

AS we drove through the gates of Camp Hemshech for the Labor Day Conference of Jewish Socialists in America, the power was off. Those that had arrived earlier were gathered round the candle-lit kitchen table sharing plates of noodles and cheese.

This conference, at the Bund camp in the Catskills, was called as a regional continuation of another one held June 8-10, which began to explore the possibilities of building a Jewish socialist youth organization in our country. Among the organizations represented on Labor Day were the Radical Zionist Alliance, the Jewish Youth Bund, the Young Workers Liberation League, Young People's Socialist League, *The City Star* (formerly the *Liberated Guardian*) and the defunct *Brooklyn Bridge*. I was there as a graduate of the progressive secular Jewish schools and Camp Kinderland, reflecting that distinctive trend. One of the delegates, who worked for *The City Star*, explained his reasons for attending the conference. He said that the staff of *The City Star* was overwhelmingly Jewish but the staff members had no consciousness of their Jewishness. He hoped to get from the conference a clearer idea of how to deal with this dilemma.

The need for a Jewish socialist organization grew out of the experiences of the last few years both within the Jewish community and the left. There is a need for an organized Jewish socialist response to questions like the New York City teacher's strike, the Middle East crisis, Soviet Jewry and the Forest Hills housing project.

One of the participants at the con-

PAUL SHNEYER, a student at Queens College of the City University of New York, appeared in our Oct. 1973 issue with the article "World Youth Festival."

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ference was Arthur Waskow, member of a semi-religious community in Washington, D.C., Farbrenge, and author of *The Freedom Seder* and *The Bush Is Burning*. During the first evening of the conference, at which the schedule was discussed, Art presented his well-thought-out version of how the conference should proceed. He feels that there is need for a revitalization of Jewish culture and identity in North America. To him that should be the major concern of Jewish socialists. Unless this needed revitalization takes place, the Jewish people will vanish, he believes.

Since very few delegates had a clear idea of how to proceed or what they wanted from the week-end, Art's revisions of the schedule were adopted. His revisions basically put cultural questions in front of the political issues. As the week-end progressed, I realized the shortcomings of Art's suggestions. We were not clarifying the role of Jewish young socialists in America.

Participation in the conference was diverse: socialists, communists, Zionists, liberals, Bundists, anarchists and radical Jewish nationalists. Although in the past many of these groups could not have been in the same room together, these old problems did not surface during the conference. The youth there were able to bury their

I.

The New "Jewish Socialist Community"

By PAUL SHNEYER

sectarianism temporarily in order to participate in the discussions for the week-end. Since the conference however, the various groups have isolated themselves from each other again.

After reflection on the June conference, it was felt by several delegates that there had been no time to discuss the question of sexism or issues facing Jewish women. Therefore, Saturday morning began with separate women's and men's meetings. At the men's meeting, the discussion centered on growing up as a Jewish male in America—the stereotyped roles accepted by the Jewish community and American society.

Later that day, as per Art's suggestions, there were cultural discussions. What is Jewish Culture in Yiddish, Hebrew, English, Ladino? How can it survive? Is its survival important?

At the workshop I attended, I noticed that members of the Jewish Youth Bund have accepted the "Yiddishism" of their elders. They see only Yiddish as the expression of Jewishness. This closed-mindedness and cultural exclusionism is a major reason behind the Jewish Youth Bund's present meager existence.

I have thought over several questions raised by the Cultural workshop I attended. As a Jew from a secular and progressive home. I wonder about

the roots of my identity. How much of my heritage is from Judaism and how much from socialism? It seems that the heritage that I called my culture, as embodied in Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, Morris Rosenfeld and Emma Lazarus, grew directly out of the progressive values which were found in their religious background. There was a conscious selecting of which of the principles and values that Judaism taught were to be accepted. Combined with the conditions of the times, a progressive, secular culture evolved that was specifically Jewish. I have not gone through this process. I was raised in a secular Jewish home. I have learned about the progressive and cultural aspects of Jewish life and not the traditional or religious. Yet I still am a Jew and a socialist. How many of my values have their roots in common soil with the literary greats?

