "Four years later, when a brief civil war broke out, Mr Saleh sent those Islamist warriors to fight against the more secular south."

For the mujahedeen returning from Afghanistan in the early 1990s, the suppression of the godless South Yemen was a logical continuation of their victorious war against the Soviets in the Hindu Kush," wrote Yassin

Musharbash, Volker Windfuhr and Bernhard in *Der Spiegel*). "Even today, Afghanistan veterans have ties that reach as far as President Saleh's innermost circle. Sheik Abdulmajid al-Zindani, known as the 'red sheik,' is a former associate of bin Laden and is one of the most powerful people in Yemen."

At the same time, the Yemeni president angered his US benefactors by refusing to go after, or pardoning, individuals deemed terrorists with whom we had political ties. Like Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, he would resort to charging interference if pressed too hard from Washington.

The Shiite Houthi rebellion in the north of the country grew stronger last year "and reached the margins of the capital," wrote Worth. "Now that policy of divide and rule appears to have run beyond his control. Some current and former government officials say the rebels have struck humiliating blows," he continued. "They have gained support among Yemeni tribes, and have bought weapons from the Yemeni military, which is said to have suffered desertions."

[Abridged from the *Black Commentator* via *Portside*.]

US Jewish community groups support alleged Somali criminal

It seems totally illogical. US Jewish groups are lining up to support a former Somali government official living in the US who is alleged to bear responsibility for atrocities committed during his tenure.

One reason it is strange is that US Jewish organisations had earlier fought to establish the jurisdiction of US courts for suits against terrorist groups. One would expect them to adopt the same principle when it comes to charges relating to human rights abuse by former and present officials of internationally recognised governments. But the Jewish groups have decided to support the alleged abuser because of the precedent it would create against current and former government officials already under legal threats in some places in Europe.

The *Forward's* **Nathan**

Guttman reported on 30 December that the US "Supreme Court will hear oral arguments March 3 in the case of *Yousuf vs Samantar*, in which a group of Somalis is seeking financial damages from Mohamed Ali Samantar, Somalia's former Defence Minister. He also served as Prime Minister from 1987 to 1990. Samantar was a top official in the regime of President Siad Barre, a socialist-leaning dictatorship that was denounced by international groups for its systematic use of torture and arbitrary arrests, and for the rape and murder of political rivals and dissidents. "Among the five Somalis suing Samantar are a student who was allegedly detained and raped 15 times by a military man, a former officer who alleges he survived a mass execution and a businessman who claims he was tortured for months by the regime Samantar helped lead.

Two of the plaintiffs are now American citizens. The case was filed under the Torture Victim Protection Act.

"The Supreme Court will rule on the plaintiffs' right to pursue a civil lawsuit against Samantar. Pro-Israel activists, fearing a precedent that will allow others to pursue legal action against Israel for alleged war crimes — as has happened in Europe — have filed briefs opposing their suit."



Is protecting Israeli leaders worth abandoning cherished principles?

"There will be a rash of lawsuits of this kind against Israel" if the court rules for the plaintiffs, warned Alyza Lewin, a lawyer with the firm of Lewin & Lewin, which has filed a friend-of-the-court brief in favor of Samantar and against making foreign officials vulnerable to civil lawsuits. The brief was filed on behalf of four Jewish groups: the Zionist Organization of America, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, Agudath Israel of America, and the American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists. The ZOA and the Union of Orthodox Jewish congregations at least are known for their hard-line pro-Occupation policies.

Guttman noted that it is an unusual setting, "one in which pro-Israel activists are siding with the Saudi government — which has also filed a brief on behalf of Samantar — while pitting themselves against international human-rights advocates. Furthermore, this battle also puts the Jewish community on the side of those seeking to limit international jurisdiction after years of fighting to broaden the ability to sue foreign entities in order to go after terror groups and their sponsoring states."

In this issue...

