



# AJDS Newsletter

Volume 10, Issue 4

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

May 2009

## An historical seachange

Sometimes the course of history changes overnight. Think of the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima or the UN partition resolution of 1947. Occasionally it takes just a little bit longer, like the six days in June 1967 that changed Israel's history.

But every now and then, change comes in a gradual fashion. Nevertheless it can be as profound and as significant as the instantaneous variety. I would like to put forward the proposition that 2008-09 has seen the culmination of a change as momentous of those of 1947-49 and 1967.

Others have made similar observations. The *Jewish Voice for Peace's* Cecilie Surasky came up with an innovative analogy:

*For those of you old enough to remember making popcorn in a pot over the fire or stove, you know you have to wait a long time as the heat builds up slowly. Finally, just one lonely kernel pops. Then, an eternity later, another one pops on the other side of the pot. Wait awhile, and another one pops. When you're really hungry, it can feel like forever. But then something happens - the frequency starts to change and you get 2 or 3 kernels*

*popping at a time, first here and then there. And then, the unthinkable happens -- it's as though all the kernels start popping simultaneously in a big cacophony until there's no room left in the pot.*

Surasky's particular concern is open speaking and thinking. She has noted a sudden acceleration of this phenomenon after years of just occasional popping of voices here and there. Surasky listed Jon Stewart and Bill Moyers on Gaza and the *New York Times's* Roger Cohen's critical columns, particularly those challenging the Israeli view of Iran. Her list had a US flavour, but the changes

are not confined to that country or the media alone.

*Haaretz's* Zvi Bar'el compiled another list, pointing to the US-Iranian dialogue, a second visit to Syria by US officials, a new diplomatic plan prepared secretly, frequent visits by Arab leaders to the White House, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty waved in front of Israel, and Britain ready to talk with Hezbollah. And the United States is talking in terms of re-evaluating its attitude to Hamas.

The list of changes does not end there. The Obama administration in the US and the Rudd government in Australia waited till the last moment before deciding not to go to the Durban II conference. A few years ago it would have been lay down misere that such a decision would

have been announced with fanfare months in advance. Or take Obama's Chief of Staff, Rahm Emmanuel's, comments on prospects of peace: "In the next four years there is going to be a permanent status arrangement between Israel and the Palestinians on the basis of two states for two peoples, and *it doesn't matter to us at all who is Prime Minister*" (emphasis added). This was reported in the Israeli media by a reporter



**Netanyahu: I've prepared a plan. Obama: So have we**

*Amos Biderman in Haaretz*

with a reputation for getting it right, and it was never denied.

There's more. Obama has met nearly 50 leaders since he was elected, but Israel's Prime Minister is not one of them. When Netanyahu was fishing for an invite to coincide with addressing the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference, he was told that Obama had a full schedule. This is unheard of. Netanyahu is going to see Obama, but as part of a triumvirate and with equal billing to Hosni Mubarak and Abu Mazen. Not to mention that King Abdullah of Jordan beat them all to the

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Special AJDS event

### Israel, Zionism and Evolution of Jewish Identities.

**Speaker: Professor Yakov Rabkin, University of Montreal**

**Sunday 24 May 7.30pm**

Contact Tom Wolkenberg on 9885 6260 or Sol Salbe on 9318 3107 for details.

**The Australian Jewish  
Democratic Society Inc**  
(Affiliated with the Jewish  
Community Council of Victoria)

**Contact the AJDS!**

**PO Box 685 KEW 3101**

**Phone 9885 6260**

**Executive Committee**

**Steve Brook**

sjbrook1@bigpond.com

**Helen Rosenbaum**

hrose@vic.chariot.net.au

**Les Rosenblatt**

wandjina@vicnet.net.au

**Larry Stillman**

larryjhs@fastmail.fm

**Tom Wolkenberg**

lintom@bigpond.com

**Harold Zwier**

hz@doublez.com.au

**David Zyngier**

sndz@bigpond.com

**Newsletter Committee**

**Steve Brook, Miriam Faine, Margaret Jacobs, Vivienne Porzsolt, Dan Rabinovici, Les Rosenblatt, Sol Salbe (Editor)**

**Editorial Phone: 9318 3107 or  
0417 508496**

***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.

## ***In this issue...***

*How can you cram so many items into such a small space? Not much got left for this column. Look at what we cover: our own activities (p3), Australian society and politics pp4-5 ; important debate in regard to Israel - Is Uri Avnery right in suggesting that Israel might go fascist (p6) and how should we relate to boycotts of Israel (pp12-13). I think Margaret Jacobs does a particularly fine job in providing an overview of the latter.*

*There is also James Galbraith on the economic crisis -- one does not need to be dogmatic to provide a comprehensive analysis of its causes (pp8-9) . An eyewitness report on the UN conference on racism as well as two reviews you are unlikely to read anywhere else round up the issue.*

***Sol Salbe***

---

## **Correction:**

**In last month's article by Pablo Brait on climate change we omitted to mention that a version of that article had originally been published in *New Matilda*. Our apologies.**

---

*(Continued from page 1)*

honour.

You may think that these are wishful thinking lists, concocted by critics of Israel. But people in the forefront of the Israel-first camp have made similar observations. The *Australian* editorialised that the days when Washington agreed to whatever Israel wanted are over. More significantly, the Executive Director of AIPAC, Howard Kohr, spoke at the recent gathering and was quite upfront about the intellectual/political seachange that is undermining support for Israel. Kohr lamented the way in which criticism of Israel is no longer confined to the fringes: "No longer is this campaign confined to the ravings of the political far left or far right, but increasingly it is entering the American mainstream: an ordinary political discourse on our TV and radio talk shows; in the pages of our major newspapers and in countless blogs, in town hall meetings, on campuses and city squares . . ."

So why is this happening? Put simply, anyone encountering the news cannot possibly think of Israel as the victim. The Holocaust is but a faint memory for most politically active people.

For the vast majority, seeing Israel as the underdog means turning back the clock 42 years. Most of the population is too young to remember.

The economic crisis has forced many governments, particularly that of the US, to focus on priorities. Political luxuries are no longer affordable.

The US shares the view that the most important crisis zone is Afghanistan/Pakistan. It needs Iran onside. A rapprochement between Iran and US is on the cards, if not already visible.

Above all, Israel is in bad odour with many people around the world – a sentiment that goes all the way to our organisation. The "Georgian" tactics used to keep Israeli casualties to a minimum in Gaza kept domestic support at an unprecedented high level. But the corollary was that the brutal tactics resulting in high Palestinian civilian casualties have resulted in unprecedented opprobrium among people outside Israel.

Important as they are, the reasons for the seachange are not as crucial as grasping the nature of the change itself. I always remember the case of Prime Minister Billy McMahon in 1971. Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam had been visiting China, and McMahon severely criticised him for the silly notion of China becoming an important part of international politics and trade. Within days it was announced that US President Nixon was to visit China. McMahon missed the vital signs of the changes of China's position in the world. I saw the same thing when my friends on the Left continued to deny the impending collapse of the Soviet Union, even well after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the other Eastern European regimes. Those who do not understand the similar seachange in Israel/Palestine are likely to end up looking just as foolish.

**Sol Salbe**

## The AJDS month

### [Contributed]

The Jewish sages long ago observed that displaying a half-completed task wasn't wise. But at the moment this is where we are. There are many ideas and activities in the pipeline. While many great suggestions have been put forward, particularly for the end of the year, we will be involved in some delicate negotiations during that time but we cannot divulge the details as yet. Please stay tuned.

Actually there is one item that we can announce already. We have arranged a meeting with Professor Yakov Rabkin on the subject of Israel, Zionism and the Evolution of Jewish Identities. Professor Rabkin has been invited to teach and do research at Yale and Johns Hopkins Universities in the United States, Paris-Dauphine and Université Louis-Pasteur in France, as well as at the Hebrew and Tel-Aviv Universities in Israel. His recent book, *A Threat from Within: A History of Jewish Opposition to Zionism*, has been translated into seven languages and nominated for Canada's Governor-General Award and for the Hecht Prize in Israel. One of our previous guests, film maker Eric Scott, who hails from the same part of Canada as Rabkin, recommended us to him during his stay as La Trobe University's scholar in residence. The details are on the front page.