The next day of the conference, discussion centered on political issues confronting Jewish Socialists, racism, especially reflected in Black-Jewish tensions, the Middle East, Soviet Jewry and the changing economic position of Jews in the United States. There was a consensus that the Jewish Establishment has failed to provide decent leadership in terms of these political questions. The increased identification of the Jewish Establishment with the powers that be was seen as a roadblock to the resolution of these questions.

To me it seems that the new-found strength of right-wing forces within the Jewish community reflects a change in the economic position of many Jews in the United States. For example, teachers, many of whom are Jews, are siding with the educational establishment rather than with the parents who are demanding a more responsive educational system. I was surprised to hear a member of the Young People's Socialist League say

that the problems in New York City schools resulted from the poor home environments of the students. When a member of the YWLL responded by pointing out how racist that statement sounded, several delegates were taken aback. A comment was made that we should not start making generalizations. The discussion escalated without any resolution. It seems the effects of racial tensions between Blacks and Jews of the past few years has infected even some young socialists.

The Jewish Establishment, when it comes to the question of Israel, has equated the survival of the Jewish state with the survival of the present regime in Washington. Washington has been playing the peoples of the Middle East off against each other for many years, and the Jewish Establishment has walked right into the trap. The intransigence of certain forces within Israel, supported by U.S. arms, partially provoked the latest attack by Egypt and Syria. The United States is in no position to lead the world to an era of peace, no matter what Mr. Nixon might promise. All in all, the interests of Jews in America, as workers and as a people, are compromised by the present leadership within the Jewish community.

The final morning of the conference was devoted to proposals and future actions. At the workshop on Soviet Jewry, I had expected a sharp debate between members of the Young Workers Liberation League and other delegates. Instead, one of the League members presented their official position, which is that there are no major problems for Soviet Jews, followed by a few contrary reactions. From there, the discussion continued on how socialists should respond to this question. The majority feeling was that there should be a Jewish socialist task force on Soviet Jewry as an alterna-

tive to the Student Committee for Struggle on Soviet Jewry. This task force would actively support the right of Jews in the U.S.S.R. to equality as Soviet citizens and full group cultural rights to express their nationality. As of now, this task force has not materialized.

A second set of proposals, which have been acted upon, include monthly forums to develop the ideology of a Jewish socialist movement, formation of radical Jewish unions on various campuses and presenting a Jewish socialist youth voice within the American left and the Jewish community.

The organizations that participated in the conference have not all continued to work together. The two most established of the organizations, the Jewish Youth Bund and the Young Workers Liberation League, have failed to participate in any of the follow-up work. The Bundists are trying to revitalize their youth group and I assume the same for the YWLL. Their outlook, in terms of working with other groups and individuals, is reflected in a statement made by one of their members, "The Bund answers all the questions that face the Jewish people."

Since the conference, a loosely knit group has been meeting bi-weekly. The Jewish Socialist Community, as it calls itself, participated with its own placards in a demonstration Sept. 18 in support of the Chilean people and one on Nov. 10 calling for Nixon's impeachment. The J.S.C. held one public forum Oct. 20 on "The Struggles of the Jewish Left and Labor Movement," attended by over 100 people. The second, on Dec. 2, was on the Middle East, and drew about 75.

The goals and direction of the J.S.C. are still undefined. The response to the first forum, along with the reaction to their presence at the two demonstrations, indicates a place exists

for a group which recognizes both its Jewishness and its socialist politics. The question facing the Jewish Socialist Community now is whether to exist as an organization which tries to involve its members in its own activities or to be a collection of people involved in different community Jewish and left organizations. I feel the J.S.C. is needed as a gathering point where socialists who are Jews and Jews who are socialists will mix. This exchange can heighten participants' awareness of their Jewishness within their socialist groups and heighten their awareness of their socialist politics within Jewish groups.

I have heard a variety of reactions

from my comrades on the left when I describe to them the Labor Day Conference and the activities since then. One reaction is that an all-Jewish group is a racist formation at this time in history, since it will be an all-white group. Another is that there is no basis for organizing around being Jewish. On the other hand there are those who find the activities of the past six months extremely stimulating. For this last group, there has been no way to integrate their Jewish heritage with their socialist politics. In the past they would have to choose between the two. The Jewish Socialist Community now is a channel to express both.