After a long break the issues to be covered, if not the articles to be published, choose themselves. We had a particular interest in Naomi Chazan, who was scheduled to address meetings in both Melbourne and Sydney this month. She was guest speaker in our very successful 2004 Annual Dinner. We had reprinted some of her articles. We have carried items about the New Israel Fund that she heads. So when the NIF was being attacked we sensed trouble, and indeed her tour was cancelled. There is ample material defending the NIF but in the Australian context no one provided as strong a counter argument as **Nathan Cherny**, another person whose work we admire and whose occasional letters to friends we have more than once reprinted in the Newsletter. Cherny puts such a strong case that even though many of you would have seen this already we decided to make sure that none of our members missed it. If you haven't read it, you'll find it on the **cover**.

The NIF saga is of course related to the Goldstone report and while again readers are likely to have seen plenty of material both for and against (although more likely the other way around) "**Jerry Haber**" provides an unusual Israeli point of view which you can read on **page 7**. Also related is the Gaza Freedom March. You can read **Vivienne Porzolt's** participant's account on **page 6**.

Another participant's account is 50 years old. When we asked **Joan Nestle** to compare civil rights struggles in the US in 1960 and in Israel in 2010, we did not realise that her account will come from first-hand experience. Her fascinating story is featured on **page 11**.

As much as your editor would love to cover other issues, the Israel/Palestine conflict casts its shadow upon other articles as well. There is **Shamai Leibowitz's** plea for alternatives to boycott (BDS) strategy adopted by so many Palestinians and their supporters (**p12**); **Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's** critique of the way Anthony Julius' new book conflates opposition to Israel's behaviour with antisemitism (**p14**); Jewish community organisation support for an alleged Somali violator of human rights (**p9**) and even **Daniel Bensaid's** obituary (**p15**) touches upon the subject.

Still we managed to cover other topics: **David Spratt** and **Damien Lawson** (**p5**) counter the Murdoch media take on "Glaciergate"; **Linda Briskman** reviews Halina Wagowska's (Strnad) new book while on **page 13 Dan Rabinovici** sums up the life of US historian and political analyst Howard Zinn who died last month. We manage a brief comment on **Avatar** (**p5**), and of course there is a major feature trying to make sense of the war in **Yemen** on **pp8-9**.

I left the most important part of the Newsletter to last: coverage of our own AGM. As well as a summary of what actually transpired (**p3**) we provide our members with a longer account of the **Newsletter report** (**p3**) given to the meeting. Future editions will carry some of the other reports that members heard. To round out the AGM's coverage we have on **page 4 Carolyn Whitzman's** more personal impressions as the newest and youngest person there.

Sol Salbe

We must keep our counsel over Iran for now

Towards the end of last year, Iran was shaken by a new series of opposition demonstrations. The context of Iran's real or putative nuclear weapons program makes it important for the West to act from the brain and not from the gut. The editors of the UK Independent opined:

Spilled blood is a powerful and energising symbol in any country. It is especially so in Iran, where there are strong memories of the police shootings that became the catalyst for the final push to overthrow the Shah.

The government knows this all too well – hence its relative restraint in using force to contain the protesters until now. The arrest yesterday of several aides to the opposition leader Mirhossein Mousavi – whose nephew was among those shot dead – may mark the beginning of a much tougher course in coming days. If the gloves come off, things could turn bloody indeed, for one factor that has really emerged in recent days is the mutual hatred that now exists between the regime and its disparate foes.

For us, standing on the outside and looking in, there are feelings of anguish and helplessness. The sympathies of almost all of us lie with those who, to borrow from the events of the 1960s in Czechoslovakia, would like to see a "Tehran spring"; an Islamic regime, perhaps, but with a more human face.

President Ahmadinejad, meanwhile, has forfeited his claims to legitimacy as head of state, having benefited

from what everyone suspects was a falsified election result in June.

Now he clings on to his high office, decked out in the rags of ultra-nationalism and irresponsibly courting collision with the US and Israel with belligerent grandstanding over nuclear power and even more belligerent rhetoric about annihilating Israel. Posing as the great patriot, his claim to be defending his embattled country against a coalition of Zionists and imperialists is his only remaining card.