**Yakov Rabkin**

But the main reason we do not have as much as usual to show is that we are trying to work smarter. The Executive

has initiated a series of planning workshops designed to clarify our goals and aims. That process takes time. The first workshop, *Confirming history and clarifying our future directions*, took place on 19 April with an interesting mixture of members old and new and with varying political experiences.

Our facilitator, Helen Rosenbaum, clearly showed that she had put in a lot of effort. Using a mixture of innovative questioning, humour and old-fashioned cross examination, she helped the crystallisation of our individual views. Members presented their vision of the AJDS in visual form. While no points could have been awarded for artistic impression the range of concepts was astounding.

Rosenbaum observed some common themes. We all knew about the breadth of the organisation, so it was no surprise that the values articulated by AJDS are common to decent people. The organisation provides a space for decent people to come together, to be Jews in their own way and to hold attitudes to Israel in their own way. Our deep roots within the Jewish community were noted. There may be tensions in the relations, but we have placed ourselves within the community -- not outside it. Our voice might sometimes be different, but we are not defined by that difference. We define ourselves as Jews with a common interest in issues of social justice, anti-racism, human rights, conflict resolution and dialogue. Sometimes those interests lead to tension between us and the rest of the community.

There was considerable discussion about our role and what we can do with our resources. In particular, it was noted that we have been reactive more than proactive in recent years -- we need to become more proactive again.

---

## Venezuela from the inside

### Margaret Jacobs

An Ethiopian restaurant in Footscray. Just the place to meet Professor Michael Leibowitz, a US-born Canadian Marxist economist who has written about antisemitism in Venezuela, his current country of residence.

The seven AJDS members certainly got an incisive and frank insider's viewpoint on Venezuela from Leibowitz, who advises President Chavez from the Miranda (Higher Education) International Centre in Caracas. Leibowitz won the Isaac Deutscher memorial prize for 2004 and recently published *Build It Now: Socialism for the Twenty-First Century*.

Leibowitz highlighted the sharp divides between rich and poor, indigenous (black) and white. Despite lush countryside and several growing seasons each year, Venezuela imports 70 per cent of its food. The mass of the population is poor and urban (having recently come off the land), and suffering from the overvaluation of the currency that comes with being an exporter of oil: this makes imports very cheap and exporting (except for oil) impossible. The Latifundia (landowners with large landed estates) bitterly oppose Chavez' land reforms.

Leibowitz sighs when asked about allegations of state-

sanctioned antisemitism, the influx of Cuban doctors, the teachers' strike. These are the news items that pass for coverage of Venezuela in Australia, Canada, etc. ("CNN's 24-hour Get Rid of Chavez coverage", Leibowitz calls it) and reflect their source, opposition-owned media. Relevant context to the teachers' strike (not reported): there are five teachers' unions. The biggest is pro-Chavez and negotiated, successfully. Others struck, and failed completely.

The break-in at the synagogue had nothing to do with antisemitism: it was a robbery and an inside job, involving among others the rabbi's former bodyguard and local police. [The same explanation was offered by the Opposition-owned media - Ed.] The president made it very clear that antisemitism is not acceptable and some sections of the Venezuelan Jewish community publicly supported Chavez in this affair. However for Leibowitz it is inevitable that attacks such as those by Israeli in Gaza will lead to antisemitism in any country, in the absence of strong Jewish voices condemning such actions. Leibowitz surmised that there were also differences between the Ashkenazi and the older Sephardi community with the latter being more pro-Chavez. The Editorial Committee has resolved to try to follow up the leads provided by him in looking at antisemitism in Venezuela.

## Sad tidings in the *Monthly*

### Sol Salbe

It is a story in which everyone is Jewish: the editor (Sally Warhaft), the publisher (Morry Schwartz), the chair of the Editorial Board (Robert Manne). Even the lawyer engaged by Warhaft (Josh Bornstein) was Jewish. But for some reason the departure of Sally Warhaft from the *Monthly* and the ensuing media kerfuffle did not make it to the *Australian Jewish News*.

For the *AJN* this was the second snub of Warhaft: when Kevin Rudd's 2020 conference fell on the Pesach weekend the paper listed all those Jews who nevertheless attended, omitting her.

For us in the AJDS the problem is different. We have a conflict of interest. In the past few years we have invited all three chief protagonists to speak at our Annual Dinner. Only one actually accepted: Sally Warhaft, who also pointed out that attending an AJDS dinner at the age of 12 and listening to Barry Jones was one of her earliest political experiences. But past this necessary proper disclosure we have expressed some very positive views of all those involved, both in this *Newsletter* and elsewhere.

With conflicting accounts, very much in the "he said she said" mode, it is hard to make heads or tails out of the story but it is clear that relationships on the editorial board turned very sour. Somebody had to leave, and that seeing the publisher/owner wasn't going to go away, it was the editor. Indeed from reading the various accounts, and Crikey.com.au alone made it a daily feature, it seems that no one comes out of it smelling like roses. The authority of the editor was clearly undermined. Robert Manne admitted to chasing writers

independently of Warhaft. There were diametrically opposed accounts of one of the most talked about instances, in regard to the Victorian bushfires. Manne has explained how many of the victims were family friends (he lives close to the area) and contends that he had consulted with the editor before approaching David Marr. But it is not only Warhaft who disagrees with that account. Marr's own version appeared in the *Age*: "David Marr yesterday confirmed he had been approached by Professor Manne to write a 10,000 word piece for the next issue. When he emailed Dr Warhaft to discuss the piece, she knew nothing of it -- and had approached author Richard Flanagan to work on a similar subject".



Sally Warhaft

On the other hand there were some highly critical accounts of Warhaft by apparently disinterested parties. Above all, this is a sad occasion for those of us who subscribe to and enjoy the *Monthly*. Its success, measured particularly in terms of its 30,000 circulation, is undoubtedly owed to the outgoing editor. But the publication did have its flaws. Warhaft's love affair with Labor politics has coloured her political outlook. Unfortunately this came through in the magazine, (as it did in her address to us in 2007).

Also unfortunate was the way in which the most important politically contentious issue of our time, that of the Israel/Palestine conflict, has been totally absent from the magazine. Hopefully in future this aspect will change, if for no other reason that the focus is firmly now on the magazine.

---

## Open hearts to refugees

A Cairns skipper is urging people to think twice before condemning asylum seekers, after a first-hand encounter with an unseaworthy vessel carrying nearly 60 Afghans. The plea comes as Australian authorities intercepted the eleventh boat this year.

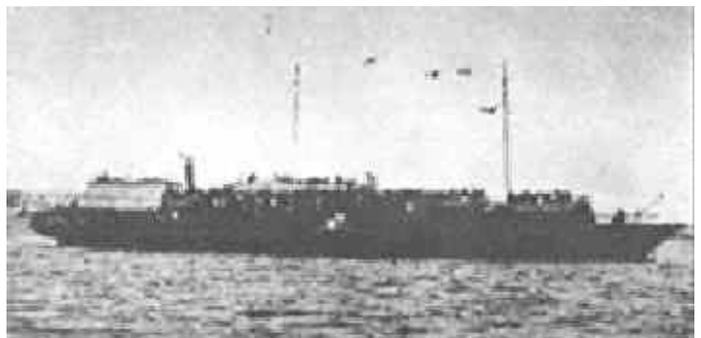
Paul Smith, the skipper of the *Lady Sandra*, an offshore oil rig support ship working off the Broome coast in Western Australia, came to the rescue of an overloaded boat on April 25.

He said the encounter had changed his view about asylum seekers after seeing the "sheer desperation" and "personal risks taken" by those on board.

"Regardless of personal feelings on how refugee boats and their unfortunate and desperate human cargo should be treated, the plight of 56 persons on board a small and unseaworthy vessel cannot be ignored," he said. "The crew of the *Lady Sandra* were quick to respond and offer assistance as soon as possible. All crew on board were touched by this experience and were moved by the plight of these people who could be so desperate to set sail with so very little. These people did not have suitcases or bags and their worldly possessions were what they were wearing."

Smith said the cramped boat had no toilets or safety equipment, little food and water, inadequate navigation

equipment and was 200 km off course but had no communication facilities. He said it had nearly run out of fuel and it was leaking badly. "Their desperate situation is a tragedy and before we condemn the refugee problem on our northern shores, we need to fully understand the plight of these people," he said.