2.

From Chutzpah, About Chutzpah

Dear Mr. Schappes:

. . . We know about your youth issue and may try and get an article to you. But we are busy trying to get out the next issue and with things happening in the Middle East, we're very busy. . . .

One last thing. Several of us have read your pamphlet on the Jewish Question and the Left. We have found it very helpful and together.

Shalom, Sei gesunt!

MYRON PERLMAN

Chicago, Aug. 14

Dear Jewish Currents:

The attached article is for consideration for inclusion in your forthcoming youth issue. . . . Our next issue will be out in a month or so and we'll send it to you then. We read and ap-

preciate your magazine. Some of us, hopefully all, eventually, have been reading Schappes' excellent pamphlet on the national question. Personally, I have read JEWISH CURRENTS since my youth, as my father is a long time subscriber.

Shalom and struggle,

LEO SCHLOSBERG

Chicago, Nov. 12

WE ARE a collective of nine people who publish a newspaper called *Chutzpah* and engage in other organizing efforts in the community. We are socialists and are committed to the notion of Jewish peoplehood; the women's and gay movements are also important to us. We are not Zionists but we believe the survival of Israel is of crucial importance to Jews.

Being a collective means that work and decision-making are equally shared. Our income from paper sales and occasional small donations is just sufficient to meet the costs of printing, postage and supplies. We do the layout, typesetting, distribution, and office work ourselves. All of us have full- or part-time jobs as we personally get no income from the paper. There is also a comrade in Los Angeles who assists us with distribution and articles and is attempting to organize a related group there.

The paper has been in existence for two years now. Originally it grew out of a loose Shabos community of radical Jews here in Chicago called Am Hai. In addition to putting out a paper, we have held demonstrations, primarily anti-war, started women's, men's and gay discussion groups, and last spring, in commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, held a well-attended, all-day educational program on resistance during the Holocaust.

We have created our own forms for observing the holidays, forms that are consistent with our lives and politics. Some of us knew Yiddish before joining *Chutzpah*, and others have since learned it. We are engaged in learning and teaching Yiddish, and in the participation and creation of Yiddish cultural events.

Throughout our history, one constant difficulty or tension has been that we see ourselves as dwelling within two communities—the Jewish community and the Left community. With both of these we have agreements and disagreements, solidarity and difference. This tension is always present to some extent, but it is most pronounced as regards Israel. Here, there is a Jewish community which is not only intensely and emotionally supportive of Israel, but largely uncritically so. The Left tends to be uncritically, and very emotionally, supportive

of the Palestinians and, by association, of the Arab states. The Left is anti-Zionist in a manner that is often hysterical rather than principled and ends up being not only anti-Zionist but anti-Israel, and occasionally anti-Semitic.

Thus, when selling papers we have had persons refuse to buy or even look at the paper because, in their opinion, we were either Zionist or not Zionist, depending on their perspective. We have felt caught, because for all of these people their willingness to listen to us at all often hinges on our Israel position. Also, at times we feel genuinely confused and uncertain.

To us, Israel is important by itself, but that importance is magnified by the focus given it by others. We think it important that Jews in America, and elsewhere in the Diaspora, build a strong community which does not have Israel as its center. Israel is, and should be, important for Jews everywhere but as long as we live in a nation we must dwell in the reality here at home, in terms of both the national and Jewish communities.

We have attended conferences and made numerous contacts with other people and groups with positions similar to ours. Loose ties have been formed and we are looking forward to seeing a nationally organized radical Jewish movement.

For more information or subscriptions (4 issues/\$1) write:

Chutzpah
P. O. Box 60142
1723 W. Devon
Chicago, Ill. 60660

Information in Los Angeles:

Conrad Mellili
P. O. Box 2015
Beverly Hills, Calif. 90213

“Uncharted Jewish Limbo”

Dear Mr. Schappes,

I doubt if you remember me. I met you in the JEWISH CURRENTS office about two years ago and spoke to you for an hour or so about the emergence of Jewish radical groups. I was writing a paper on the topic for my sociology class at Stony Brook University. . . .