We must bear that in mind when considering what our own governments should do in response to what may be a protracted, possibly agonising, struggle between Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on one hand, and the alliance of clerical reformers and more secular-minded liberals on the other.

We must recognise that there is nothing anyone outside Iran can actually do physically in this situation to assist the opposition. This isn't Kosovo, a postage-stamp-sized land in Europe's own backyard that NATO can handle with a little air power.

All we can do, in fact, is talk; that is, offer verbal support to those who, whatever their agendas, seem a lot more democratically minded than their opponents. Even in the realm of talk, however, we must be careful not to provide President Ahmadinejad with a pretext for claiming that Western powers are trying to meddle in Iran's internal affairs. For now, silence may be the best course.

Fighting for civil rights then and now

Joan Nestle

Fifty years ago this February, in a Greensboro, North Carolina, five-and-dime store, the daily expected acts of denial and humiliation based on race were challenged. Four black college students, Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr and David Richmond, sat down at their local Woolworth's segregated lunch counter and quietly asked for service. "The best feeling of my life," McCain said, was "sitting on that dumb stool." Their carefully planned act of civil disobedience launched the American civil rights movement; within a week 1000 protestors jammed the aisles of the store and by March, sit-ins had spread to 55 cities in 13 states. In April of 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee became the leading organiser of popular resistance. All over the South and into the large cities of the North, everyday people took on the tyrannies of local custom. In six months, black and white Americans were eating their hamburgers together in Greensboro. As Andrew B. Lewis put it in the 31 January Los Angeles Times, "what may seem like a small moment turned into the largest black protest against segregation ever; it was the largest outburst of civil disobedience in American history."

I was one of the students who participated in that moment of history, joining freedom rides to segregated Baltimore and picketing outside Woolworth's segregated lunch counter in Flushing, Queens, New York, while our black comrades were refused service and waited for the arrival of the police. And the change of history. Those fifty years still loom over my life—the power of collective resistance that I witnessed in the back roads of Alabama, in Brown's Chapel in Selma, in Mississippi and in Georgia, the hands I held of tired but persistent farm workers, following in the footsteps of their sons and daughters, marching over the Petty Bridge, taking on the full force of an enraged police mob, marching for three days behind the broad back of

Martin Luther King, all the way to the state capitol, Montgomery, still flying its Confederate flag. Now the International Civil Rights Center and Museum lives in that very same Woolworth building and the original lunch counter sits there, waiting for visitors to sit at its counter and see themselves reflected in the mirrors of history.

But now I read that that the refusal to accept segregation based on local custom is still very much alive, this time in Israel. In a recent Forward editorial, our attention is called to the efforts of women like Naomi



Women hidden in a segregated bus

Ragen, an Orthodox and other wise very rightwing Jew, who is protesting against gender based discrimination on a growing number of public buses where women are expected to give up their seats to men, in the name of growing Jewish fundamentalism. "For the operator of a public bus to suggest that women sit in the back is akin to the person behind the luncheonette counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, declining to serve the four black students who arrived there fifty years ago and tried to order some food. There is nothing voluntary about segregation..." Well said. Here is the living force of social action metaphor; one generation's courage, one site of national decency can spread its wings over borders and decades.

Doctors call for inquiry into Australia's part in Iraq War

The Medical Association for Prevention of War has supported calls for an independent inquiry into Australia's involvement in the Iraq War.

MAPW President, Dr Bill Williams said: "It's time to quiz the men and women who sent Australians to war in Iraq: let us scrutinise their reasons: Were they valid? Was our intelligence accurate? Was our participation legal? Can we protect our national interests more effectively?"

"If the Dutch, the British and the American public can scrutinise their leaders' path to war, why can't we? We owe it to our soldiers and their families -- and ourselves." A recent Age editorial and a major piece in the Canberra Times have argued for an Australian inquiry, in discussing the UK's Chilcot inquiry which aims to obtain "a reliable account of the UK's involvement", and lessons for the future.