SS Struma: Refugee boats have been abandoned before

"Once we saw people in that situation, it really makes you think differently. I'm sure there are some crooks trying to get into Australia but most would be genuine people seeking freedom. We need to try and understand these people and not condemn them."

[From Jennifer Eliot of the *Cairns Post*]

# The dangers of Internet censorship

## Larry Stillman

I glanced through an old book before I started to write this article. It's nearly 40 years since Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris published *Australia's Censorship Crisis*, and aside from the fact that electronic systems of communication are now pervasive, nothing much seems to have changed in how governments behave and react to communications that appear to threaten our morality or national security.

Back when such threats to the community as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or *Portnoy's Complaint* led to suitcases being searched at ship terminals or airports, Dutton concluded his chapter with: "Of course children need protection, and always will. But Australia is not a nation of children." Thus, in the current climate of moral panic about the effects of online pornography, Dutton's observation should be kept in mind. Society has every right to protect children, but how we protect them is the question. Thus, Senator Conroy's recent suggestion that the Australian Communications and Media Authority's secret blacklist of sites (supposedly only child pornography, pro-rape and incest) is up to scratch is scary.

As recent leaks from Wikileaks have shown, the secret list is itself full of holes, often out of date, and has even covered political sites, and by accident, a dentist's site that had been hijacked by the Russian mafia. Thus, to think that well-intentioned but pressured bureaucrats can manage to get a perfect score in what they classify is preposterous, and even more preposterous was the minister's suggestion that software could be 100 per cent effective to only include the really nasty stuff.

Under the current regime, sites covering euthanasia,

abortion and terrorism could be covered under the internet service provider filters. The ridiculousness of it all was proven with the excuse of 'technical error' for including PG-rated website photos by Bill Henson on the list. Given the complexity of the legal system, if the system goes into operation, anyone whose site is hijacked or accidentally included is going to have a long wait for a remedy, with lost income and reputation to boot (if they have the money to go to court, that is). But worst of all is the fact that much of the worst pornography is not on the web, but contained in private bulletin boards, emails or other services that are impossible to police.

We also need to keep in mind the broader application of current security laws and their censorship of print materials in the current environment. Anti-terror legislation was used in 2006 to refuse classification for two pro-terrorism books from Islamic sources. The Australian Federal Police have questioned a student for borrowing books on Palestinian terrorism. Yet, while writing this piece, I downloaded a copy of one of the banned Islamic terrorism books.

The answer: think about what Dutton and Harris suggested. "Instead of secret decision-making, we must possess the civil right to test the competence of the banners, the consistency of standards, and application or misapplication of laws which may be good, indifferent, or rotten. If we cannot do this, then we live under a system of immoralautocracy." That is how we need to treat the issue of contemporary porn and terror — with public caution, supervision and extreme technical care.

**[Larry Stillman is a committee member of Liberty. First published in that organisation's newsletter.]**

---

## Hearing their pain

### Forward Editorial

*[Don't you wish we could see editorials like this in our mainstream media?]*

The tale of the Palestinian youth orchestra players from the Jenin refugee camp who performed for Holocaust survivors in Israel is a classic illustration of the way giddy hope is squashed by political reality in today's Middle East. It began with warm feelings and good intentions — bring Palestinian teenagers from one of the West Bank's most notorious refugee camps to serenade elderly Jews in a setting where the only common language is music and the only response required is to clap in appreciation. It ended with the outrageous move by Jenin's self-styled leaders to condemn the program and bar the orchestra's director, an Israeli Arab, from entering the camp.

It's tempting to view this sorry episode as one more reason to believe that the larger goal of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation is impossible when even an hour-long program played with scratchy violins is viewed as a traitorous act. But, of course, this is about more than the music, or even the participants. It's about the unwillingness of both peoples to acknowledge each other's suffering.

Denying the centrality of the Holocaust to modern Israeli identity is like telling an African-American that slavery and

segregation were just minor mistakes in US history. But denying that Palestinians have suffered greatly since the founding of the state of Israel is also a wilful injustice.

The numbers of murdered, maimed and misplaced are not equal. The Holocaust was unlike any other genocide because of its calculated use of modern technology to inflict maximum destruction. That so many in the Arab world, and beyond, refuse to acknowledge it is painful and infuriating. It sure makes conversation difficult.

Palestinian suffering has a different character and cause, and yet it is no less real to those who mourn loved ones and long for what they consider their homeland. Recognising one hurt need not obviate another.

Closing the Jenin youth orchestra — ironically called "Strings of Freedom" — was bone-headed and sinister. It was a failure of leadership and cannot be justified. But it points to the larger challenge: the need to actually listen to the mournful tune of one's enemy.



**Jenin youth orchestra**

# Is Uri Avnery right about danger of fascism in Israel?

## Sol Salbe

Is there a possibility that a fascist regime might come to power in Israel? The question was recently posed by well-known Israeli peace movement leader Uri Avnery.

His initial reply was a resounding NO. As he puts it: "After the Holocaust which Nazi fascism brought upon us? Can one even imagine that Israelis would become something like the Nazis?"

But Avnery is concerned at the Avigdor Lieberman phenomenon. "Many of his voters are immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who look upon their 'Evet', an immigrant from the ex-Soviet region of Moldova, as a representative of their 'sector'. Although many of them brought with them a right-wing, anti-democratic and even racist world view from their former homeland, they do not pose by themselves a danger to Israeli democracy. However, Avnery was more worried about Lieberman's new voters: "Israeli-born youngsters, many of whom had recently taken part in the Gaza War. They voted for him because they believed that he would kick the Arab citizens out of Israel, and the Palestinians out of the entire historical country.

"These are not marginal people, fanatical or underprivileged, but normal youngsters who finished high school and served in the army, who dance in the discotheques and intend to found families. If such people are voting *en masse* for a declared racist with a pungent fascist odour, the phenomenon cannot be ignored."

For Avnery, fascism was not a specifically German disease: "Fascism is a unique phenomenon and has unique traits: the notion of being a 'superior nation', the denial of the humanity of other nations and national minorities, a cult of the leader, a cult of violence, disdain for democracy, an adoration of war, contempt for accepted morality. All these attributes together create the phenomenon, which has no agreed scientific definition."

He then goes on to suggest that a fascist revolution breaks out when a very special personality meets with a very special national situation: "Germany at the end of the Weimar republic has also been the subject of many books. What made the German people adopt Nazism? Historical causes, rooted in the terrible catastrophe of the Thirty-year War or even earlier events? The sense of humiliation after the defeat in World War I? The anger at the victors, who ground Germany into the dust and imposed huge indemnities? The terrible inflation of 1923, which wiped out the savings of entire classes? The Great Depression of 1929, which threw millions of decent and diligent Germans into the street?"

"This question, too, has found no satisfying answer. Other people have also been humiliated. Other people have lost wars. The Great Depression hit dozens of countries. In the US and the UK, too, millions were laid off. Why did fascism not seize power in those countries (except in Italy, of course)? In my opinion, the fatal spark was ignited at a fateful moment when a people ready for fascism met the man with the attributes of a fascist leader."

The writer suggests that Hitler was such a person. There are circumstances in which an individual can make the difference and change history. He provides the example

of Lenin in 1917, where a single person made the difference.

Avnery then poses the question: "Is the State of Israel approaching an existential crisis – moral, political, economic – that could leave it an endangered nation? Can Lieberman, or someone who could take his place, turn out to be a demonic personality like Hitler, or at least Mussolini?"

"In our present situation there are some dangerous indications. The last war showed a further decline in our moral standards. The hatred towards Israel's Arab minority is on the rise, and so is the hatred towards the occupied Palestinian people who are suffering a slow strangulation. In some circles, the cult of brute force is gaining strength. The democratic regime is in a never-ending crisis. The economic situation may descend into chaos, so that the masses will long for a 'strong man'. And the belief that we are a 'chosen people' is already deeply rooted."

## Counter arguments

Avnery ends by stating that the red light of danger is blinking. His argument does carry a certain force, but his analysis seems to ignore several key factors.

Germany in the early '30s was a very much different country than Israel now. While it was trading extensively, it was in no way as dependent on international trade as Israel is now. The dynamics of globalisation will make it very difficult for Israel to go its own way beyond a certain level. The precursor of globalisation on the European level created the forces that brought down fascist Spain and the similar regime in Portugal. The process of international integration has gone much further. And there are few nations on this planet who are as proportionately involved in international trade as Israel.

