

# Australian Jewish Democratic Society Inc.

A Jewish Voice among Progressives  
A Progressive Voice among Jews



PO Box 685  
Kew Victoria 3101  
info@ajds.org.au

(Affiliated with the Jewish Community Council of Victoria)

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## Israel's future – a fork in the road

*The recent wave of interest generated by the Independent Australian Jewish Voices petition provided us with many lessons. In due course the AJDS, like others both on the Left and within the wider Jewish community, will, no doubt, dissect them thoroughly. But in the meantime we can focus on one of the few areas of agreement. People in the Jewish community really do care about Israel and its people. Each community member may have a different take, a different angle and most certainly different conclusions, but the motivation seems to be in common.*

*Moreover there is an enhanced interest in Israel at the moment, and it is not confined to this country. Britain, continental Europe, the United States and other places have all seen a flowering of debate and discussion.*

*The discourse is not taking place in a vacuum. The debacle of the Iraq war (and its little sister known as the second Lebanon war) has resulted in a flurry of diplomatic activities. After five years, the Arab states have again affirmed the Saudi peace proposal of 2002: not merely a cold peace, but normalisation of relations with Israel in return for total Israeli withdrawal from the areas it occupied in 1967 and a mutually agreed upon solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. The ball is now firmly in Israel's court. And it is Israel's hesitant-to-hostile response which has fuelled the enhanced level of activity of members of the Jewish Diaspora of all hues and shades.*

*The editors of the New York Forward – described by Dan Goldberg as one of the top five Jewish newspapers in the world -- have been unequivocal: they think the risks are worth taking. They point out, however, that the weakness of the Olmert government will make acceptance difficult.*

*"Israel faces its own minefields. The government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was elected on a promise to seek a settlement, and public opinion favours a deal. It's not clear, though, that Israelis are prepared for the magnitude of the sacrifice that will be demanded of them. Reaching a deal will require leadership and courage, and both of those commodities are in short supply in Jerusalem right now. Olmert's political career hangs by a dozen fraying threads, and his main challenges come from the Right."*

*Israel's government did not show enthusiasm for the*

*fact that Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas was one of those attending the Riyadh conference. It did not even acknowledge the hard-line Hamas leader Khaled Meshal when he made it explicit that Hamas will not break the Arab consensus. Understandably Haaretz's Zvi Bar'el was thus more critical of Israel's attitude, which is to maintain sanctions on Hamas and ignore its more flexible stance.*

*"Unlike other sanction regimes, Israel is setting conditions but does not offer any reward for compliance. Thus even if Haniyeh were to cover his head with a kippa, and Khaled Meshal were to hum Hatikva – not to mention if Abbas were to decree the compulsory teaching of the heroic saga of Masada in Palestinian schools, Israel would still be unwilling and incapable of offering an alternative. Such an alternative would inevitably lead to the creation of an independent democratic Palestinian state. It is unwilling because any such offer would mean a withdrawal from most of the Territories and the dismantling of the majority of settlements..."*

*Supporting a two-state solution has become a motherhood statement. With the exception of the religious and far Right, everyone supports it. But there is a great deal of difference between those committed to such a solution like Ron Pundak of the Peres Centre for Peace, and those like the leadership of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, who only pay lip service to it.*

*Offering the Palestinians a Swiss cheese state criss-crossed by Israeli settlements, with Israel taking a disproportionate amount of the good land (not to mention the even scarcer water) is unjust. There are those who think that even though the number of Israelis and Palestinians is similar, 78 per cent of the land is not enough. Perhaps they ought be reminded of the prophet Nathan's tale of the poor man's sheep.*

*But it is not merely a question of morality. No Palestinian leader could accept anything less than the Green Line as a basis for negotiations and a land swap. Those in our community who argue otherwise may be able to adorn themselves with the two-state label, but they are working for the very opposite.*

**Sol Salbe**

## In this issue...

A two-monthly issue, necessitated by my absence from Melbourne due to my mother's death, is in some respects easier to produce. Twice as much material accumulates. The trouble is that there are just too many articles which select themselves. Choosing them is more difficult, but we have managed to bring out a rounded issue with quite a lot of interesting and hard-to-come-by material. Unfortunately, most of the innovations proposed by the newly invigorated Editorial Committee have been postponed as a consequence of the above.

It was not quite a tsunami, but there was certainly a wave of interest generated by the Independent Australian Jewish Voices petition. We could have easily filled the great bulk of this Newsletter with that issue alone. On **Page 3** you can read the **AJDS perspective** on the one aspect that we consider crucial – the use of vilification as a substitute for debate. No doubt we will read and hear more about it; which is a good segue to remind you that we are interested in **your** views. If you are unhappy with something in the Newsletter or any actions of the AJDS, let the rest of the membership find out. For a totally different perspective of the way dissident Muslims can take heed of the British IJV experience, I recommend the incomparable **Yasmin Alibhai-Brown** on **Page 11**.

As the **front page** item suggests, the IAJV kerfuffle did not take place in a vacuum. The shadow of war and the Arab/Saudi peace proposal are in the forefront of world politics. Again it would be a comparatively easy task filling this Newsletter with material listing Israel's wrongdoings – there is so much of it around. That, however, would go against the grain of what I think we

ought to be doing and saying. One must put it all in perspective. One of the areas of concern is the increased racism against Israel's own Palestinian Arab citizens, who have decided to issue an alternative constitution. Jeremy Kenner, one of the Editorial Committee's newer members, looks at the pros and cons of that proposal on **pages 6-7**. Also included in our Israel coverage is **Gershon Baskin's** plea to accept the Arab peace proposals on **page 5** and former Jerusalem Deputy Mayor **Meron Benvenisti's** lesson for the doomsayers from Ireland on **page 12**.

Our own organisation's activities are highlighted **below**. There is also a summary of Linda Briskman's informative talk at our AGM on **page 4**. And of course, we do miss **Henry Zimmerman**. As a tribute, we are running some of his more memorable contributions as a retrospective. While his contributions go back over two decades, we are starting with his very first "And another thing" column on **page 7**.

Again, our new year's resolution to include more reviews and culture items is being fulfilled. If, like me, you have never heard of the fascinating Mai Ghous-soub, then make a beeline for her obituary on **page 10**. **Les Rosenblatt** reviews Shlomo Ben-Ami's account of the peace process on **page 9**.

Easter is not our holiday, although it sometimes feels like it. Why don't you take a break, read a good book and then review it for the Newsletter? We have a long list of suggestions – we may even lend you a book! Whatever you are doing, enjoy the rest of Pesach.

**Sol Salbe**

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## The AJDS month

The most important outcome of February's AGM has been the setting up of the new sub-committees. The Editorial Committee has been revamped, with plenty of new blood. The Events Committee is the next to get off the ground. If you are interested in joining that group contact Tom Wolkenberg on 9885 6260 or use the email address at the back. We have some great events to organise, including an all-day seminar on Israel and Apartheid. It is envisaged that the first session will cover the similarities and differences between the South African and Israel/Palestinian situation, while the second session will deal with the lessons to be drawn from the reconciliation process in South Africa.

It is also only two months to June when the Occupation will be forty years old. While no specifics have been finalised, the Executive has made a firm decision to commemorate the occasion appropriately.

A lucky break that we have at the moment is another visit by Zvi Solow, a founder of Hashomer Hatzair in Australia, who made Aliya in 1958. He is one of the most informed people that we have ever had the pleasure of listening to. The peace process is a particular area of interest of his, and no doubt the Events Committee will organise opportunity for all of us to get an update.

**Renate Kamener** reports on one recent activity:

Julius Roe, national president of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, was the main speaker at our most recent forum. He presented a clear and concise history of the trade union movement in Australia, from its beginnings to the present. However, the present is a very bleak place, he said. He outlined the problems caused by the Australian Workplace Agreements and WorkChoices -- the punitive legislation which imposes heavy fines on workers for minor breaches of their contracts (eg the fines imposed on a group of workers in WA who were five minutes late after the lunch break because they had been collecting funds for a co-worker's funeral).

There is an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, which has changed the nature of the workplace. Workers are penalised for attending meetings, and currently the union prefers to hold small, private meetings in people's houses, rather than large meetings at work or elsewhere. The workforce may seem to be quiescent, but there are rumblings below the surface which can only be addressed by a change of government. This is something we can all work towards.