"The invasion of Iraq was opposed by the parliamentary Opposition and by the majority of ordinary Australians [and by the AJDS, which alongside MAPW, was one of the first organisations to form the Victorian Peace Network.]. As predicted by our organisation and many others, it was a humanitarian disaster with many negative long-

term regional and international legacies. A formal commission of inquiry could help us avoid unnecessary, destructive and counter-productive military engagements in the future," said Dr Williams.

An inquiry could inform Australia of the following:

How and on what basis, the decision to join the invasion was made,

Has Australia's participation broken Australian or international law, or breached our treaty obligations?

Are individuals, including the former Prime Minister, John Howard, legally culpable?

How can such decisions be prevented, and democracy and transparency guaranteed, for the future?

What have been the implications of our participation?

Testimony to the Chilcot inquiry indicates that democratic processes were distorted and citizens and Parliament misinformed by UK leaders in their determination to participate in the invasion and occupation.

Calls for an inquiry coincide with a Bill before Australia's Parliament, which would require the consent of Parliament before troops are committed to a war. This is a constitutional requirement in many countries.

Yes to cooperation...no to boycotts

Shamai Leibowitz

[Since this was written in mid-2006, BDS has become much better known, but the debate is still the same. The author's credentials as a supporter of Palestinian human rights are beyond reproach. While we are unaware of his current position, this is a useful contribution to the ongoing discussion on the subject. At the AJDS AGM it was decided to set up a special meeting to discuss an official AJDS position on the subject – Ed.]

Even the most ardent fans of acronyms will not recognise this one -- BDS. That is, unless they are involved with peace movements concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

BDS means Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions. It has recently become a popular acronym in many organisations sincerely concerned about ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What is urgently needed to bring peace, these movements argue, is BDS. Against Israel, of course, until it ends the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Question of efficacy

While at one time I thought there was some efficacy in BDS as a means of nudging the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the processing of peace, I now see that BDS is not the magic bullet people hoped it would be. There are a number of reasons why I have changed my views.

When dealing with this issue it must be conceded at the outset that the organisations adopting BDS strategies honestly believe that imposing economic pressure on Israel, or on industrial corporations whose sale of weapons and equipment to Israel supports the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, is a productive step towards ending the bloody conflict.

Take for, example, the Presbyterians' divestment initiative, which is being discussed this week in the Presbyterians' 217th General Assembly Conference in Birmingham, Alabama. The Presbyterian Church leaders will deliberate on whether to implement some form of selective divestment -- ie the withdrawal of their investments -- from "corporations whose practices support the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories or facilitate violent acts against innocent civilians by Israelis or Palestinians".

Nothing in the language of the resolution suggests they are attacking Israel per se, or singling out Israeli human rights abuses. Indeed, the resolution condemns in no uncertain terms acts of violence against civilians, whether committed by Palestinians or the Israeli army. Thus, many of the accusations hurled at BDS organisations -- such as "antisemitic" or "anti-Israel" -- are baseless and unfounded.

But as a Jew committed to peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians, I believe that BDS strategy is a grave mistake.

- First, as Israelis, we can be proud of our country's many accomplishments. Many institutions in Israel are devoted to freedom, prosperity and peace. Large-scale disinvesting from Israel could undermine what we have achieved in spheres such as universities, hospitals and industries.
- Second, while there is much to improve and correct in Israeli society, the idea of economic punishment of a

whole society because of actions of members of that society is neither justified philosophically nor feasible practically.

Having discussed these issues with policy-makers in Washington DC, it is clear to me that Israel's strong and vibrant economy will never be seriously affected by boycotts of civil-society groups. Regardless of how many interest groups join this campaign, it will not affect political change because the US government will continue to provide Israel with \$2.5 billion in annual aid.

Closing of the ranks

Rather than affect political change, it is more likely the BDS campaign will alienate world Jewry, triggering a closing of the ranks and preventing any significant change.