A related issue is international travel. Israelis travel overseas more than most people. Taking the expression literally (over the sea) they are probably the world champions. Those same "sane" young people whom Avnery is speaking about will soon change their minds about their strong man given the hostility they will encounter abroad or more likely the outright bans that will confine them at home.

And can Israel maintain its international position without external support? There's probably no country on the planet as dependent on its friends abroad. Young Jews in countries like the US are already deserting its cause in droves. What chance does Israel have for international backing if it crosses the line into fascism? One would dare say that even a John Howard would not back a fascist Israel on the world stage.

When fascist leaders take power, they do so with at least the acquiescence of the power elites. The tight-knit Israeli elite is unlikely to accept anything that will adversely affect their international business.

To my mind, the counter arguments are persuasive. But that does not mean that Israel's friends should not remain vigilant. There are undemocratic forces at play. The recent Gaza war showed that Israelis are prepared to adopt an attitude at variance with the rest of the world, and the rest of the world Jewish community. But that kind of disequilibrium cannot last.

## After Durban II, egg on whose faces?

### Kathleen Peratis

By any conventional standard, the declaration issued at the conclusion of the Durban II global conference on racism, held in Geneva in late April, was a signal — and a very, very positive achievement. It is forward-looking in its commitment to protect victims of racism, includes significant new protections for migrants, omits the pernicious idea pushed by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference that religions should be protected from “defamation” and does not single out Israel for anything.

Even though the singular rant of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad got all the press, the conference was not the “hatefest” that many Jews had confidently and noisily predicted. As early as February, the American Jewish Committee’s David Harris was calling the Durban II planning process “discredited,” while the Anti-Defamation League cautioned governments and NGOs to say “Not again” and insisted, “This time, no one can say let’s just wait to see what happens.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, Durban II’s secretary general, complained of a “widespread and highly organised campaign of disinformation” regarding the conference. While she has declined to elaborate on this statement, many believe that she was referring to the efforts of Jewish groups.

But the fears expressed by Jewish organisations proved to be unfounded. Indeed, in negotiations over the conference declaration’s text, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference did not end up playing a destructive role. Instead, it showed a willingness to accommodate most American (and Israeli) red lines. Before the Durban II conference even began, virtually all significant American concerns — some of which were about Israel and Jews, and many of which were not — had been accommodated, and properly so.

The one demand that was not met proved to be a killer: The conference document endorsed Durban I. This was understood by many observers to be simply UN-speak — no conference ever fails to endorse its predecessors. But to many Jewish groups, it amounted to nothing less than the wholesale incorporation into Durban II of all of Durban I’s antisemitic, Holocaust-denying, genocidal ugliness.

I was at Durban I, and I walked out of its NGO forum

along with scores of other Jews. In light of the Durban I trauma, Jewish scepticism over anything named “Durban” is understandable. But Durban II *was not* Durban I. The unshakable assumption that it was, however, led the United States, Israel and eight other nations not to attend.

Despite the no-shows, the 180 or so countries that did attend achieved astonishing consensus. Western and Muslim governments actually worked together effectively — the very goal President Obama fervently promotes but simultaneously undermined by pulling out of this conference.

Still, there are opportunities for redemption. An American endorsement of the conference’s declaration would, even now, help create a powerful global force against racism. Unfortunately, that doesn’t seem likely. Instead, the future of the Durban II process is uncertain.

This is a shame, and it presents a problem to the Jewish community. Jewish groups played such a prominent role in criticising Durban II that they were the very first to be informed by the White House of its decision to boycott the conference. (Human rights groups were informed second and civil rights groups third.) International human rights groups, however, think that the Durban II declaration is worth fighting for and are stunned that the opportunity it presents is being squandered. Sadder still, it is no longer assumed that Jewish groups will be allies in global human rights work.

Jews were once seen as being at the forefront of the global campaign for human rights, which is surely where we belong. It’s time for us to once again assume our rightful place in this struggle, and there is no shortage of places to start. One of them is here and now: We can urge the United States to signal its approval of the Durban II declaration. It might be awkward for the White House and for Jewish organisations to do such a sudden turnaround, but furthering the global fight against racism is certainly worth a little egg on the face.

**[Kathleen Peratis, a partner at the New York law firm Outten & Golden, is a board member emerita of Human Rights Watch. First published in the *Forward*.]**



**Kathleen Peratis**

### Seeger told us so

I have always disliked the smugness of people who say “I told you so!” after an unpredictable event. However I am prepared to make one exception — Pete Seeger. Back in 1963, at the Melbourne Town Hall, I was in the fourth, or maybe fifth row of the overflow audience which had come to meet the already-legendary American folk singer face to face. We were not disappointed.

In a concert lasting well over an hour, Pete told us through his songs that civil rights had to be protected, war must be opposed, the planet could use all the care we could give it, children were sacred and women deserved equal status with men. All in all, it was about time humanity in general had a better deal.

The Cold War was still at its height, and it was no surprise that the Melbourne media did not even deign to

mention the Seeger concert. It was all Red propaganda, you see, and no one could possibly take it seriously, or even be allowed to judge it for themselves.

It’s more than forty years later, and Pete Seeger, now aged 90, is still with us. He has spent most of those years campaigning around issues close to his heart, issues which have become the commonsense of our own time. And he told us so.

### Steve Brook



**Pete Seeger at Obama inauguration**

# Causes of the Crisis

## James K. Galbraith

[These remarks were delivered to a meeting of the Texas Lyceum in Austin on 3 April, at a debate between University of Texas professor James Galbraith, an Observer contributing writer, and former US House of Representatives Majority Leader Richard Armey, chief instigator of the recent Astroturf "tea party" protests. Armey had begun his remarks by noting that his rule in life was "never trust anyone from Austin or Boston," and proceeded to declare his allegiance to the "Austrian School" of economics, a libertarian view that regards public intervention in private markets as socialism.]

It is of course a pleasure to be with you today. I was born in Boston, and I am proud of it. And I have lived 24 years in Austin -- and I'm proud of that.

Leader Armey spoke to you of his admiration for Austrian economics. I can't resist telling you that when the Vienna Economics Institute celebrated its centennial, many years ago, they invited, as their keynote speaker, my father [John Kenneth Galbraith]. The leading economists of the Austrian school -- including von Hayek and von Haberler -- returned for the occasion. And so my father took a moment to reflect on the economic triumphs of the Austrian Republic since the war, which, he said, "would not have been possible without the contribution of these men." They nodded, briefly, until it dawned on them what he meant. They'd all left the country in the 1930s.

My own economics is American: genus Institutionalist; species: Galbraithian.

This is a panel on the crisis. Mr Moderator, you ask what is the root cause? My reply is in three parts.

### Not self-stabilising

First, an idea. The idea that capitalism, for all its considerable virtues, is inherently self-stabilising, that government and private business are adversaries rather than partners; the idea that freedom without responsibility is a viable business principle; the idea that regulation, in financial matters especially, can be dispensed with. We tried it, and we see the result.

Second, a person. It would not be right to blame any single person for these events, but if I had to choose one to name it would be a Texan, our own distinguished former Senator Phil Gramm. I'd cite specifically the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act-the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act-in 1999, after which it took less than a decade to reproduce all the pathologies that Glass-Steagall had been enacted to deal with in 1933. I'd also cite the Commodity Futures Modernisation Act, slipped into an 11,000-page appro-

priations bill in December 2000 as Congress was adjourning following Bush vs Gore. This measure deregulated energy futures trading, enabling Enron and legitimating credit-default swaps, and creating a massive vector for the transmission of financial risk throughout the global system. When the *Washington Post* caught up with me at an airport in Parkersburg, West Virginia, a year ago to ask for a comment on Gramm's role, I said very quickly that he was "the sorcerer's apprentice of financial instability and disaster." They put that on the front page. I do have to give Gramm some credit: When the *Post* called him up and read that to him, he said, "I deny it."

Third, a policy. This was the abandonment of state responsibility for financial regulation: the regulation of mortgage originations, of underwriting, and of securitisation. This abandonment was not subtle: The first head of the Office of Thrift Supervision in the George W. Bush administration came to a press conference on one occasion with a stack of copies of the Federal Register and a chainsaw. A chainsaw. The message was clear. And it led to the explosion of liars' loans, neutron loans (which destroy people but leave buildings intact), and toxic waste. That these were terms of art in finance tells you what you need to know.