We hope to publish an article by Julius Roe based upon his talk in a coming *Newsletter*.

## VILIFICATION AND HATRED

Groups of Jews in the UK and Australia have recently issued statements calling for more open discussion about issues involving Israel, the Palestinians and the Middle East.

It seems to me that what they are calling for is discussion, without the abuse that seems to permeate the discourse between Jews who don't agree with one another.

The AJDS agrees with their claim that uncritical support for Israel, as reflected in the public statements of the community leadership, does not reflect the diversity of views in our community. We believe this works against the interests of the community both internally and externally.

While there is an arguable case that one-sided statements from our leaders weaken the credibility of the Jewish community, the comments here focus on the damage being done within our community by demonising those who dissent from the mainstream.

Let's start with the end point. The use of abusive language by leaders in our community leads to emails like this one, which came from an on-line Jewish discussion group:

"They are committing a crime that is worse than that of the kapos. The kapos admitted their Jewishness but chose to help murder their fellow Jews in order that they might have some chance of survival themselves. This scum hide behind their Jewishness to give credence to modern day Nazism in the guise of Islamofascism."

Comments like these used to be the province of anonymous emails or abusive phone calls, but nowadays people feel less constrained.

And it's hardly surprising, given that our leaders label dissenters in the Jewish community with descriptions and labels such as: Disloyal; Traitor; Self-hating Jews; Destructive; Anti-Israel; Encouragers of antisemitism; New antisemites; Enemies of Israel; Jews for genocide; Appeasers; Apologists for terrorists; Aiding Israel's enemies; Putting the community in danger.

It seems that the perception among leaders in the Jewish community is that most people who criticise Israel believe it should not exist. The truth is that very few critics of Israel believe that sort of nonsense. But shades of grey don't serve these sorts of political arguments very well. They don't fall neatly into the "you're either with us, or against us" mindset.

For example, the IAJV statement says "we believe that Israel's right to exist must be recognised..."

But Colin Rubenstein is quoted in the *AJN* describing the new group as "destructive", and said it would help Israel's enemies. He said their statement is a publicity stunt by a small number of Jewish-born individuals who have adopted the belief that "alone among the world's nations, Israel has no right to exist". This analysis flies in the face of the signed IAJV statement, but completely fits into my argument that distortion and demonisation are seen as valid tactics in countering criticism of Israel.

Rubinstein's use of the term "Jewish-born" is quite extraordinary. It carries both a denial of their origin and denigration of their origin at the same time. In any other context, we'd call the ADC.

Have we become so arrogant that we no longer need to listen to a diversity of views? Are we so certain of the right way forward that we believe that those people who have a different perspective must be dissenting out of sheer spite?

The 9 February *AJN* editorial was titled "The right to dissent" and seemingly defended it, until about halfway through, when it decided that in reality dissent was being used as a smokescreen for those who oppose Israel's existence:

"But we draw the line at anti-Zionism, which -- though they typically obscure it -- many of the signatories of the British petition adhere to". Even though the statement by the British group is not anti-Israel, the *AJN* editorial turned the issue of dissent into an issue of anti-Zionism and then endorsed abusive terms such as "disloyal" or "self-hating Jews".

The *AJN* can claim "plausible deniability", but the subliminal message is there. The dog whistle screams its high pitched message that critics of Israel are anti-Israel, and as such can be labelled with terms of abuse. No wonder vilification and hatred permeate the debate.

We don't have to go far back in history to know about the spread of hatred. Yitzhak Rabin was murdered in a political climate in which expressions of hatred were widespread -- so widespread that it became possible for Yigal Amir to be convinced that words of hate needed to be turned into action.

We still need to defend Israel against unfair and unjust criticism and we still need to do so passionately and strongly, but we need to guard our speech. And guarding our speech doesn't curtail our right to speak, any more than speed limits on our roads curtail our ability to travel.

Unless, of course, you believe that expressing hatred is the only way to argue against those with whom you disagree.

And it would help if leaders in our community accepted that the way they argue serves as an example to the rest of the community. It would help if they acknowledged that vilification and expression of hatred work against the interests and harmony of our community, and ought to play no part in our discussions and debates.

**[Edited copy of Harold Zwier's address to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, 6 March meeting.]**

### ***Newsletter schedule***

Unavoidable personal circumstances meant that it was impossible to bring out a March Newsletter. We intend to make it up by producing a special issue devoted to the Apartheid debate. In the meantime the best way to keep up with the AJDS and its activities is by ensuring that we have your current email address.

# THE PEOPLE'S INQUIRY INTO DETENTION

## Linda Briskman

In early 2005 many people were shocked to hear that an Australian resident, Cornelia Rau, was being held in the Baxter Immigration Detention Facility in Port Augusta. Community outrage resulted in the Australian government commissioning former Federal Police commissioner, Mick Palmer, to conduct an inquiry into the circumstances of her detention. For refugee advocates and immigration detainees, this was a glimmer of hope that at last the injustices of the mandatory detention system would be publicly exposed.

But hopes were soon dashed for a wider inquiry, with Palmer's brief focusing on Cornelia Rau alone. Why was it, many asked, that when someone like us was detained there was no action? What about the strangers, mainly from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, who had sought asylum on our shores and had been locked away, sometimes for many years, in dehumanising and harsh conditions? Cornelia Rau was suffering from a severe mental illness. Many of the others detained were mentally ill, with their conditions exacerbated by incarceration.

Imagine what it is like to flee from oppression, to undertake a perilous journey to Australia and to be locked away for exercising the right to seek asylum! And even upon release, to suffer the indignity of a temporary protection visa with its ongoing uncertainty and its limited rights, including a ban on family reunion.

The Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (ACHSSW) decided to expose the policies and practices in immigration detention by placing on the public record the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, professional groups and refugee advocates and activists. In February 2005, the People's Inquiry into Detention was announced and we were overwhelmed by the support which came from people in all walks of life, people who were concerned at the violation of human rights in this country. Many came forward to volunteer their help. With minimal funding, we were able to hold a rigorous and thorough Inquiry that was open, inclusive and transparent.

Ten public hearings have been held throughout Australia, in metropolitan and rural settings. More than 200 people have given verbal testimony and another 200 submissions have been received. The stories have

been compelling and are included in the first report, which presents a preliminary analysis of journeys to Australia and life in immigration detention.

Evidence from asylum seekers on boats the Australian Navy tried to remove from Australian waters before the 2001 federal election includes accounts of women holding the feet of naval personnel begging for mercy, and sailors weeping while carrying out government orders. Photographs from inside detention centres accompany evidence about widespread assaults, appalling levels of health care, deaths, attempted suicides, acts of self-harm and the despair experienced by those Australians whose advocacy fell on deaf political ears and hard hearts.

The overall impression was one of needless cruelties with former immigration detainees, visiting health workers and others reporting a catalogue of callous disregard for human rights. Detention in desert locations was hard enough, but the isolation was magnified by needless and endless cruelties imposed on vulnerable people. Those cruelties fuelled the despair and depression and the Inquiry was told about being called by numbers alone, the indignity of head counts, difficulties of telephone access and the hardship on families who endured the suffering of their children.

The final report, to be released later in 2007, will expand on these themes and also provide details of the processing of asylum claims and the aftermath of detention.

Beyond the issue of immigration detention, the Inquiry demonstrates the power of a people's movement and the capacity of the citizenry of a nation to mobilise and take action to expose injustices that betray our common humanity.

The first report of the Inquiry can be viewed at [www.peoplesinquiry.org.au](http://www.peoplesinquiry.org.au) For further information email: [l.briskman@curtin.edu.au](mailto:l.briskman@curtin.edu.au) or telephone 08 9266 7186

**[Linda Briskman is the Chair of Human Rights Education at Curtin University in Perth. A long-standing member of the AJDS, this is a summary of her talk at our Annual General Meeting.]**



Linda Briskman

## Update on refugees

**Pamela Curr of the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre** reports on the conditions of refugees on Nauru.

- \$50 phone credit for Rontel will be or is being distributed by the International Organisation for Migration.
- Still waiting to hear how much actual call time this will buy.
- This is a once per month offer.
- Lawyers have been able to talk to some of the Sri Lankan asylum seekers.

- People are able to fax their phone numbers but so far no calls have been returned. This may be because the phone credit is still being processed.

IOM are negotiating release from the camp so that the asylum seekers are able to go to the one internet cafe on the island.