Perhaps the most challenging stumbling block to peace in Israel/Palestine is the prevailing mentality in Israel that Palestinians belong to a violent and primitive culture. The effects of this mentality -- which permeate the educational system and media establishment -- are paralysing because it prevents mutual trust and confidence-building between Israelis and Palestinians.

Instead of boycotting and sanctioning Israel, peace-oriented groups should invest in creative ways to build bridges of confidence and trust that will eventually mature into legally-binding agreements.

Non-violent efforts

BDS organisations and their members would do well to focus their energies on increasing awareness of Palestinian and Israeli non-violent, civilian-led efforts to build a base for peace in the Middle East. There are dozens of such joint confidence-building groups, such as the inspiring example of the recently-formed Combatants for Peace organisation (combatantsforpeace.org), a group of Israeli and Palestinian former fighters who are now cooperating and committing themselves to ending all forms of violence and terminating the occupation.

The struggle for peace will be won through education and cooperation, not via boycotts and sanctions. Rather than implement the failed BDS strategy, fair-minded Americans could affect positive and lasting change by investing in opportunities for Israeli and Palestinian civilians at all levels of society to cooperate with each other in business, social and educational initiatives, in schools, universities, businesses, synagogues, mosques -- thereby breaking the isolation of the two societies and laying the groundwork for a network for peace.

BDS can actually be a wonderful idea, provided the BDS of Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions changes to the BDS of Bilateral Doubling of Support for joint peace-oriented groups.

The writer is one of Israel's better known human rights lawyers. He has represented drivers, foreign workers, asylum seekers and Palestinians before the Israeli Supreme Court.



Shamai Leibowitz

A historian of the people

Dan Rabinovici

Howard Zinn, historian, teacher and political activist, iconic figure of the American Left, passed away on 27 January, aged 87 years.

Born in New York in 1922 to poor Jewish immigrant parents, Zinn joined the US Air Force in 1943 out of a sense of duty. It was the anti-Fascist struggle, which Zinn considered a noble crusade against racism, militarism, fanatical nationalism and imperialism, that revealed to him the horror and futility of war. He became convinced that warfare is morally damaging to noble causes. Pacifism, resistance and civil disobedience were to become not only the central themes of his historical works, but equally his main political practice tools.

He married Roslyn Rabinowitz in 1944. They raised two children and were inseparable until her death in 2008.

After the War, Zinn worked as a fitter at a naval building site. At age 27 he entered the university world by taking advantage of the GI Bill and obtained his doctorate at Columbia University. Zinn started teaching in the Department of History and Social Sciences at Spelman College in Atlanta, a black women's college, where he encouraged students to fight against racial segregation. In 1964 he joined Boston University, teaching political science until his retirement in 1988. Zinn's brand of politics led to a long-lasting conflict with the university administration.

His view of history broke with the American academic mainstream. By 1980, when Zinn's magnum opus *A People's History of the United States* was published, little history had been written from the perspective of the downtrodden. With an initial modest print of 5000 copies, the book was written from a novel ideological angle -- of the oppressed and the ignored: the Blacks, the American Indians, the poor, the unemployed, the women. It was nourished by a mixture of Marxism, Anarchism, Social Democracy and Egalitarianism. Zinn's *People's History* was not meant to be measured, detached and objective, but a partisan and engaged work, written deliberately as a counterbalance to the prevalent historical writings focused on the political and economic elites. In other words, a history written for the rulers' victims. To date the book has sold over two million copies.

Zinn was also a much loved teacher. His teaching was infused with the need to move beyond offering students exclusively an objective and disinterested historical knowledge. He strived to pass onto students the urge to learn to speak up and act against injustice. It was in the classroom that his political engagement was an inspiration to many students. The novelist Alice Walker said she never had a better teacher than Zinn.