### Subprime

Subprime securities are inherently unsafe and should never have been permitted. They are based on loans to borrowers who cannot document their income and who may have bad credit histories, and they are collateralised by houses with fraudulently inflated appraisals, rated by agencies that did not examine the loan files. Writing in the *Washington Post*, Richard Cohen described one case, of Marvene Halterman of Avondale, Arizona:

At age 61, after 13 years of uninterrupted unemployment and at least as many of living on welfare, she got a mortgage. She got it even though at one time she had 23 people living in the house (44 square metres, one bath) and some ramshackle outbuildings. She got it for \$103,000, an amount that far exceeded the value of the house. The place has since been condemned. ... Halterman's house was never exactly a showcase -- the city had once cited her for all the junk (clothes, tyres, etc.) on her lawn. Nevertheless, a local financial institution with the cover-your-wallet name of Integrity Funding LLC



James K Galbraith



(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

gave her a mortgage, valuing the house at about twice what a nearby and comparable property sold for. ... Integrity Funding then sold the loan to Wells Fargo & Co., which sold it to HSBC Holdings PLC, which then packaged it with thousands of other risky mortgages and offered the indigestible porridge to investors. Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service took a look at it all, as they are supposed to do, and pronounced it 'triple-A.'

The consequence of tolerating this and like behaviour is a collapse of trust, a collapse of asset values, and a collapse of the financial system. That is what has happened, and what we have to deal with now.

### Can "stimulus" get us out?

As a matter of economics, public spending substitutes for private spending. It provides jobs, motivates useful activity, staves off despair. But it is not self-sustaining in the absence of a viable private credit system. The idea that we will be on the road to full recovery and returning to high employment in a year or so therefore seems to me to be an illusion. And for this reason, the emphasis on short-term, "shovel-ready" projects in the expansion package, while understandable, was a mistake. As in the New Deal, we need both the Works Progress Administration, headed by Harry Hopkins, to provide employment, and the Public Works Administration, headed by Harold Ickes, to rebuild the country.

The desire for a return to normal is very powerful. It moti-

vates both the ritual confidence of public officials and the dry numerical optimism of business economists, who always see prosperity just around the corner. The forecasts of these people, like those of official agencies such as the Congressional Budget Office, always see a turnaround within a year and a return to high employment within four or five years. In a strict sense, the belief is without foundation. Liquidation of excessive debt is now, and will remain for a time, the highest priority of American households. That is in part because for the moment they want to hold on to cash, and therefore they do not wish to borrow, and in part because with the collapse of house values, they no longer have collateral to borrow against. And so long as that is the case, there can be no strong recovery of private spending or business investment.

The risk we run, in public policy, is not inflation. It is lack of persistence, a premature reversal of direction, and of course the fear of large numbers. If deficits in the trillions and public debt in the tens of trillions scare you, this is not a line of work you should be in.

The ultimate goals of policy are not measured by deficits or debt. They are measured by the performance of the economy itself. Here Leader Armey and I agree. He spoke with approval, in his remarks, of the goals of 3 percent unemployment and 4 percent inflation embodied in the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978. Which, as a 24-year-old member of the staff of the House Banking Committee in 1976, I drafted.

---

## What's happening to Israeli democracy and freedom?

### Alex Nissen

How does one begin to describe what is happening to freedom of expression and debate in Israel? When is it time for the global Jewish communities to raise their voices in support of the Israeli peace movements and against the actions of the Israeli government to suppress dissent? Is it not our responsibility as Jews to hold Israel accountable for its actions?

Last year the Israeli Attorney-General announced a criminal investigation into New Profile – a feminist movement whose proclaimed aim is "civilisation of society in Israel" and "opposition to the undue influence of the military on daily life". New Profile is part of the Coalition of Women for Peace. The group's prime role is to support young Israelis by providing information and counselling. They also provide support and information on imprisoned conscientious objectors.

In late April, New Profile activist houses all over the country were raided. Their computers were confiscated, and they were summoned for interrogation. Since then, they have been released on bail under restraining orders and were told that during the next 30 days they are forbidden to contact other members of the movement. Contrary to the police's accusation, the organisation is adamant that "We do not encourage, incite or preach in favour of draft dodging."

"Amongst those interrogated: Analeen Kish, aged 70, a ceramics artist, daughter of a family of the "Righteous among the Nations" who converted to Judaism after her marriage to Holocaust survivor Dr. Eldad Kish, active in

organisations of Dutch Holocaust survivors in Israel. The pair have six grandchildren; Miriam Hadar, age 51, an editor and translator, mother of two, married to professor of psychology Uri Hadar."

As we go to press police have summoned an additional ten activists for interrogation. What happened to freedom of expression and dissent in Israel?

Why is the Israeli government attacking feminist peace organisations now? Is it because this new Israeli government has moved more to the Right with the inclusion of Avigdor Lieberman, who is known for his racism? What is our responsibility to the Israeli peace movement, freedom of expression, dissent, justice and human rights? When is it right for us to take action? Does silence in knowing what is really happening yet ignoring the situation make us complicit?

For those who love and care about Israel, watching what is happening is painful. With all the accessible information about the continuous deterioration of human rights, is it not time to voice our opinion?

More information: <http://www.newprofile.org/english>

**[Alex Nissen is a member of the Coalition of Women for Peace. She divides her time between Melbourne and Israel.]**



**73-year-old Dr Dorothy Naor is one of the women taken into custody**

# Why are we fighting in Afghanistan?

## Brian Walters

So we are going to send another 450 young Australians to fight in Afghanistan. Some of these young men will die. Others will be fearfully injured. We'd better be very sure it is worth putting our people in harm's way.

Kevin Rudd gave only two reasons: to prevent Australians dying from terrorism and to comply with our ANZUS treaty obligations.

Sending soldiers to occupy a foreign country far from our shores is no way to repress terrorism. If anything, the resentments created are apt to nourish terrorism and make us more of a target. The Taliban gain their traction from fighting foreign invaders and the al-Qaeda training camps are long gone anyway. The PM's first reason makes no sense: getting Australians killed is no way to protect Australians.

As for his second reason, the ANZUS treaty imposes no obligation on Australia relevant to the Afghan conflict. The operative article provides:

The Parties will consult together whenever in the opinion of any of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened in the Pacific.

The requirement is for consultation, not the sending of troops, and relates to threats in the Pacific -- a theatre which on no view includes Afghanistan. Of course, the US no longer respects any obligation to our neighbour New Zealand under this treaty anyway.

## Aims?

Why are we in Afghanistan at all? What really are the aims of this war? How will we even know when we've won it? Unless there are clear answers to these questions, our involvement is immoral.

Nine days after the 9/11 attack, President George W Bush demanded that Afghanistan "deliver to United States authorities all of the leaders of Al-Qaeda who hide in your land." The demand was an ultimatum. President Bush said in his address to Congress "They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate."

The Taliban rulers of Afghanistan asked for evidence to demonstrate Osama bin Laden's involvement in the September 11 attacks. If such evidence warranted a trial, they offered to handle the trial in Afghanistan.

The US refused to offer any evidence. They made no request for extradition. There was no pretence of legal process. Like the leader of a Southern lynch mob, Dubya was sending in his boys to do rough justice on Osama bin Laden and wasn't going to let legalities get in the way.

On 7 October 2001 the invasion began with a large-scale bombardment. The stated purpose was to capture Bin Laden, destroy al-Qaeda, and remove the Taliban regime for harbouring them. For thousands of years, conquering armies had come to Afghanistan because of its strategic position at the crossroads of empires. Now it was invaded because it was a dead end backwater where a fugitive was hiding.

## Missed bin Laden

The US and its allies missed Osama bin Laden, so the rhetoric for the war changed. It was really, we were told, all about restoring democracy (often coupled with restoring the rights of women).

If this is the reason Australia sent troops to Afghanistan, it hasn't worked. Sure, there now is a vote in Afghanistan for those where Kabul's writ runs and that is something. But without more it does not amount to democracy. It is the essence of democracy to respect the rule of law and to listen to different voices. To go to war rather than go to law, to use force rather than negotiation, is the antithesis of the democratic ideal. Far from spreading democracy, the invasion has undermined it. At the same time, the new regime in Afghanistan has proved almost as oppressive to women as the Taliban.