I'm writing now to express my wholehearted support of your clarion call [in the Jan., 1973 issue] for a young Jewish progressive movement. I think it is vitally needed, at least for me in my perennial search to affirm my identity (shades of *Time* Magazine sociology?).

At the prematurely senile age of 23, I can claim to have undergone a political and, if I may say, spiritual metamorphosis. Once an omnipresent protester, Pantherphile and vociferous supporter of “liberation struggles,” I can now view those activities as puerile play-acting. My “membership” in the New Left has expired and my sympathy with my comrades is not even thinly veiled contempt. (In a strenuous attempt to avoid the pitfalls of the “new converts”—what I term the Herbert Philbrick syndrome, I foresee no lucrative vocational outlet for my newly acquired beliefs. However, I have succumbed to a common characteristic of those who have recently glimpsed the eternal light—my passion has intensified but my convictions are still strong despite Yeats's admonition.)

I can point to three events which I feel significantly changed my outlook. The murder of the four students

at Kent State University greatly affected me, mainly because three were Jewish. I couldn't understand why that fact would multiply the impact of the tragedy but I guess it was an instinctive reaction. (Do you recall the Philip Roth story in which the grandmother was reading a newspaper account of a bus accident with numerous fatalities? She couldn't decide whether to term it a tragedy or disaster—the list of dead included nine with Jewish names but she couldn't ascertain the lineage of the Miller family, only having the moniker to judge.) Anyway I learned something about the genesis of my beliefs—they are screened through an ethnic prism.

The massacre at the Lod Airport stunned me. Particularly, the aspect that “life goes on.” As a member of a generation that didn't live through the Holocaust, I suppose it reveals my unworldliness ever to think that that “common sense” aphorism shouldn't apply. Too impatient to await the verdict of a magistrate Deity, I heartily welcomed the reprisal raids conducted by the Israelis and gleefully greeted the news of the death of Khasanfani, the Black September leader who was killed when a bomb detonated in his automobile. I only mourned the fact that a similar fate didn't await the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sidky. Quite a remarkable emotional outpouring from one who is a self-professed and U.S.-government-certified conscientious objector. I'm still certain that I could never pull a trigger and destroy life but to cheer as a spectator at such activity places my beliefs

in a moral quagmire (I received my C.O. on humanist grounds because I never resolved my feelings about engaging in combat during World War II and still am not certain about the efficacy of the pacifist position during such perilous days. My encounter with the draft board is a whole other personal odyssey that I'll refer for another time.) The aftermath of the Lod airport massacre deeply furthered my disgust with the New Left, whose vision of a new humanity appeared more than somewhat astigmatic when it is recited from the press communiqués of the Arab Information Office.

The continuing emergence of black cultural nationalists, especially Imamu Baraka (Le Roi Jones) has also markedly pointed to the selective outrage of the New Left. His callous and heartless description of Schwerner and Goodman as "artifacts," his vicious anti-Jewish rantings termed poetry, his motion at the National Black Political Convention in Gary, calling for the "dismemberment of Israel," all these actions are tolerantly (or is it enthusiastically) accepted by the New Left as the just outrage of that mythical entity, the Third World. These same sages, who create a tripartite universe, somehow neglect to explain the Sudanese civil war, the Greek junta support for the Arab governments, Malawi's recognition of South Africa or why the Arab word slave is used to refer to their "Third World brothers and sisters" south of the Sahara. All of the above seems curiously absent from the New Left's moral purview.

My disgust with Le Roi Jones doesn't solely emanate from his malicious demagoguery. Rather, his bitterness and dreary petulance have become a staple item in America as marketable as a bottle of coke. His misuse and abuse of the language de-

grades the just struggle of blacks and other people who have been grossly mistreated and oppressed. If Jones's vituperative utterances are tacitly accepted, then what is left for Elie Wiesel to say?

The Open Letter to James Baldwin written by Shlomo Katz appearing in *Midstream* articulate these beliefs much better than I can. The importance of maintaining a clear perspective has become crucial to my philosophy. If the murder of 21 Black Panthers by policemen is termed genocide, how does one describe Bergen-Belsen and Maidanek? Again, I'm not trying to downplay the repressive and racist activities of the police. However, their crimes must be described accurately and the unthinking use of Holocaust terminology only demeans the horror of this most tragic episode in human history.