The bottom line is -- why send people to a place far from basic communication facilities, legal advice and monitoring and scrutiny of conditions? Silly question- we know why!

# ACCEPT THE ARAB PEACE PROPOSALS!

## Gershon Baskin

Four years after it was first presented, the Arab peace initiative is finally coming to centre stage. Rumours of behind the scenes meetings and negotiations on the initiative between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Saudi national security advisor Prince Bandar bin Sultan have been strengthened by reports that the Saudi prince is trying to modify the initiative so that it will be more acceptable to Israel.

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni stated that Israel cannot accept the initiative in its present form because it mentions UN Resolution 194, which is the foundation of the Arab claims for the right of return of refugees from the 1948 war to their homes inside Israel.



**Olmert is "continuing forward (Kadima)!" But it is the weakness of his government which is the most serious obstacle to progress.** Eyal Eilat in Walla

Israel also rejects the direct reference to the June 4, 1967 lines in the initiative. Israel rightly claims that in negotiations with the Palestinians on borders, the principle of territorial exchanges has already been accepted, so why go back to the 1967 lines which ignore any of the new realities on the ground and the very tenuous nature of those lines for Israel?

Since the initiative has been widely overlooked by Israeli politicians, it is certainly worthwhile to point to its primary advantages and reasons why Israel should accept it quickly before it is no longer relevant. The Arab peace initiative was accepted unanimously by all the member states of the Arab League in March 2002.

It was once again unanimously ratified at the meeting of the League of Arab States in Khartoum in May 2006. The initiative calls for the recognition of the State of Israel, full peace and normalised relations between all of the member states of the Arab League and Israel.

There is huge significance in the reference to normalised relations. It should be understood that this notion of normalisation has been a steadfast taboo in Arab political culture since 1948. For the Arab League to call for normalised relations is no less than a political revolution.

The initiative also calls for "achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194." This is the first time that an Arab document uses the word "agreed" in this context. That would mean that this issue could be negotiated between the parties. In its operative paragraph on refugees, UN Resolution 194 states: "That the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible."

The resolution does not state that all refugees must be allowed to return and opens the door for those who do not wish to return to receive financial compensation instead. An agreement between Israel and the PLO that would award Palestinian refugees compensation instead of return would certainly fulfil the requirements of the Arab peace initiative and should not hinder Israeli agreement to it.

In order to receive the benefits of the proposal, Israel must allow for the creation of an independent sovereign Palestinian state in borders that will be mutually acceptable to Israel and the PLO, with east Jerusalem as its capital. This step is clearly understood to be within Israeli national security interests. Israel would still need to resolve the issue of the Shaba Farms area with Lebanon and Syria, and must withdraw from the Golan Heights. Removing the northern front from the domain of possible war is also clearly an Israeli national security interest.

Solving these issues would provide the means for achieving peace. This is almost too good to be true. It is now the turn of the leaders of Israel to turn to the Arab world and to say "yes" loud and clear. The government of Israel should send a message to the Arab League summit that it accepts the Arab peace initiative, even in its current form, as a framework for the renewal of the peace process and bilateral negotiations that should commence as soon as possible. Prime Minister Olmert in announcing his acceptance of the initiative as a framework should declare his willingness to speak before an Arab League summit. The Quartet should declare its willingness to escort Olmert to Riyadh and to lend its support to immediately organise a regional peace conference for the re-launching of all the bilateral and multilateral tracks aimed at reaching full agreement on all fronts within one year.

For the first time in the history of the Middle East, the possibility for genuine comprehensive peace is much more reality than fantasy. The opportunity is on our doorstep. If we miss it, we will have no one to blame for the next war but ourselves.

**[The writer is Co-CEO of the Israel/Palestine Centre for Research and Information. First published in the Jerusalem Post. ]**

# A CHALLENGE FROM ISRAELI ARABS

## Jeremy Kenner

Back in February the Adalah Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel released a document entitled *The Democratic Constitution*. This document proposes a democratic, bilingual, multicultural state for Israel inside the Green Line. Challenging the primacy of the question “Who is a Jew?” in similar proposals put forward by Israeli Jewish groups, the principal constitutional question addressed by this document is “Who is a citizen of Israel?” The answer provided raises legal, political and existential questions for all who care about the future of Israel.

Here is a list of the principles and demands included in *The Democratic Constitution*:

- The Law of Return (relating to Jews) should be abolished
- Citizenship should be extended to all descendants of Israeli citizens, whether born in Israel or abroad, including to all spouses of Israeli citizens
- Uprooted Israeli-Arabs should be returned to their villages and both “unrecognised” Arab villages and Bedouin property rights should be recognised
- All land claimed to have been confiscated from Arabs should be returned in full – with compensation
- The affirmative action principle should guide compensation of Israeli-Arabs for systematic discrimination against them
- Arab Knesset members would be able to bring about the disqualification of any legislation that impinges on the rights of Arabs
- The judicial system would be authorised to overturn any laws that contradict the constitution
- All cultural groups should be empowered (with state funding) to maintain their character through educational and cultural institutions
- The paraphernalia of the State (flag, anthem, emblem etc) should be replaced
- Israel should apologise “for the injustice which Israel’s creation has caused the Palestinian nation.”

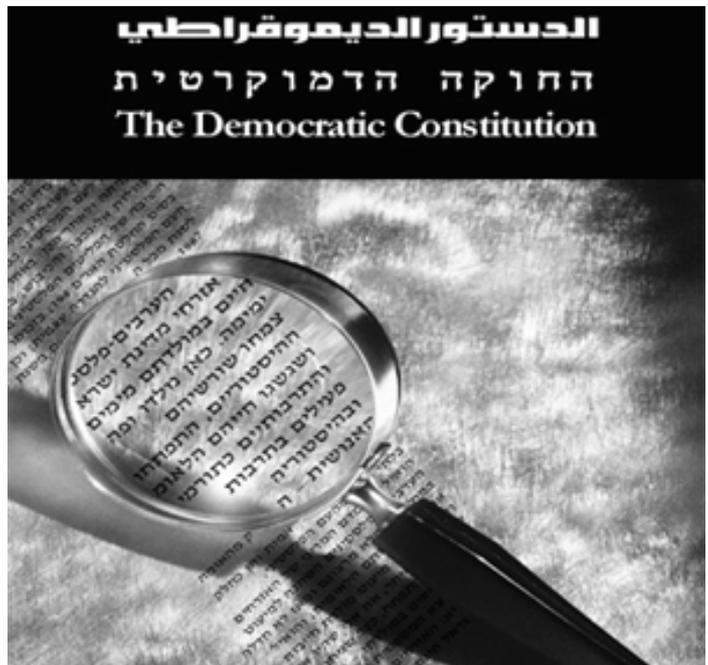
Several modes of analysis can be applied to this document. One can approach it as a legal document or a political document. As a legal document, it claims to incorporate pre-existing principles and constitutional frameworks used in disparate contexts such as South Africa, Belgium, Macedonia, Germany, Northern Ireland, Canada and, yes, Australia with respect to a state’s treatment of its minorities. Discussion of this aspect of the document can be found in the on-line pages of the *Jerusalem Post*, *Al Jazeera* and elsewhere.

As a political document, it can be seen in at least two ways: first, as codification of the self-defined rights and current political stance of the Israeli-Arab academic and political establishment, and, second, as an opening offer in negotiations regarding the definition and character of the State of Israel. In this latter sense, the document is what is known as an “ambit claim,” that is, “an extravagant initial demand made in expectation of an eventual counter-offer and compromise.” This aspect of the docu-

ment is acknowledged by Adalah chairman Prof Marwan Dwairy who states that “*Adalah* hopes that its proposal will spur public discourse on the legal and cultural standing of Israeli Arabs ... (and) on the nature of freedoms and rights in (Israel which) we will see as an important step.”

As would be expected, the response in Israel to this document is mixed, from Prof Shlomo Avineri, who views it as nothing less than “*an extreme nationalist Arab plan for Israel’s annihilation as a Jewish state, while coating these aims in the outward trappings of human rights and justice*” to *Haaretz* commentator Zvi Bar’el’s more reflective “*more troubling is the civic spirit that emanates from the proposal, according to which it is possible to endlessly stretch the limits of Palestinian cultural autonomy ... and to determine that the state is nothing more than a bureaucratic system designed to finance every issue, every institution and every caprice of every community*” to the position of the Forum of Druze and Circassian Authorities which rejects the proposal and reaffirms Israel’s standing as “*a Jewish and a democratic state that champions equality and free elections.*”

Even more interesting, perhaps, is an exploration of the psychological or existential component of the document, that is, the way in which the document affects Palestinians and Jews on a more visceral level; in particular what it says to each about group identity, past, present and future.