More than seven years after the invasion, the Taliban remains a growing force precisely because of the western military presence. Tension with Pakistan and throughout the region has spread. There is no official record of civilian casualties, but the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan lists 2,118 Afghan civilians killed by armed conflict in 2008 alone. The civilians killed in Afghanistan now far outnumber those killed in the US on 9/11.

Afghanistan has been a sorry place for invaders. In 1839 the British amassed their huge Army of the Indus, which stretched for 30 miles when it marched. They invaded Afghanistan, engaged in regime change, but an insurgency slowly built up around them. When they finally retreated in 1842, only one man made it out to the British garrison at Jallalabad. More recently the Soviets, with far larger forces than those currently occupying the country, were eventually driven out.

Sending more troops to Afghanistan only exacerbates the folly of our involvement in the first place. Far from sending more troops, it's time to bring our young men and women home.

**[Brian Walters is a Melbourne barrister and human rights advocate. First published in Crikey.com.au. Reminder: The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS.]**



# RAISINS AND ALMONDS

## Gaza workers miss out on compo

Thousands of Gazans injured in work-related accidents in Israel have not received their National Insurance Institute disability payments since January. The workers have approached the Workers Advice Centre, saying the benefit payments were suddenly and inexplicably stopped.

WAC said that about 5,000 Gazans became disabled following work-related incidents in Israel, and were receiving disability benefits from Israel. They were legally employed within Israel and their injuries were accepted as work related by the insurer. They receive a monthly payment of about \$500.

The NII reported about 700 payment cheques that were returned to their offices without reaching their destination. Prior to December 2008 the benefits were transmitted to the beneficiaries' accounts in the Bank of Palestine, via Israeli banks. Since January 2009 Israeli banks no longer operate such transactions, and no alternative has yet been found.

"We are not guilty of the political situation, we are not guilty of the bureaucracy or of what's been happening in Gaza, we are disabled and hungry," said Zachi Masri, a resident of Gaza entitled to disability benefits. "Before the war there were some Abu Mazen (Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas) people connecting us to the Insurance Institute, but since the war it all stopped and there's no one to talk to anymore. We have a right to live with dignity after working loyally until the very end."

WAC director Assaf Adiv said, "The workers are in a state of uncertainty. They include a severely injured person with 75 per cent disability. These people were entirely dependent on even the smallest benefits, and without them they may reach the point of starvation."

[From WAC]

## No refugee flood

Amidst the hysteria about asylum seekers, here is the hard core data from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Australia still rates so low as a country of asylum that we are off the radar. 2008 figures for asylum applications lodged are: EU received 289,000, USA and Canada received 85,900, Australia received 4,750 -- hardly a flood and not numbers that we cannot handle.

In terms of country of origin, Afghans moved from ninth place on the list of source countries for asylum seekers to fourth place. It seems as if those who can will do anything to get away from the violent and unbearable living conditions there, conditions that remain despite the trillions spent on war there.

Further information is available at [unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/49c796572.pdf](http://unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/49c796572.pdf)

[From Pamela Curr of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre]

## Aboriginal wages scheme to reconsider rejected claims

It will be easier for thousands of people to win back millions in wages stolen from them while working under Aboriginal protection acts a generation ago after NSW agreed to review cases.

In the final days of the Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme it was decided to extend the program until June 30, 2010, though applications for compensation must be received by May 31 this year.

Under the extension, all applications rejected so far will be reviewed, claims with no records will be rechecked and any payment of less than \$11,000 will be topped up to that amount. Oral and non-documentary evidence will now be allowed.

The changes follow a report to cabinet by the members of the scheme's panel, chaired by the former senator Aden Ridgeway. The Government has refused to make the report public. It is understood to be critical that just over \$1 million of an estimated \$70

million debt had been paid.

Lawyers for claimants say 60 per cent of claims have been rejected because much of the evidence, held by government agencies, was lost.

[From Joel Gibson of the SMH via the Stolen Wages Campaign]

## Birthday statistics

On the eve of the recent Independence Day, the Central Bureau of Statistics maintained the tradition of publishing the number of Israeli residents at this time. The total figure provided was 7.4 million people.

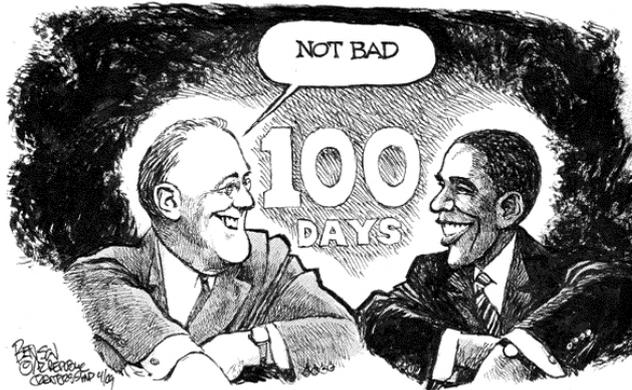
The overwhelming Jewish majority in the country has been maintained. According to the statistics provided by the Bureau, 75.5% of Israel's residents at this time are Jewish, while only 24.5% of the country's residents are not Jewish.

These figures are applicable to the area within the Green Line only (the one recognised by the Australian government but not shown on Israeli maps). Within the total area whose registration of births and death is controlled by the Israeli Interior Ministry, the figures are quite different: the Israeli government rules over 11.43 million people at this time.

Of those, 5.6 million people are Jewish, while 5.83 million people are not Jewish (2.46 million Palestinians in the West Bank, 1.55 million Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip, 1.5 million Palestinians who are citizens of the State of Israel, and another 0.32 million people characterised as "other non-Jews.")

For the first time in Israel's history, Jews are a minority in the area under its control.

[From B Michael in *Yediot Acharonot*.]



## Sanctions or not?

### Margaret Jacobs

*[Within the AJDS, virtually every single position is represented on the issue of taking sanctions against Israel for its continuing Occupation of the Palestinian Territories. However, the Editorial Committee was unanimous the subject ought to be reviewed and discussed. Contributions on this subject (as on every other one) are always welcome.]*

One thing can safely be said about the “sanctions against Israel” question: it is a powerful concentrator of the mind and exposé of woolly thinking. Two recent publications are a case in point. Ran Greenstein, an Israeli-born academic based in South Africa, proposes a tightly argued and highly specific sanctions strategy grounded in his assessment of Israeli academics as “seeing themselves as an integral part of the global academic community” (Reflections on Academic Sanctions). The debate between *No Logo* author Naomi Klein and Rabbi Arthur Waskow (*In These Times*) is conducted in broader terms, encompassing as it does the more general notion of Boycott, Disinvestment, Sanctions (BDS) as first proposed by Palestinians in 2005.

Think sanctions, think South Africa—where sanctions were called for by its black citizens, despite possible adverse effects on themselves. The South African narrative invoked by all three commentators on Israel certainly sharpens the focus of their debate. As Greenstein points out, in South Africa it was impossible for whites to ignore the existence of the black population: “the reality of Apartheid was fully visible” (to all). By contrast, and disturbingly for Greenstein (and Klein agrees), in Israel it is possible for Jewish Israelis to continue to live under a state of normalcy. “While the occupation is still the paramount reality in the daily lives of Palestinians, it has become invisible to the majority of Israelis (academics included), who neither see it nor feel its presence in their daily lives.”

### Klein, Waskow debate

A recognition of this invisibility may or may not have been a contributing factor to the call by Palestinians for sanctions. For Rabbi Arthur Waskow, the fact that Palestinians call for them is no reason to necessarily support BDS: many Palestinians also supported Hamas’ rocket attacks on Israeli civilians. For Klein however the point is precisely the opposite: here is a non-violent tactic, advocated by Palestinians themselves; the limitations on, say, Israeli academic freedoms that might flow from BDS bear no comparison with the effects of bombs on Palestinian schools and universities.

Klein and Waskow agree that violent attacks on each other by the two sides have failed as a strategy—but they disagree on the alternatives. Their dialogue is somewhat

frustrating. Rather than directly countering Klein’s arguments, Waskow returns again and again to his proposed alternative. (It is difficult not to conclude that he may not be aware of or want to admit to the precise reason for his opposition to BDS.) His proposals all revolve around what he refers to as an Abrahamic Alliance of Jews, Christians and Muslims: “not as vague generalisation but [making] specific commitments into our prayers, festivals, life-cycle ceremonies and public advocacy”. It is not particularly clear exactly how this would bring about the achievement of the aim he shares with Klein, that of changing US policy and behaviour towards Israel, preventing Israel from getting away with its annexing of more and more land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.