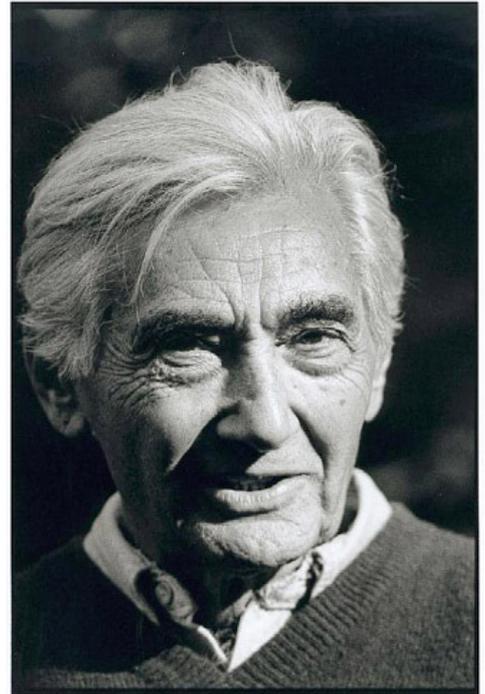
He was a strong opponent of the Vietnam War and of subsequent US military engagements. *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, published in 1967, was one of the first books to critically examine the US involvement in Indochina.

At the time, Zinn was sceptical about the creation of the State of Israel, sharing the apprehensions of Albert Ein-

stein and Martin Buber about the consequences of creating a Jewish state. Judaism will be damaged, Zinn opined, as a result of Israel's existence. He condemned the dispossession of the Arab majority in Palestine during the 1947-48 war. Later, Zinn opposed Israel's occupation of the territories conquered in 1967, and the disproportionate use of violence by the Israeli Army as a means of perpetuating the occupation. He consistently condemned Israeli militarism and expansionism. In 2009 Zinn supported the divestment campaign against US-based companies involved in promoting Israeli injustice against Palestinians.

The Iraq war drew his wrath too. Zinn's articles and interviews argued that the removal from power of Saddam Hussein did not mean the liberation of Iraq, but an abject and unjustifiable occupation of that country by the USA.

He was equally critical of the so-called War on Terror. Zinn saw it not only as a war against innocent people in a



Howard Zinn

foreign country, but also as a war against the people of the United States, against basic liberties and the country's youth. During 2009 Zinn became more and more sceptical of President Obama. He commented that many were simply dazzled by Obama's rhetoric. People ought to begin to understand that Obama is going to be a mediocre and dangerous president, unless a national movement pushed him in another direction.

Was Zinn a fringe activist, a radical historian? *The New York Times* obituary claims Zinn was hardly a radical. Because what is so radical about believing that workers should be treated fairly, that corporations have too much power and influence on government, that alternatives to warfare should be found, that ethnic and racial minorities should have the same rights as whites, and that the interests of political leaders and powerful elites do not coincide with those of ordinary people? This is not contemptuous nihilism as his critics contend, but the outlook of a decent citizen.

He will be remembered for his tireless political activism, revolutionary history writing and engaged teaching.

Howard Zinn was a great American. His voice reminds us of the necessity for a vigorous Left politics.

Still no hope of commonsense in the war against antisemitism

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

One would not choose to roll around naked in a field of nettles. One learns that choosing to write on antisemitism is just as rash, possibly more so. Protesters and malicious maligners stalk anyone who ventures on to the subject. And for the only Muslim weekly columnist in the country (who knows for how long) to tread into that field is extreme recklessness. Or reveals a worrying proclivity for masochism. Stinging rebukes will arrive before I am awake and all manner of outrageous allegations will roam the streets of the Internet, rogue rumours against which there is no defence. Every word typed can be distorted or has the potential to offend. The column will madden both hyper-Zionists and insufferable Islamicists. So divisive is the issue today that many who see themselves as "reasonable" Muslims and Jews may not be too happy either. Ah well, so be it. No more procrastination. Unto the breach, dear friends.