Were I an Israeli Arab, even a pragmatic one, I expect that I would be inspired by this document. It validates my national identity. It links my brethren in Israel to their families in the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian diaspora. It is founded on universal principles and international conventions of human rights, thus joining me to the family of nations. It is coherent, civilised in tone and authored by the best and brightest of my people. And, at first glance, it seems to bypass the unpalatable idea of accepting a Palestinian state that is bounded by the arbi-

(Continued on page 7)

## And another thing...

### If only the Fuehrer had known...

When I was a little boy in Nazi Germany, and I pointed out some excesses of the regime, I was told that this wouldn't have happened if only the Fuehrer (Hitler) had known. This of course was not just to exonerate Hitler, it was exonerating the regime for the bad actions were those of individuals, who got away with it because the authorities, represented by Adolf, didn't know, and if they had known, would not have approved. Thus the evil regime was excused. It was all the fault of some individuals.

Similarly, some German historians paint a picture of a dictator who was weak and indecisive when it came to the extermination of the Jews. Taking it to an absurd extreme, the Holocaust revisionist David Irving claimed that Hitler had no knowledge of the Shoah.

I am reminded of this by a report in the 26 October *Australian* newspaper which reports the forthcoming release of an album by a group called "Prussian Blue". Their biggest hit is a song called "Sacrifice" a tribute to Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy. The lyrics describe Hess as "a man of peace, who wouldn't give up". The singers are described in the headline to the story as "angelic twins". What are they on about? Just rehabilitating Hess? The terrible twins have been singing songs about white supremacy since they were nine. They are proud of their German heritage and their piercing blue eyes, the story in the *Australian* tells us. "We are proud to be white, we want to keep being white", one of the

angelic twins explains. And one of the ways of doing this is to rehabilitate well-known racists.

In May this year the German pro-Nazi group the National Democratic Party (NPD) applied to march under the Brandenburg Gate, near the Holocaust Memorial, just as the Nazis did in the Hitler years. They finally got permission to commemorate the defeat of Germany through the main streets of Berlin, but not through the Gate. There was also a move to ban the NPD but it failed, although the court had had no trouble in banning the German Communist Party (KPD) earlier. The German judicial system, just as under the Weimar regime, continues to be "blind in the right eye" in the well-known phrase. It cannot see anything wrong on the Right.

Then there is the recent rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators, as for example in the case of the Hungarian fascist Ferenc Szalasi, leader of the Arrow Cross party, who came to power under Nazi tutelage in a coup on 15 October 1944, and who was hailed on posters plastered throughout Budapest last October.

But if other people can have their extremists, we can too. We must not forget the adulation heaped upon the American-Israeli Baruch Goldstein, who murdered 29 Muslims at prayer, and whose tomb became a shrine for the Jewish extreme Right.

— Henry Zimmerman 1923-2006

*(Continued from page 6)*

trary ceasefire lines of a long ago war, permitting the expression of my identity in the villages and wadis whence it was born; returning me from decades of exile.

This elucidation of hypothetical sentiments should resonate in all of us. In fact, any Jew breast-fed on early Zionist writings and the best humanist and universalistic political literature of the 19th and 20th centuries would recognise the merit of this response in the abstract. Were the constitution to be applied to Belgium or Botswana, most of us would be inclined to say "Bravo."

But, from the point of view of a Jew who supports the definition of Israel as a Jewish State, or hasn't yet been convinced that universal principles outweigh group security, *The Democratic Constitution* poses an existential threat.

Jews are not Flamands or Quebecois. Perhaps others, too, are legitimately concerned with the survival of group identity, but most Jews believe that their physical survival, or at least the survival of Israeli Jews is genuinely and perpetually threatened. And so, a Jew asks, "What would happen to my brethren in Israel and to my people if such a constitution were legitimated?" From one vantage point the answer is simple: Israel would, sooner rather than later, disappear as a Jewish State. Jews would become a minority in Israel (no doubt reunified with a future Palestine by majority vote) – if they were lucky enough to sur-

vive at all. From this perspective, the document requires no further study: its terms guarantee that Jewish identity becomes a museum piece and that Hitler is granted a posthumous victory replete with the additional irony of the modern State of Israel being dismantled by the very conceptual structures that generated its own transformation from dream into reality.

Is there a way other than inspiration or threat to respond to *The Democratic Constitution*? What of the notion that the document does not replace an Israeli-Jewish constitution, but that each could be drafted to complement one another? Could a modified, less polemical version of this document, one focused not on undoing the Jewish character of Israel, but on underpinning a just resolution of Israeli-Arab grievances and validating their rights in a multicultural state be the outcome of a negotiated process? Or would any such outcome merely provide the means for institutionalising and entrenching an eternal separation between Israeli-Arabs and Israeli-Jews – a version of a two-state solution within the borders of a single country?

These are questions that ought be asked, even if they are not yet answerable. And, if nothing else, there is, on record, an Israeli-Arab produced constitutional proposal that is constructed according to European legal principles and which can be analysed, debated and revised using the tools and in accordance with the norms of that tradition. For those who are ready to sit down at the table, this is food for thought.

## THE LIVES OF OTHERS: A TWO-DIMENSIONAL GDR

### Victor Grossman

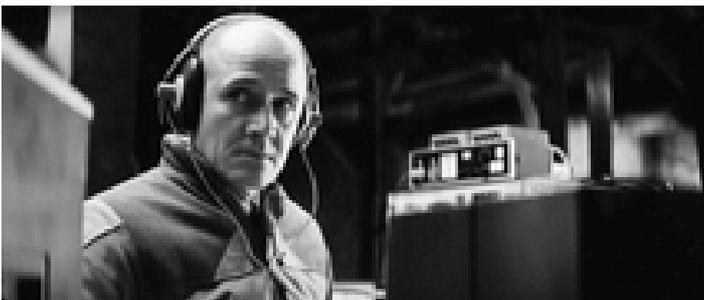
**[The longer the time span since the fall of the Berlin Wall, more and more simplistic black and white interpretations of history rather than nuanced shades of grey and other colours tend to come to the forefront. This is a good film that deserves to be seen. But it has become de rigueur never to mention that anything worthwhile was ever achieved in any of the countries of the Soviet bloc. As the saying goes "the baby was thrown out with the bathwater".]**

**Berlin:** A film from Germany, *The Lives of Others*, currently showing in Australia, was the winner of the Oscar for best foreign film. The film is cleverly written, well directed and well acted. The ballyhoo level for the film is rising. Why do I regret this choice?

It is the story about a dogmatic officer of the East German "Stasi", the State Security, who in the end, after a change of heart, proves that even a Stasi officer can be a human being. Interesting, perhaps, but misleading, one-sided and with evil intent.

Few deny that the Stasi in the German Democratic Republic was intrusive, nasty and sometimes rough. But the film reduces the entire country to this cliched image. It shows only a nasty Minister of Culture, criminal methods of bugging apartments and tapping phones, and then the innocent victims -- like the writer who wants only to smuggle out the awful truth about the GDR to the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* -- and a single heroic exception, a Stasi man who sees the error of his ways. How clear and simple!

This film panders to the fact that any book, film, or TV program telling people in eastern Germany how terrible their lives were under "Stalinism" and making West Germans shudder to think of what they escaped, is sure to



**Secret police listening to citizens is not confined to the German Democratic Republic**

be promoted and, if made at all well, to receive awards, prizes, publicity and innumerable screenings. And so it has been. The good-humoured attitude of a film like *Goodbye Lenin*, though basically in the same mould, has been abandoned here for a tougher stance. And there are good reasons for this.

What does the film leave out? That in the GDR, which went under nearly 17 years ago, despite many problems and some unpleasant aspects, most people led relatively normal daily lives, which included certain benefits which are only gradually and grudgingly being recog-

nised, usually with no mention of their success in the GDR. Among these benefits was free child care, which is today seen as an important but distant goal.