**A boycott that does make sense: Caterpillar bulldozers play a major role in the Occupation**

It is crucial, Klein and Waskow agree, for the US to insist on a process for creation of a truly independent Palestinian state that is not chopped up, and a peace treaty with all the Arab states. But for Klein, it is BDS that would make a difference: the alternative strategies to BDS proposed by Waskow, while worthwhile and complementary, when used previously, haven’t “changed the economic and political dynamics”.

Waskow is highly sceptical about a proposal by the Presbyterian Church to disinvest from Caterpillar, the company that builds the

bulldozers used to destroy Palestinian houses. However why he sees the proposal as a waste of time, he doesn’t say, except that he sees it as part of a “sticks only” policy against Israel. His preferred alternative involves bringing Israelis and Palestinians to US churches to “lay out” the Geneva Initiative for a two-state peace treaty and lobby the US government around it. While Klein acknowledges such a strategy as complementary to BDS, Ran Greenstein might well dismiss it as sounding off. For Greenstein, as for Klein, persuasion alone will not work. For both, an effective strategy is one that speaks directly to Israeli complacency. Klein speaks of the Israeli feeling of “normalcy, of Israel being part of Western civilisation, even though they are in the Middle East.” If Israelis begin to pay a price for that feeling they may start to pressure their political leaders. Like Waskow’s proposal, this has a grand sound, but is short on specifics: how would Israelis pay a price?

### Academic sanctions are different

Of course, there is a difference between academic sanctions and disinvestment in Caterpillar Inc, in that it is possible to see how academic sanctions might relate in an immediate sense to Israeli institutions and personnel. Greenstein’s paper cuts to the chase as he sets out exactly how academic sanctions might work from an Israeli

*(Continued on page 13)*

(Continued from page 12)

point of view. There must be a clear relationship between crime and punishment, carrot and stick, positive and negative reinforcement. And although they need to work in alliances with international solidarity organisations, it is crucial for Israelis themselves to work for change, "...through their own efforts and within their powers". His problem with a general academic boycott as has been proposed is that "it is punitive, externally imposed, and does not encourage people to work directly for change within their own institutions and take responsibility for their own environment". Rather, there should be action committees at each institution, allied with international organisations, "working to identify a list of concrete demands". A logical target, for example, would be the School of Law at Tel Aviv University, which employs Pnina Sharvit-Baruch. For Greenstein, she is a war criminal colonel/lawyer, who "played an active role in planning the execution of war crimes in Gaza in such a way that would shield perpetrators from possible prosecution. If the School rejects the demand [to terminate her employment] it would be subject to sanctions (the precise nature of which to be determined as appropriate)".

### Deep unease

Although I have been open to BDS as a strategy of opposition, the proposal for a general academic boycott of Israeli universities and academics has always left me with a deep unease, probably because of its echoes of silencing and of tarring all with the same brush; and a sense that as much harm as good would come of it.

Perhaps this aligns somewhat with Waskow's "better the carrot and the stick than just the stick" maxim. However Greenstein distinguishes his notion of sanctions from the idea of a "general" academic boycott. Firstly, sanctions should be applied to practices rather than opinions; secondly, although it is preferable to target institutions rather than individuals, this distinction cannot always be maintained (as in the example above of the employee of the Tel Aviv Law School). Thirdly, the campaigns should focus not on who to exclude from sanctions but on whom to include. He calls for choices "to be made strategically in order to maximise impact, heighten the visibility of oppression, and bring the issues to the consciousness of Israeli-Jews in the most effective manner. By making focussed choices this strategy may run the risk of letting some guilty individuals off the hook, but its impact would be all the more powerful as a result, precisely because it would not be seen as mindlessly punitive in nature". Finally, activists at different locations must regularly coordinate and share information, as "Israeli-based activists are subject to enormous pressure internally, and [the campaigns will need] a flow of moral and material assistance from the outside. Palestinian activists are in need of even more external exchange and assistance."



**Boycotting the Batsheva Dance Company whose artistic director has condemned "Israeli war crimes" doesn't make sense**

AJDS members and supporters who are students and teachers at tertiary institutions will doubtless have a range of opinions in any debate about academic sanctions. I am not an academic, but as someone involved in international solidarity as part of Women in Black, and as a member of AJDS, I agree with Klein that proposals for BDS, and academic sanctions, do not necessarily reinforce barriers between Israelis and the rest of the world. Rather, in the right circumstances such proposals push one to get to grips with the nitty gritty of Israeli life, and life for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

### World citizen

To get to this nitty gritty one must question the situation in Australia and in Melbourne, vis a vis companies linked with Israeli policies. Well, although there have been actions taken against it in New Zealand, Caterpillar (Australia) operates here with no repercussions, despite the fact that Israel continues to drive Caterpillar bulldozers into Palestinian homes to destroy them. Then there's Connex: every time I travel on a train to the city I contribute to the coffers of a company contracted by Israel to build a light rail line. Not any light rail, but one that connects Jewish settlements in the West Bank to Israel, isolating Palestinian villages. (This is just a start and leaves out Motorola, the company that apart from making mobile phones manufactures a number of products that support Israel's military occupation, and doubtless some other companies.)

There is a Dump Connex campaign being conducted in Melbourne, but how effective will it be? If Klein and Greenstein are right, it is the Israeli sense of being a world citizen, of being part of "Western civilisation", that needs to be confronted. I asked a fellow refugee supporter, formerly a wealthy businessman living in South Africa, how the sanctions and boycotts imposed on his country had affected him. "What started to change me was when I travelled overseas," he replied. "People all talked about

what was going on." His sense of being a world citizen was affected.

Clearly there is a lot of work to do before Israelis are likely to be confronted in the same way. Greenstein suggests that to organise sanctions (for example against Pnina Sharvit-Baruch) progressive student groups including 'Arab student committees' should work with other progressive organisations of Jewish and Palestinian students, and with progressive academics, to forge international links of solidarity and activism.

Perhaps what Greenstein says is critical to the success of academic sanctions can also be applied to boycotts, disinvestment and sanctions in general. External pressure is critical; but it will only work with the involvement of Jewish Israelis, together with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Arab Israelis. Israelis must understand what the targets are, and why they have been imposed, and the relationship between the carrot and the stick.

# Rosa Luxemburg speaks to us

## Joan Nestle

Back in February, two things happened in Israel/Palestine, one huge, the other almost overlooked: a national election culminating in a rightwing government, stiff with reactionary posturing, and the opening of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's offices in Tel Aviv and Ramallah, the occasion marked by the re-issuing of a small book that influenced many of Israel's pioneering Left thinkers like Shulamit Aloni—Luxemburg's oddly idyllic and thus chillingly heartbreaking *Letters from Prison* (pictured at left).

"Sonyusha, you feel are feeling embittered because of my long imprisonment. You ask: 'How can human beings dare to decide the fate of their fellows? What is the meaning of it all...my dear little bird, the whole history of civilisation...is grounded upon 'human beings deciding the fate of their fellows,' the practice is deeply rooted in the material conditions of existence. Nothing but a further evolution, and a painful one, can change such things. At this hour we are living in the very chapter of transition..." (Letter to Sophie Liebknecht, Wronke Prison, May 23, 1917)

That the strong visage of this controversial political thinker, brutally murdered in Berlin in 1919 along with her comrade, Karl Liebknecht, should be seen once again, peering into national debates about inequalities and the futility of war and nationalism to create either stability or social justice at a time when the Israeli Left seems an almost futile gesture, is a testament to the hopeful ironies of history. And to the courage and insight of the Israeli Sifriat Hapoalim publishing house which is responsible for the book's reemergence. To commemorate the opening of its Israel office, the Foundation sponsored a free conference to discuss Luxemburg's heritage and her relevance to the Israeli and German Left, the home base of the Foundation. In *Haaretz*, Avner Shapira wrote that Dr Angelika Timm, Director of the Israel office, explains that the Foundation's activity in the region "reflects German left-wing recognition that it, like all of Germany, bears a historical responsibility for Israel. The Foundation supports civic projects such as educational initiatives for peace and humanism, the empowerment of women and assistance to weakened populations, and tries to promote mutual understanding between Israeli and German society."