I am also distressed at the functional illiteracy of my former comrades. Their knowledge of Marx and Marxism is pitiful. Mindless sloganeering is no substitute for real understanding of the dynamics of this society. The numerous deficiencies in universities have regrettably evoked a generally anti-intellectual fervor, much of it gratuitous.

I have always hesitated to attack the Left—I felt the doubts I entertained were relatively minor when compared to the monster Pentagon or the cold-blooded arrogance of the Buckleys, Mitchells or Goldwaters. However, my familial affinity has dissolved, and I find my loyalty projected elsewhere. I guess the terrain I feel most comfortable is that uncharted Jewish limbo—somewhere between the ideological drawing boards of *Dissent*, *Midstream* and JEWISH CURRENTS. One thing I can state authoritatively—it never descends to the First Circle depths on East 56th Street,

where Pennsylvania Avenue is much closer than that famous subway ride to Brooklyn.

Let me conclude this fairly verbose letter. Would you be good enough to pass this letter on to anyone else interested in forming a progressive Jewish group or else pass their names to me? (The former is preferable be-

cause my organizational skills are nonexistent).

I am enclosing \$6 for a year's subscription to JEWISH CURRENTS and the packet of special youth materials.

Shalom, and I hope I can meet and talk to you soon.

DONALD ALTSCHILLER
Somerville, Mass., Jan. 31

4. Five Poems

NAZI WAR CRIMES

GROTESQUE noises,
fermented flesh of
transparent innocence
repulsive movements
languid questions
and
it was their job . . .

SABRA

IN BAREFOOT tranquility
of the floating harvest,
the tangled transparency
of your unspoken thoughts
conquers stone memories,
tender fingers,
and almond petals gently stroking
the olive of your skin.

LOVERS IN THE GALILEE

THE river fresh from dreams
wandered

MARJORIE AGOSIN, *appearing here for the first time, is a sophomore at the University of Georgia in Athens, after a year's stay in Israel in the Kibbutz Mishmar Haemek. She has been published in the Yearbook of Modern Poetry and in college periodicals and newspapers. She now is a student at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.*

By MARJORIE AGOSIN

naked through the farmer's valley
beyond meadows of green illusion
boundless contemplation . . .
passing cornfields of sunbeam
tenderness.

The world seemed to be nothing but
gentle mist, flower baskets of
ethereal song, and
lovers,
shutting darkness with lips that weep.

KIBBUTZ

THE times are going by
in the purity of togetherness
day's undress in naked light
my soul ebbs with the mountain wind
accepting what tomorrow has
a smile reaches,
the people of the earth are singing.

ISRAEL

In the vastness
of fragility
the morning moon
laced some living wine
of the flying hairs
that were drying with the sun
in the quietness of resignation . . .
Happiness.

5.

Two Poems

By *ISAAC ELCHANAN MOZESON*

Waiting On Father

OPPPOSITE me, in the dark,
sinks an elderly hotel patron
under a peasant boy's cap.
His eyes are buried,
burnt out in their shrivel-fold sockets.
Electric, the July night
activity beats around the charred bush
man; angular, tanned, trapped in his topcoat.

The social hall blazed and blared
with the vibrant arrogance
of a sabra soul
borsht-belting out his milk and honey
for a little bread.
Aloof, proud, the unmoved mover
yet wins us several young-at-hearts,
squeezes and releases us
in the folds of his accordian.
He sings regeneration,
of olives and of swords,
his clichéd reality still so alien
to the passive rows degenerating before him.
We feel beyond his tinny glint
of Jerusalem's gold,
we answer with more than hands and feet
to his challenge, "OD AVINU HAI."

Father yet lives . . .
I remember and turn back
from the lit stage to the charcoal crowd,
to the splinter spared from fire.
He had clapped or tapped
no tap or clap
nor seemed to hear
nor to be able to.
His onion skin hands
wrestle with the arms
of his chair. He raises himself

and leaves a crooked form,
bent still from shouldering
the sack of his Anatevka.