Then there was the GDR school system, where kids learnt together until the 10th grade, and were not split up as early as the 4th or 6th grade into "high achievers", the university material, and the "low achievers", mostly kids from working class and immigrant homes, who were sent to dead-end schools. Some people may still recall the single-payer health system, often less technically modern, but available to everyone without charge after a small monthly tax was paid. Above all, the economy in the GDR provided jobs to everyone, men and women, young and old, which today is only a faint dream -- or chimera.

It is largely because of the worry that older generations may reflect on such lost advantages or younger generations may learn about or even demand some of them that films like these are promoted. They rarely consist of open and obvious lies, which would be quickly rejected. So half-truths and distortion are employed. It is more than possible that such nasty things may really have occurred. Who knows? But no Minister of Culture was ever such a miserable rotter as the character in the film; the first person to create this office was a famous anti-Nazi poet, another was a brilliant Jewish exile during the Nazi years -- who left the job as Minister of Culture to become ambassador to Italy and the Vatican City.

There was one well-known party leader who did indeed display nasty, womanising conduct, something like that shown in the film. But he got thrown out on his ear. And have other countries no big shots who misuse power to gain sexual favours? And in general, do no other countries have secret services which snoop, pressure or act nastily?

The terrible secret which the good writer smuggles out to *Der Spiegel* was that the GDR was concealing its high suicide rate. It was definitely high. But for some strange reason not mentioned in the film, the suicide rate was and is unusually high in all of central Europe. This applied to both sides of the Iron Curtain, in Austria as in Hungary, in Denmark and Sweden as in Czechoslovakia, in eastern and western Germany -- and especially in West Berlin. The film presents this as a purely GDR problem.

A key scene in the film is the Stasi's extremely exact examination, letter by letter, of the writings by the hero on a hidden typewriter. What struck me was the similarity to another case when letters of a typewriter were magnified and examined in much the same way. That was in 1947 in the trial of Alger Hiss. But somehow here the roles have been reversed. The role of the nasty Stasi was acted out in real life then by that diligent Red hunter Richard Nixon. I can't help wondering whether the West German film writer recalled the Hiss trial, subconsciously perhaps, and simply turned it around.

**[Writer and translator Victor Grossman defected from the US to East Germany during the Cold War.]**

## WHEN LEADERS FAIL TO LEAD

### **Scars of war, Wounds of peace: the Israeli-Arab Tragedy by Shlomo Ben-Ami**

Modern Israel's emergence and implantation as a Jewish state into imperially-mandated Palestine is the poisoned well-spring from which seeps the "intractable conflict" lamented by Shlomo Ben Ami in this truly remarkable political history.

His deeply analytical grip on the contexts and complexities swirling ahead, behind and throughout this 60-year (and longer) history of violence merges powerfully with a sense of the tragic failings of leadership on both sides of the conflict. Their hapless intermediaries, regional and global, are depicted as powerless or as too foolish to be of use, despite the arguable necessity of their interventions.

Shlomo Ben-Ami was Minister of Foreign Affairs in Ehud Barak's government from 2000-2001 and took part in the Camp David summit. He led the Israeli team at the Taba peace conference. His active involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process began in 1991 when he was a member of the Israeli delegation to the Madrid peace conference. A professor of modern history, he was educated at Tel Aviv and Oxford.

This Rubik-cube combination of scholar and politician, negotiator and policy analyst allows Ben-Ami to convey a sense of highly intelligent objectivity as a participant-observer at the heart of the conflict. His values, despite his political realism, are anti-militaristic, secular, democratic and humanistic, and his concern for the plight of the Palestinian people is counterposed to his disappointment with their leaders, particularly Arafat's career of evasiveness and indecision. Similarly, his great attachment to Israel as a scholar-civilian makes him critical of the dominance of the military over Israeli governments and civil society. He doesn't flinch from revealing that Israel's leaders from Ben-Gurion onwards have been at different times culpably inert, vainglorious, messianic or ruthlessly expansionistic and frequently brutal in their reliance on military force and contempt for peace where concessions are required. He is also disparaging of the Israeli political system, which paralyzes and obstructs initiative and decisiveness. Neither the Israeli political Right nor Left are spared his piercing scrutiny of their failings.

Although his book was written just before the implementation of the Gaza "disengagement" and the horrific war with Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006, Ben-Ami's account of the process of war and diplomacy up to 2005 illuminates with great clarity the local, regional and global forces which generated these new scars of war and wounds of peace.

He is particularly good at keeping the reader apprised of concurrent shifts in regional power, policy and aspirations within Egypt, Syria and Jordan over the course of the last 60 years in the context of both the Cold War and the post-Soviet era. European and US geo-strategic policy divergences are confidently included in the catalytic mix of Israeli-Arab relations. Lebanon's complexities and fractures and its turbulent centrality as a major theatre of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation are skillfully depicted as well.

But it is the swirling tornado of the contestation to the mutual detriment of each other's national narratives which roars through the succession of Israeli-Palestinian failures of accommodation on which Ben-Ami steadfastly focuses. The thinking behind the decision-making (or avoidance of it) from Ben-Gurion through to Olmert is laid convincingly bare by Ben-Ami as he sequentially deals with the contortions of each Israeli government since 1948 in their reluctance to come to terms with the consequences of Palestinian dispossession.



**[Rice: That's already better]  
Peace is dependent on US attitude.**

Palestinian leadership since the Nakba of 1948 and through all the critical thresholds of strategic re-orientation since then, is purported by Ben-Ami to have adhered for too long to chimeric rhetoric when genuine gains could have been made in their pitiable predicament.

He is keenly sensitive to the lessened likelihood of a viable two-state emergence from the conflict following on from the unilateralism of Ariel Sharon. He sees the Wall as a panicky expedient by Sharon to cut through the demographic, moral and political dilemmas posed by a population of desperate Palestinian claimants no longer controlled by a pliable Palestinian Authority, no matter how corrupt.

Events since Ben-Ami wrote his fascinating and insightful commentary do not complement the ever so slightly hopeful tone of his concluding chapter. The sectarian murders adding to the agonies of the Iraqi people, the tensions issuing from Israeli and US fear and fury at Iranian nuclear and foreign policy provocations, the bitter aftermath of the widespread destruction and military terror inflicted by the IDF in Lebanon (in response to the provocations of the kidnappings of Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah) are hardly outweighed by the good news that the US is finally willing to engage in some direct diplomacy with Iran and Syria. Similarly, the violence of the contestation between Hamas and Fatah for a credible Palestinian leadership adds to the general instability and the rising tide of anger behind the Israeli Wall.

**Les Rosenblatt**

# THE MANY FACETS OF MAI GHOUSSOUB

## Malu Halasa

[Palestinians are sometimes surprising in their intimate knowledge of Israeli society and culture. Sadly, this is not reciprocated by Israelis and Diaspora Jews – we just don't know enough about the Arab world and need to know more. Thus I am ashamed to say that I had never heard of Mai Ghoussoub; her life story may help redress the balance – Editor.]

A tour de force in Arab literature and letters, Mai Ghoussoub, who has died at the age of 54, was a publisher, author and artist. The controversial titles she published for Saqi Books, the company she founded 28 years ago with her childhood friend André Gaspard, and her critical essays on aesthetics, sexism, censorship and war -- as well as her striking art performances -- embody a vibrancy often associated with her native Beirut, a city and intellectual scene now eclipsed by the increasing Islamisation of a fractured Middle East.

Ghoussoub was born into a Lebanon where, as she wrote, the doctor apologised to her Christian Arab father, a professional footballer, for delivering a girl to a family with no male heirs. She attended the secular French lycée in Beirut, with children of all religious persuasions. To please her parents she studied mathematics at the American University of Beirut, at the same time taking a degree in literature at the Lebanese University. She came of age during the anti-Vietnam war protests of the late 1960s, at a time when the Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum sang *A'tini Bundaqiya* (A rifle to liberate Arab land) and the writings of Germaine Greer and Simone de Beauvoir were widely available in Beirut bookstores.

Despite supporting the Palestinians in the early 1970s, Ghoussoub and a group of students were kidnapped in Beirut and brought before the PLO leader Yasser Arafat, then based in that city, for distributing a publication critical of his corruption. They were only released because one student had an important father. Rebellious and anti-establishment, Ghoussoub was a self-proclaimed feminist, who adored modern jazz and belly dancing.