The lofty, intellectual lawyer Anthony Julius, whose most famous client was Diana, Princess of Wales, has written *Trials of the Diaspora*, an erudite history of antisemitism in Britain. He convincingly exposes the "polite", almost naturalised anti-Jewish attitudes still rife among genteel



Anthony Julius

folk of this country. When Diana chose him as her divorce lawyer, to the [UK] *Daily Telegraph* Julius was a clever Jew who was unlikely to understand the "English" idea of fair play. The paper was obliged to publish a grovelling apology. George Orwell wrote a stirring essay in 1945 on this English prejudice. Julius describes a train journey when he was a young boy. An Englishman who did business with his father praised the excellent manners of a young Jewish girl who knew his daughter, as if such good manners were remarkable and unexpected. Orwell describes such moments too and asks: "Was it a conscious effort to behave decently by people whose subjective feelings in many cases must have been very different?"

This month we had a report published by the Community Security Trust, a Jewish organisation that monitors hate crimes against British Jews. In 2009, there were 598 incidents and attacks, 56 per cent more than in 2006, another bad year. I believe both Julius and the CST. Wagner said: "I hold the Jewish race to be the born enemy of pure humanity and everything noble in it."

In a coffee shop before Christmas, I overheard a group of yummy mummies of all races going on about Bernie Madoff and how "these people" got the world into the mess it

is in. It really is all around us. Just look up the Jew-haters on the Internet, the neo-Nazis and Islamicists and the bloggers who say antisemitism is exaggerated. Across Europe, even in Sweden, Jewish citizens say hatred against them is in the air once more.

More wounding than racism itself is the denial of it, the invalidation of lived and felt experience. Racist statements and judgements are today defended with unprecedented ardour and conviction. Black and Asian people are instructed to learn toleration, to understand banter and brave free expression, to stop inventing pain and to end their wretched PC whinges. Muslims too are suspected of making up stories, imagining humiliation and "using" discrimination for unholy purposes. Ironically, Julius rejects the claim that Muslims are facing increasing hostility in Britain. I know Muslim activists who say exactly the same about the rise in antisemitism.

We should trust witness and victim testimonies of bigotry. But we can't and shouldn't become credulous. Unquestioning accommodation would be naïve. Accusations of racism are used by all vulnerable groups to deflect legitimate concerns about, say, female genital mutilation, or forced marriages, or the too many young black men sunk into drug addiction and violence, or the lack of real democracy in the Muslim world.

Julius plays that game, dextrously extending the accusation of antisemitism to implicate principled critics of the Israeli state. Jewish objectors, like the esteemed American Tony Judt, are also cut down with a poisoned blade. Richard Goldstone, the South African Zionist, has found himself similarly discredited by Zionists for writing a scathing UN assessment of the Israeli assault on Gaza. Similar treatment is meted out to others who try to remain scrupulously fair yet tough when scrutinising the government of Israel.

These defenders to the end of all Israeli actions knowingly mix politics and race. Their enemies do the same: when Lebanon was attacked, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said: "This is a war that is fought by all the Jews." It wasn't. To say so is iniquitous, just as bad as the Jihadis who claim all of us Muslims are on their side or must be. The much admired writer Anne Karpf points this out in a beautifully articulated column: "If the Israeli government (wrongly) elides Israel with all Jews, it is hardly surprising if antisemites do so too."

By reproducing this conflation in his book, the eloquent Anthony Julius undercuts his powerful case that antisemitism, a very light sleeper, is up again. Doubters have been given a reason to repudiate him. Oh, the pity of it all.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown is a columnist for the UK *Independent*, where this article was first published.



Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

Vale Daniel Bensaid

The student uprisings of the late 'sixties were noted for their Jewish leadership. Nowhere was this more evident than in France. Many of the 22 March movement leaders like Daniel Cohn-Bendit were Jewish. There was even a joke going around at the time: "Why don't they speak Yiddish at meetings of the Revolutionary Communist Youth [Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (JCR)?]," a reference to a Trotskyist organisation that played a key role in the uprising. The answer: "So that Bensaid can understand." It's not that Daniel Bensaid wasn't Jewish, he just happened to be of North African origin. It was true: 11 out of 12 members of the Central Committee were Jewish.