Polish-born Luxemburg (1871-1919), founder of the Spartacus League and the German Communist Party, lived much of her life under the threat of political assassination.

Undaunted by enemies on the Right and the Left, she and many others endured periodic imprisonments, long separations from those they loved and what most of us would call just the daily joys of life. A firm believer in her own ideological vision, she also cherished the social value of dissent. "Freedom," she wrote, "only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of the party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always the freedom

***"I would prefer regular news rather than food...think of Leo instead, who needs it very badly."***

**Rosa Luxemburg to Stefan Bratman-Brodowski, Breslau Prison, March 9, 1918**

of the dissenter." These words are now engraved over the entrance to the foundation's headquarters in Tel Aviv, translated into Hebrew, Arabic and German. I cannot help but think of these words when faced with the closing down of discussion in the American Jewish community (from which I hail) and here (where I now live) when it comes to critiquing Israel's version of nationalism—or the connections between a vital democracy and social inequities. Luxemburg, while passionately dedicated to her world view, rejected violence as a useful tool of social change, favouring general strikes and cultural interventions.

Rosa Luxemburg, seen as a traitor to a nation-state intent on war, spent her last two years watching for the smallest signs of life in the restricted world of her jail cell and its little yard. Used to the larger stage of international Left politics, she focusses now on the vitality of birds and butterflies, trees blooming on a horizon never to be reached by her again. "On the paper, as I write, the faint shadows of the leaves are at play with the interspersed patches of sunlight; the foliage is still damp from a recent shower, and now and again drops fall on my face and hands....At six o'clock, as usual, I was locked up." (Wronke, end of May 1917).

I know I was only supposed to give an overview of Shapira's article, but thanks to the Rosa Luxemburg Internet Archive, I was able to hear her voice again, in her last days, writing to Sophie Liebknecht, the wife of her imprisoned comrade, Karl. Here in the darkest of her days, she wonders at it all: "How strange it is that I am always in a sort of joyous intoxication, though without sufficient cause. Here I am lying in a dark cell upon a mattress as hard as stone; the building has its usual churchyard quiet, so that one might as well be already entombed; through

the window there falls across the bed a glint of light from the lamp which burns all night in front of the prison...I lie here alone and in silence, enveloped in the manifold black wrappings of darkness, tedium, unfreedom and yet my heart beats with immeasurable and incomprehensible inner joy...but when I search my mind for the cause of this joy, I find there is no cause and can only laugh at myself—I believe that the key to the riddle is simply life itself, this deep darkness of night is soft and beautiful as velvet, if one only looks at it in the right way..." Hannah Arendt, who includes a chapter on Luxemburg in her haunting *Men in Dark Times* (1955), warns against



***(Continued on page 15)***

(Continued from page 14)

over-sentimentalising this often hard-nosed theoretician; like many strong women who take public stances at the risk of their lives, she was called many seemingly oppositional things—the bloodthirsty Rosa, the hopeless romantic. Her *Letters from Prison* reveal in a matter of 50 pages her toughness, her thirst for learning—books are as important as birds in these letters—and her desire to protect fragile lives while she glories in the complexity of the

natural world and the challenges of the material one. I think of the Jewish women thinkers, Rosa, Emma Goldman, Hannah Arendt herself, who dared to be pariahs in their own homelands and I think of the darkness we will forever know as the Siege of Gaza.

[Inspired by the article “A Red Red Rosa (Not to Mention Green and Pink),” by Avner Shapira in *Haaretz*. International feminist writer Joan Nestle is an AJDS member.]

---

## Only for strong stomachs

Until just lately, not many books had me reaching for a bottle of antacid medicine. Not many had provoked such an almost physical reaction. That is, until *Cartoons and Extremism*, subtitled “Israel and the Jews in the Arab and Western media”, fell into my lap.

This book, by Dr Joel Kotek of the Brussels Free University, is almost two hundred pages showing Jews, not just Israelis, as subhuman monsters, swimming in and drinking blood, leering, hook-nosed creatures which could have crawled straight out of the Nazi paper *Der Stuermer*. Here is a fanged, black-hatted Jew getting a transfusion of Palestinian blood. (Turkey.) Here are two bottles, one empty and labelled “Holocaust”, and the other crammed with Palestinian skulls. (Morocco.) Here, a grinning Jew stands behind a golden calf, which is bleating “Holocaust! Holocaust!” The caption reads: “The Holocaust is a big lie!” (Iran.) The famous First World War recruiting poster “Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?” is altered to read: “Daddy, did you know that the gas chambers were faked?” (Brazil.) A fat spider labelled “Zionism” is weaving a web of lies. (USSR.)

By far, most of the cartoons shown here are from Arab and Moslem countries. This mirrors, says the author, their actual frequency in the world media.

Now, political cartoons are not meant to be fair or balanced. Their aim is to comment on topical news, and they often do this by wounding and ridiculing their subject. Exaggeration is their stock in trade. To put it at its mildest, Israel has never had an easy ride with its neighbouring countries, largely because of its treatment of Arab Palestinians in the endless struggle over real estate. This has inevitably been reflected in the media of those countries. Fair enough.

But where these media cross the line and become downright counter-productive is when they delve into the arsenal of traditional and modern antisemitism, depicting

Jews as usurers, vampires, leeches and loathsome insects.

As the British Jewish writer Brian Klug points out: “Critics often single Israel out unfairly, or defame the state, or criminalise it, and so on. All of which is undoubtedly biased. But is it necessarily antisemitic? No, it is not. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a tragic and bitter struggle. The issues are complex, passions inflamed and the suffering in both populations is great.” Klug suggests, and many cartoons in the book demonstrate, that the lines between anti-Zionism, legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism can become easily blurred when the subject is as emotive as the suffering of the Palestinians. “In recent years,” Klug writes, “the war in Iraq, neocon thinking about the Middle East and jihadi discourse about ‘crusader-Zionist conspiracies’ have made matters much worse.”

Klug’s advice to the Moslem-Arab world is worth repeating: “Every time you draw on antisemitism, you fuel the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – by reinforcing the anger and fear that many Jews, inside and outside Israel, understandably feel.”

Dr Kotek, who assembled the more than four hundred cartoons in this book, has done a useful job. He includes a few cartoons critical of Israel without the slightest whiff of antisemitism. By doing this, he says, he wishes to demonstrate that it is possible to stand up for certain ideas – and in so doing to criticise a state, a policy, a head of state – without demonising the enemy.

If he was in Geneva for the recent “Durban II” conference, I have the forlorn hope that he came away empty-handed.

[Cartoons and Extremism: Israel and the Jews in Arab and Western Media by Dr Joel Kotek.]

**Steve Brook**

---

## Calendar, announcements

**Monday, 18 May, 6.30pm.** *Seven Jewish Children*. Play by Caryl Churchill Starring Miriam Margolyes and Tony Llewellyn-Jones. Controversial play is being performed as part of the Nakba commemoration which also include showing of two Palestinian films. State Library of Victoria. La Trobe Street. Entry 3. Entry by donation; proceeds to Medical Aid for Palestine Gaza Appeal.

**Tuesday, 19 May, 6.00pm.** *Is Israel a racist country?* Public Lecture **Haneen Zoabi MK**

(The only Palestinian Israeli woman in the Knesset,) Union Building, Melbourne University. Sponsored by Students for Palestine.

**Sunday, 24 May, 7.30 pm AJDS Soiree:** Israel, Zionism and Evolution of Jewish Identities. Speaker Professor Yakov Rabkin. Contact Tom Wolkenberg on 9885 6260 or Sol Salbe on 9318 3107 for details.

Note: providing the details of other organisations’ events does not necessarily imply endorsement by the AJDS. Events endorsed by the AJDS are explicitly acknowledged as such.

# AJDS SUBSCRIPTION

AJDS PO BOX 685 Kew Vic 3101 Tel (03) 9885 6260

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_(New/Renew)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed for Dues: \$\_\_\_\_\_

Donation: \$\_\_\_\_\_

Total: \$\_\_\_\_\_

Membership (Due 1 January each year):

\$40 single person; \$50 family; \$25 Concession. Subscription only \$30

# AJDS NEWSLETTER

Australian Jewish Democratic Society

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA

PO Box 685  
Kew  
Victoria 3101  
Australia