During the 1975 Lebanese civil war, she and Gaspard helped to establish two medical dispensaries in quarters of Beirut from where the doctors had fled and where there were no pharmacies. They lived in a poor Muslim area on the west side of the notorious green line. Their humanitarian group negotiated the release of Christian hostages, but not all efforts were successful. When they demanded that George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hand over a kidnapped Phalange Christian militiaman, his body was dumped at the door of their dispensary.

In 1977 Ghoussoub was driving a wounded Palestinian to hospital when she was shot. She lost an eye and went for further medical treatment in the UK. She moved to Paris briefly before returning to London and starting Al-Saqi Books, the first Arabic bookshop in London, with Gaspard in 1979, an ill-timed venture. They had little money and the road to the airport in Beirut -- the city where they needed to buy books -- was closed. Eventually, they

stocked their store in Westbourne Grove, which became a hub for Middle Easterners in London and for UK universities. By 1983, they were publishing their first titles, but by 1987 the book trade was faltering and they were forced to sell Saqi's literary imprint, Serpent's Tail, to Pete Ayrton.



*Mai Ghoussoub*

In her own writing, Ghoussoub explored "the female enigma" whether by featuring Janis Joplin in her play *Divas*, for *Jamil/Jamila*, performed in Beirut, Paris, London and Newcastle-on-Tyne, or analysing social sexual dynamics in her essay on Viagra chewing gum, an alleged plot by the Israelis to threaten Egyptian birthrates. Her memoir *Leaving Beirut*, published in 1997, revisits chastity, nationalism and the futility of revenge taught by a Jewish teacher at Ghoussoub's lycée, which laid the groundwork for Saqi's humanitarian open door policy to anyone -- no matter their religious persuasion -- threatened by violence and war.

## Feminist

Saqi parties were legendary. An Israeli journalist could be seen hugging with an Arab editor and close friend of Arafat's, according to Index on Censorship's Jo Glanville, who edited *Qissat*, a Saqi anthology of Palestinian women's short stories. When Glanville reminded Ghoussoub that she came from a Jewish family and was perhaps not the best choice to edit a Palestinian collection, Ghoussoub disagreed -- a rare stance in today's Arab world.

Ghoussoub, who studied sculpture at Morley College, London, and the Henry Moore studio in the 1980s, combined her loves of literature and art. Her sculptures and installations were exhibited internationally. In 2004, in a duo show with the Israeli artist Anna Sherbany, part of the London Biennale at the Shoreditch gallery, she became one of the first Arab women artists to explore the veil in a public space by dressing up in an elaborate Islamic get-up and carrying a tennis racket around the art haunts of Shoreditch. To her delight, nobody took any notice, proving a pet theory that Britain is a tolerant country.

Last year's war between Hezbollah and Israel spurred her into action. The resulting books and readings in London, and the art exhibition, *Lebanon - Image in All the People*, curated by Ghoussoub and Souheil Sleiman for the Liverpool Biennial, celebrated Beirut, the city she loved. As the Lebanese poet Abbas Beydoun writes, "Mai was very patriotic, but at the same time a woman of the world. She was the daughter of the moment, the first to present post-modernism in Arabic. She was herself without compromise, yet she always cared for everyone." Or as Ghoussoub metaphorically described herself only last month: "I live horizontally and I'm not ready to stand up."

[From the *Guardian*.]

# MUSLIMS CAN LEARN FROM THIS NEW JEWISH GROUP

## Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

Some of my dearest friends are in the newly-formed Independent Jewish Voices, which is why I have thus far desisted from commenting on this initiative. A hug from a Muslim and an advocate for Palestinian rights would have been grabbed as evidence to "prove" the IJV an enemy of its people. But now, having witnessed such attacks building up from snide to poisonous to the verbally vicious, silence is no longer an option.



IJV is condemned because it dares to break free and think creatively about what it means to be Jewish in this troubled century. Honest diasporic Jewish people are becoming painfully aware that memories of the Holocaust have been manipulated by fundamentalist Zionists, for whom the only true test of Jewishness is that you support whatever the state of Israel chooses to do, right or appallingly wrong.

Moral deformity has become the loyalist's brand; conformity is commanded and policed by the prestigious Jewish Board of Deputies within the British Establishment. Remember, in the 1930s the patriotic Board advised Jews not to fight back against Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts.

Well-placed individuals, the willing satellite voices of the Israeli state, are incandescent too. If one of them (and they know who they are) ever ventured a straight denunciation of a single unacceptable act by the Israeli government or army, we would be reassured of their integrity. That they don't, means these are propagandists as unworthy and untrustworthy as the press officers of the Saudi Government.

I don't here mean the handful (no more) of thoughtful British Jewish intellectuals who inhabit that space between Independent Jewish Voices and the Jewish Establishment. Their critiques of the new dissenters are serious, even crucial, and should influence the nascent movement. Not to engage with legitimate critics would make the Jewish Voices as intolerant as the intolerance it is rising against.

## Muslim challenges

In key ways, this breakout faction is no different from the many Muslim challengers emerging to halt the influence of the monolithic, regressive, self-serving, presumptuous, overweening Muslim Council of Britain, funded for years by the Government without any regard for the hundreds of thousands of British Muslims who have never accepted this informal jurisdiction over our lives and thoughts.

Iqbal Sacranie, with stars of ambition burning brightly in his eyes, once said to me: "We are going to model ourselves on the Jewish Board of Deputies. See how much power they have in this country when we have none." I agreed with his last point completely but was wary of his chosen destination.

Sacranie got there fast and efficiently, inveigled himself into the corridors of power, co-opted as many Muslim organisations as he could. The MCB gained favour by al-

ways excusing Muslims who behave terribly, and using the real suffering of some Muslims to promote their own unholy agenda.

## Rebellious

Rebellious British Muslims have felt the same suffocation experienced by IJV as unelected community and religious leaders found subtle, sometimes rough, ways to discredit opposing views. Religion and race were used -- if you voice any disagreements with the "official" line, or point out oppression within, you are charged with betraying the faith and faithful, bringing on the British National Party and encouraging Islamophobia. And thus are we blackballed, decent Muslims who are concerned about the crisis we find ourselves in globally.

These days the threats feel feeble as the democratic urge gets stronger among British Muslims. Our new organisation, British Muslims for Secular Democracy, to be formally launched this year, is attracting an extraordinary range of people, including young women in hijab. I am delighted that we are only one of a flurry of other nascent collectives which will disagree with each other and us. Between us we can turn compliant Muslim citizens away from monopolistic control to embrace participatory democratic activity. That is our dream.

For reformist Jewish people who seek the same, the pressure not to do so must be that much worse. Already denounced as luvvies, traitors, splitters, and "congenital Israel bashers", next they will be accused of supporting Palestinian suicide bombers and genocidal anti-Semite exterminators.

I hope IJV remains steady as the winds blow to pull it down. It won't be easy. Members should take courage from the fact that within Israel itself are principled people who reject the racist ideologies of Zionism for the sake of Jewish survival. Read the *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by Ilan Pappé, the Israeli historian: "The problem with Israel was never its Jewishness -- Judaism has many faces and many of them provide a solid basis for peace and cohabitation; it is its ethnic Zionist character.

"Zionism does not have the same margins of pluralism that Judaism offers, especially not for the Palestinians. They can never be part of the Zionist state and space and will continue to fight -- and hopefully their struggle will be peaceful and successful.

"If not, it will be desperate and vengeful and, like a whirlwind, will suck up all in a huge, perpetual sandstorm that will rage not only through the Arab and Muslim worlds, but also within Britain and the US, the powers which, each in their turn, feed the tempest that threatens to ruin us all."

British Jews separating from the Board of Deputies, and Muslims distancing themselves from the Muslim Council, may have taken the first tentative steps to prevent this catastrophe. Wish us luck; too many wish us harm.

**[The full version of this article was published in the *Independent*, where Alibhai-Brown is a columnist.]**

# A LESSON FOR THE DOOMSAYERS

## Meron Benvenisti

The historic meeting at the end of March between Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams in Belfast was a slap in the face to all the doomsayers, professional sceptics, perpetual pessimists and people who believe that what is what will always be.

Here was the 80-year-old minister, as if from a distant era -- the preacher who became a national leader -- sitting comfortably with his sworn enemy, the Irish Republican Army leader whom he once called "Satan," "the embodiment of evil" and "mass murderer." The man who preached in the streets and churches for fifty years, "if you compromise, God will curse you," "surrender is worse than death," announced power-sharing with those who seek to eradicate Northern Ireland as a political entity and annex it to the Republic of Ireland.