The *shtetle* lies in ruins.
Seven piece silver settings,
linen napkins, miniature bulbs of wine,
(all the way from Palestine)
impatiently they whine and dine
as the young wait on them.
"Waiter, I said HOT water for de prune juice."

Yes, the Catskills have their Van Winkles;
Let the lids close slow upon a lavish exile,
malcontented cows put to pasture
for this long, wandering sleep.

There is no Jewish history
of events not to pass.
Our mah jong jew must pass too;
One by one they sputter and fall,
miniature bulbs on a dark bronze wall.
And we that wait shall cancel the reservation
of forty years in this distinctive, glatt,
accommodating Wilderness
of Sin. And with the olive and the sword
we alone will Jordan ford.

Yahrzeit

COULD it be that you of the bronze generation,
that dark congregation heavy hung upon the back wall,
is it possible that you of the brass names
and five watt crystal souls
cast iron eyes upon your sons and smile
down at their annual inconvenience
when they come (en)lightened of straps and fringes
to transliterate your heritage,
honoring not your stones but your moss?

ISAAC ELCHANAN MOZESON, *appearing here for the first time, is a recent graduate of Yeshiva University now studying English literature at the City University of New York. His poetry has been published in Poetry East West, an annual anthology of college poetry, 1970, 1971 and 1972, and in college publications of Yeshiva University, C.C.N.Y., Fairleigh Dickinson University and Rhode Island College.*

6.

Being Jewish

By RICHARD RUTH

I

i always experienced it as an epithet:
at least, for a long time i did.
 it was everything in me
 too studious/too serious/too sensitive
 too un-skinny-and-blond-haired-and-straight-nosed
it was old people with accents and strange ideas,
hard to understand;
funny sounding melodies,
foods too strange to be on suburban connecticut menus.
 at least, that's what they taught me about

and even later—

 after i learned from the vietnamese it was crucial
 to be serious and study hard
 after i learned with a lot of others in the sixties
 that we'd better get more sensitive and quick
even then being jewish didn't make all that much sense
why should it?
in the synagogue they taught me myths and historical caricatures
that the rabbi was a good man
seemed ungermane to being rabbi

being jewish wasn't stopping the war
 /making school human
 /figuring out about dope
 /answering growing-up questions
it came into my life as one more drag obligation
an excess weight on growing up in the rush of the sixties
(which, on the other hand, was fast, exciting, and scary as hell)

II

but part of me *was* being jewish,
in ways i only vaguely understood:
 that my family was warmer, closer than others
 that i grew up with books and music and trips to museums
 that i wanted to be a teacher instead of a fireman
that when sundays at my grandmother's
i talked about the war and the farmworkers and biafra and my life
everyone somehow understood,

not like wasp teachers in school
of course, no one *said* it was because we were jewish
—no one acted all that jewish anyways, it seemed to me—
but somehow i had a suspicion it was all tied in . . .

III

when i began to learn my history
i boiled over in excitement
 excitement that there were Jews who fought back,
 in Warsaw, in Spain, on the Lower East Side
 Jews who organized
 Jews who made a culture that was beautiful and angry
Jews who were proud and strong and determined
Jews who weren't complacent like fat cats in synagogues
Jews who were radicals
Jews who were like me and not Moshe Dayan

i read eisenstadt and ehrenburg and olgin and burst out
with proud identification
learned i had roots—a heritage that wasn't some facile legend
 and how much that explained parts of me i didn't understand,
 and how much that gave me strength

IV

i don't know yet where i go from here, not real clearly
 i know i want to learn more, learn about my people
 study our traditions—the real ones—and our history,
 speak our *mameloshen*, read our books,
 sing our songs, dance our dances
know i want to find new ways to live jewish
—because, at least for me, the old ones don't apply—
but how?

in this country, in this time, nothing comes easy
but again and again i think about the vietnamese:
 like them, in resisting oppression
 we find a love for our people that runs deep;
 in resisting we find new ways:
we struggle,
and our culture will survive and grow

RICHARD RUTH of *New York* appears here for the first time with his first published poem. A student at the New School for Social Research in New York, he also works for *The City Star*, successor to *Liberated Guardian*.