Those leaders whether Jewish or not, later went on their merry ways. Now, nearly 42 years later, they can be found across the political spectrum; one is even a *chozer b'tshuva* in a Jerusalem Yeshiva.

But Daniel Bensaid, who died on 12 January, stuck to his course, ending up as one of the best-known non-dogmatic Marxist philosophers of our time. He was France's leading Marxist public intellectual, much in demand on talk shows and writing essays and reviews in *Le Monde* and *Libération*.

Bensaid was the kind of person who was comfortable holding an audience of 10,000 spellbound while producing his extensive literary output. He wrote a fair number of books on various aspects of Marxism and philosophy generally. One of his favourite subjects was the Jewish question. Naturally he was anti-Zionist and critical of Israel, but he was long way from holding the axiomatic view Israel = bad, preferring to concentrate on analysing and

explaining rather than condemning and denouncing. Tariq Ali noted in the *Guardian* that Bensaid "disliked identity



Daniel Bensaid

politics and his last two books – *Fragments Mécréants* (*An Unbeliever's Discourse*, 2005) and *Eloge de la Politique Profane* (*In Praise of Secular Politics*, 2008) – explained how this had become a substitute for serious critical thought."

Sol Salbe

Halina's story

Reviewed by Linda Briskman

Holocaust stories continue to shake us from our complacency by revealing the thin ice we tread in nations we call civilised. Accounts of the terrible scars of this evil period in human history are now commonplace, with the most potent being the narratives that derive from personal experience. These stories are even more poignant when an author is known to us.

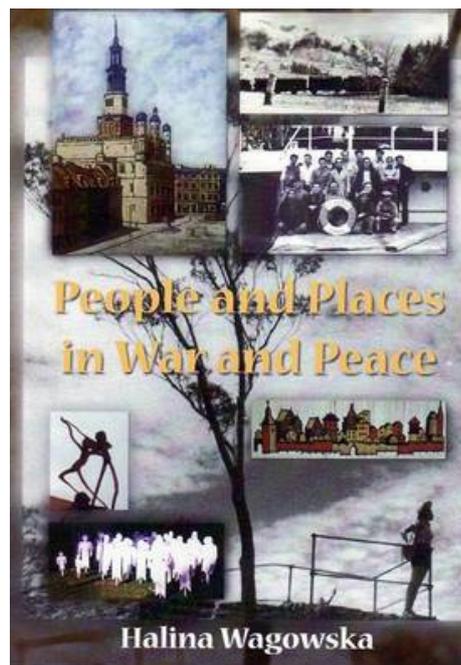
A member of the AJDS has written her story. Published by Makor Jewish Community Library, Halina Wagowska's *People and Places in War and Peace* was recently released and this compact book traces her life from childhood to the present. The chilling accounts of the Polish Ghetto and the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp raise questions of the resilience of the human spirit through the compassion and activism that followed Halina (who is better known to most of us as Strnad) to her new life in Australia.

The book lives up to the promise of the preface to pay homage to remarkable people, and she lavishes warmth on many who have been part of her life including her parents, the housekeeper of her childhood and her friend Frieda in the camp, who discussed with her how humanity would view the events they witnessed. A very moving chapter tells of the rescuer Sasha, who still remains in her heart.

Once in Australia, the stories of Halina's life are fascinat-

ing and also filled with humour and light. We gain insight into her doggedness as she makes her way in the workforce beginning with menial tasks and sometimes fraught working environments. Part of the book is a digression into her overseas travels to the USSR in 1987, which was clearly a meaningful experience in her life.

Despite the extreme harshness of her early life that most of us can barely imagine, the book is without malice and highlights Halina's zest for living, her compassion and her quest for a just world. In her preface, she acknowledges, among others, the support of our very own the late Renate Kamener in the book project.



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