It's no wonder that surprised onlookers compared that meeting with others that shook the world: Nixon and Mao in 1972, Mandela and de Klerk in 1990 and Rabin and Arafat in 1993.

Like those meetings, this meeting too holds great promise; fulfilling that promise though will require great effort. Like those other meetings, it also hides paradoxes. The event symbolising a historic peace deal could only occur because, since the beginning of the peace process a decade ago, both the Catholic and Protestant communities have radicalised their political views and opted for less compromising parties.

Paisley, who excelled at expressing Protestant fears of loss of their standing and anger at their representatives' weakness, found himself at the head of the largest party; this automatically made him the lone candidate for prime minister. Adams, whose party defeated more moderate Catholic parties, agreed to all of Paisley's conditions: primarily, full support of Northern Ireland's law enforcement. If Adams hadn't agreed to all that, he would have been accused of torpedoing the establishment of the power-

sharing government and undermining the accomplishments of the truce, which had been good for the Catholics.

Citizens of Northern Ireland watched the historic meeting from their mono-ethnic enclaves. The segregation lines -- known as peace lines -- have in Belfast increased since the peace process began and segregation has expanded so greatly, it is now known as "voluntary apartheid."

The contradictions between the micro-ethnic positions, which cause introversion, and the macro-national openness can possibly be attributed to the complete change in British-Irish relations and the prosperity of the common market. The importance of the border between Northern Ireland and its south has decreased, while in contrast the importance of the internal, community segregation lines, has sharpened.

The need to be differentiated from the "other" -- once reliant on loyalty to the British crown, as opposed to loyalty to the Irish republic -- is expressed differently today, as long as there is rational justification for the primeval need for the sense of "otherness."

The two communities' power-sharing accords are based on the agreement that any change in Northern Ireland's sovereignty will be democratic; so as long as there is a Protestant majority, there will be no change. This raises the Northern Ireland version of "demographic danger," in all its severity. It is true, the percentage of Protestants is dropping and a Catholic majority is visible in the not-too-distant future. But everyone hopes that when it happens, there will no longer be any significance to distinction between the northern and southern parts of the island.

And what about the famous comparison between Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine? Once people were furious by the very comparison. Today we say: In our dreams, and the doomsayers, this writer included, should learn a lesson.

[Originally published in *Haaretz*.]

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## The real cost of bottled water

**[An occasional new column on climate change and the environment.]**

Australian capital city dwellers (with the possible exception of Adelaide) enjoy some of the world's highest quality drinking water. And most people around the globe would trade their own for Adelaide's any time. But Australians still buy bottled water. Why?

Maybe it's because we think bottled water is cleaner and somehow better, but that's not true. Tap water is subject to stringent quality tests. It does not taste any better.

*Choice* magazine conducted a blind taste test between Sydney water and two brands of bottled water. The taster could not tell the difference. Bottled water is no bargain either: Using the *Choice* survey, it costs 560 to 6000 times more than tap water. For the price of one bottle of Mount Franklin, you can receive just under 2000 litres of tap water.

Most of the price of a bottle of water goes for its bottling, packaging, shipping, marketing, retailing and profit. Transporting bottled water by boat, truck and train involves burning massive quantities of fossil fuels. More than 20 trillion litres of bottled water is shipped internationally each year.

Just supplying Australians with plastic water bottles for one year consumes more than 1.5 million litres of oil, enough to take 1000 cars off the road and 35,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, according to the Container Recycling Institute. In contrast, Australian tap water is distributed through an existing infrastructure which is minimal carbon and mainly plumbing and gravity.

**[Based on an article by Jared Blumenfeld, director of the San Francisco Department of the Environment and Susan Leal, general manager of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.]**

# RAISINS AND ALMONDS

## Shaher Hussein El-Mashni 1926-2007

The Melbourne Palestinian community lost its patriarch and key community leader, Shaher Hussein Mashni, on 1 March. Shaher, better known as Abu Nasser, was a regular participant not only in every Palestinian activity in Melbourne, but in other community events as well. Distinguished by his large frame, white beard, bald head and the ubiquitous Palestinian flag, he was not difficult to spot.



I first met Shaher in about 1970. Shaher was very welcoming of his Israeli friend but at the same time he was never too shy to disagree. But when my own views changed in the early 'eighties from anti-Zionism, his friendly attitude never changed. (Not all Palestinians were as understanding.) Shaher also changed his view alongside

**Shaher Mashni** many Palestinians who supported the Fatah line which accepted a Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories.

He loved our common place of birth and regarded the treatment of the Palestinians as unjust. It was his life-long ambition to undo the injustice. It is something he inculcated in his three sons.

With his death, the local community has lost one of the few remaining links to pre-Israel Palestine. His stories of playing with Jewish children in his youth, his account of the Nakba and his role in fighting on the other side to our own family will now be second-hand.

[Sol Salbe.]

## Crisis group endorses Sudan sanctions

The chairman of the International Crisis Group, Chris Patten, has suggested that "it is time for targeted measures such as travel bans and asset freezes."

He added: "As the Darfur tragedy enters its fourth year, it is hard to believe the European Union's response has been so feeble. Europe has failed to take any effective steps to pressure Khartoum to stop the war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed by its troops and proxy militias in western Sudan -- and during this time over two million people have been forced from their homes, and more than 200,000 civilians have died in the government-sponsored campaign.

"Of course, if official European expressions of unease were effective, Sudan's ethnic cleansing would have been halted long ago.

"Since April 2004, European foreign ministers have issued 19 council conclusion statements on Darfur, most recently on March 5th, 2007, announcing their 'collective concern', 'grave concern', 'continued concern' or 'deep concern' no fewer than 53 times.

"Not surprisingly, Khartoum has been rather unimpressed with European concerns because, when it comes to anything beyond words, the EU has fallen short, having sanctioned only four individuals: a former

mid-level Sudanese air force commander, one Jan-jaweed militia leader and two rebels."

Patten continued: "Instead of a 54th expression of concern, European foreign ministers should use their next monthly meeting in April to heed the European Parliament's call for sanctions on Khartoum. They should impose travel bans and asset freezes on all the individuals named in the UN Commission of Inquiry and Panel of Experts reports. They should look at measures specifically targeting revenue flows from Sudan's petroleum sector and foreign investment and supply of goods and services to that and associated sectors."

[From the *Irish Times*.]

## Polish ban may face problems

Poland's conservative Law and Justice (PiS) government of Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski has drafted laws intended to "remove the symbols of communist rule from public life." If passed by parliament, the use of the names of communist leaders for streets, schools, bridges, parks or even ships, planes and trains would be banned, Poland's TVN24 news channel reported.

The draft would also annul all medals, orders and hon-



Leahy in the *Courier-Mail*

orary titles issued by communist authorities from 1944 until the collapse of their system in 1989. The proposed laws are in line with a PiS drive to remove the vestiges of the communist system from life in Poland.

The ex-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) parliamentary opposition has voiced strong opposition to the draft, arguing it was up to municipal governments, not Warsaw, to decide about the names of streets and character of local monuments.

Observers say the proposed ban would raise many ethical and political problems. For instance medals and citations were awarded every year during the communist period to commemorate the Ghetto Uprising of 1943 and the general Warsaw Rising a year later. It would be absurd, say observers, if these were to be invalidated

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by the ban. There would be a similar situation regarding honours awarded for taking part in one or another faction of the Polish underground movement against the German occupying forces during the war.

Polish veterans of the Spanish Civil War are now referred to as "criminals and traitors" by their government. If Kaczynski's law is passed, Polish International Brigade veterans, many of whom also fought in WW2, will no longer receive special government pensions. All references to the Spanish Civil War will be stricken from street signs and school names.

Recently, the Spanish senate unanimously supported a motion of solidarity with the Polish members of the International Brigades against their government's attempt to expunge their legacy.

**[Compiled by Steve Brook.]**

## West Papuans Close Mine

West Papuan locals have managed to close down the huge Freeport copper mine in late March. Although information is sketchy, it seems as if over 400 Papuans are blockading the road to the mine and the pipelines. The major issue of contention has been the environmental impact Campaigners against the mine point to the millions of tons of mine tailings flowing down the local river



**Area impacted by mine tailings**

systems and the 130 square kilometres already devastated.

The blockade is in response to an attack by police who shot at locals on Freeport land while trying to remove

them. One of those attacked has now died in hospital. The locals have declared that they will keep the mine closed until Indonesia and Freeport leave West Papua. There are also reports of sabotage inside the mine itself by Papuan employees.

## Peace Now: Engage with Iran!

The moderate group Americans for Peace Now (APN) has called on the Bush Administration to change course on Iran and abandon its longstanding sanctions-only policy in favour of limited, constructive engagement, characterised by a combination of carrots and sticks.

"As a Jewish, Zionist organisation dedicated to achieving peace and security for Israel, we believe that we have a responsibility to speak out regarding current US policy on Iran. How the US deals with Iran has a very real impact on Israel, in terms of not only the direct existential threat

to Israel an Iran armed with nuclear weapons would pose, but also in terms of the threat of Iranian retaliation against Israel in the case of a US military action against it, and in terms of continued Iranian support for terrorist organisations in Lebanon, Syria, and, increasingly, the West Bank and Gaza," said Franklin M. Fisher, chairman of APN's board.

"For a number of years, some organisations and members of the American Jewish community have taken a very public, leading role in pressing the Administration to pursue and escalate its current policy vis-à-vis Iran – a policy which, in our view, is inconsistent with the best interests of both Israel and the United States. As a well-established and respected member of the organised Jewish community, representing large numbers of Jewish, pro-Israel Americans, we believe APN has a responsibility to make clear that the American Jewish community is not united behind this policy," Fisher explained.

## Absurd new travel laws

The absurdities of air travel security become even more transparent in April when going abroad will require the assembly of all liquids, aerosols and gels (LAGS) in volumes of not more than 100ml in a one litre plastic bag if taken on board as hand luggage.

Consider the "urgency" with which Australia has complied with the rules, waiting until the very last possible day of the March deadline set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) half a year ago.

If the risk had been remotely credible, Australia would have acted immediately after the seriously exaggerated Blair scaremongering that followed the 9 August busting of an alleged UK terror scheme by plotters, including non-passport-holding juveniles in chat rooms, to simultaneously blow up trans-Atlantic flights with toilet bombs.

These were to have been assembled in the dunnies by combining individually smuggled LAGS into something that would bring down a jet. Or in the case of bombs using moisturisers and deodorants, to make a stuffy cabin smell nicer.

Can you imagine a dozen terrorists actually successfully getting into a jet's toilet in sequence and in pairs in the time it takes to cross the Tasman, or finding a toilet that hasn't been closed because it is blocked?

Domestic passengers are exempt. So how do you stop people with critical masses of LAGS boarding those flights where they won't even have to go to the toilet in twos to set off a dishwashing fluid/skin peel/makeup remover bomb?

Australia is lucky in a way. It has a Minister for Transport in Mark Vaile who is shrewd enough not to overreact to the excesses of airport security inflicted on air travellers in the US and UK, but astute enough to "tick all the boxes" required to comply with supporting an America-driven security agenda that is deeply flawed.

**[From Crikey.com.au aviation writer Ben Sandilands.]**

## **Calendar, announcements**

**Monday, 9 April, 1.30pm.** SBS-TV documentary: *Antisemitism in the 21st Century*. Today, more than sixty years after the Holocaust, parts of the world are experiencing a dramatic resurgence of antisemitism - from hate-propaganda to vandalism to attacks on Jews themselves. This documentary explores the history and origins of antisemitism and looks at the reasons behind the new rise in antisemitism worldwide over the last few years.

**Sunday, 15 April, 7.30pm.** Yom Hashoah commemoration: *Living in Hiding*. Robert Blackwood Hall, Monash University, Clayton. Sponsored by the Jewish community Council of Victoria.

**Thursday, 19 April, 8.00pm.** Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration. Meeting to remember the six million of our people who were brutally murdered. Holocaust Centre 13 - 15 Selwyn Street Elsternwick. Sponsored by the Jewish Labour Bund.

**Sunday, 22 April, 12noon-4pm.** Union and community family day: Rip up Howard's IR laws! Festival & protest. Myer Music Bowl. Organised by Victorian Trades Hall Council. Ph 9662 3511

**Thursday, 26 April, 6.30pm.** Book Launch: *Scorcher - The Dirty Politics of Climate Change*. Speakers: author Clive Hamilton with introduction by Dr Peter Christoff. Tickets: \$5/\$10 available at all Readings bookshops. Melba Hall, Royal Parade, Parkville, University of Melbourne.

### **An inconvenient time**

There once lived a king who had a Jewish adviser called Chaim. The king relied so much on the wisdom of Chaim that one day he decided to promote him to chief adviser. But the other advisors objected.

They said, "It's OK sitting in counsel with a Jew, but to allow him to boss us about would be unacceptable."

The king accepted their argument and ordered Chaim to convert. Chaim had to obey the king.

But soon after, Chaim felt great remorse and over the months that followed he became despondent, his health suffered and he grew weak.

Finally Chaim could take it no longer and made a decision. He went to the king and said, "I was born a Jew, and a Jew I will always be. So do whatever you want with me."

The king had no idea Chaim felt so strongly about his conversion. "OK," said the king. "If that's how you feel, go be a Jew again. The other advisers will just have to live with it. You're too important for me to lose."

On his way back home to tell his family the news, Chaim felt the strength surge back into his body.

When he arrived, he called out to his wife, "Sarah, we can be Jews again, we can be Jews again!"

Sarah glared at him and replied, "Couldn't you wait until after Passover?"

### **Letters to other Editors**

I HEAR that 1000 police officers were brought to Sydney for Dick Cheney's visit. Surely it shouldn't take that many to arrest him?

**Joe Dwyer, Rose Bay** (*The Australian* 24/02)

About a week ago newspapers around the globe carried a picture of the Defence Minister, Amir Peretz, viewing the northern border through binoculars with the covers still on. I reckon this picture was a cause of great merit not only among Israelis but Arabs as well. It has caused a serious dent in our deterrence as a laughing stock does not deter. To ensure there is no repeat performance all IDF binoculars should be equipped with transparent covers.

**Baruch Rosen, Petach Tikva** (*Haaretz* 1 March)

Apparently the only lawyers in Australia who are not outraged at the fiasco of David Hicks's guilty plea are our Prime Minister, John Howard, and the Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock.

**Robyn Park, Balgowlah** (*SMH* 28/03)

As the election in NSW shows, Australians are now aware that the snake oil of WorkChoices comes with the rest of the snake.

**Scott Poynting, Newtown,** (*The Australian* 28/03)

David Hicks is at least as guilty as the women executed following the Salem witch trials of the 17th century. And his guilt has been proved beyond doubt by a judicial process with at least as much integrity as the Salem trials.

**Ian Bishop, Albany** (*The Australian* 28/03)

Santo Santoro's integrity is as intact as it ever was, and that is not very.

**B. Welch, Bridgeman Downs** (*The Australian* 30/03)

THE guilty plea by David Hicks has as much credibility as the statement broadcast on Iranian television by British Leading Seaman Faye Turney, admitting to trespassing in Iranian waters.

**John Ransley, Highgate Hill** (*The Australian* 30/03)

#### **Contact the AJDS!**

**PO Box 685 KEW 3101 Phone 9885 6260**

[info@ajds.org.au](mailto:info@ajds.org.au)

Editorial Phone 9318 3107 0417 508496

#### **Executive Committee**

Steve Brook	E-mail: <a href="mailto:sjbrook1@bigpond.com">sjbrook1@bigpond.com</a>
Helena Grunfeld	E-mail: <a href="mailto:helena_grunfeld@yahoo.com">helena_grunfeld@yahoo.com</a>
Renate Kamener	E-mail: <a href="mailto:renert2@bigpond.com">renert2@bigpond.com</a>
Leon Midalia	E-mail: <a href="mailto:lmidalia@bigpond.net.au">lmidalia@bigpond.net.au</a>
Sol Salbe (Editor)	E-mail: <a href="mailto:ssalbe@westnet.com.au">ssalbe@westnet.com.au</a>
Tom Wolkenberg	E-mail: <a href="mailto:linton@bigpond.com">linton@bigpond.com</a>
Harold Zwier	E-mail: <a href="mailto:hz@doublez.com.au">hz@doublez.com.au</a>

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