

THE JEWISH COUNCIL TO COMBAT FASCISM AND ANTI-SEMITISM: AN HISTORICAL RE-APPRAISAL (Part Three: Conclusion)

Philip Mendes

In 1961, the Council mobilised support in the non-Jewish community for the action of the Government of Israel in placing Adolf Eichmann on trial. Council speakers addressed more than a hundred meetings in Trade Unions, Labor Party branches and church organisations, and a number of articles appeared in the Labor Press all over Australia. The Council also protested strongly to the Soviet Ambassador in Australia against the publication in the Daghestan *Kommunist* of a vicious 'blood libel' alleging that Jews drank the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes.²⁷⁷

1961 also saw the Labor Party's choice of Jewish Council President Sam Cohen for a safe place on its Senate ticket in the 1961 elections, in preference to Maurice Ashkanasy, the leader of the Australian Jewish community, who had expected the position. According to Rechter, in response, 'the *Bund* joined Ashkanasy and the Board of Deputies in a campaign to discredit Cohen as a fellow-traveller, without support in the Jewish community. The ensuing controversy catapulted Jewish anti-Communism into the national political arena, involving extensive media coverage and debate in Federal Parliament'.²⁷⁸

Just prior to the 1961 Federal election campaign, circulars issued by a 'Labor Rank and File Committee' (which claimed to consist of twenty-one ALP members — a large proportion of whom were Trade Union officials) entitled *Labor Yes — Sam Cohen No* were widely distributed in Victoria, and their contents were noted in the national press. The circular rhetorically asked the Federal Opposition leader Arthur Calwell ten questions relating to current controversial issues in the Jewish community. In particular, it claimed that the Jewish Council had been banned by the Victorian ALP in 1951 because it was 'Communist controlled', an allegation denied by Victorian ALP secretary Mr. Cyril Wyndham, who was strongly attacked by the same circular.²⁷⁹ Arthur Calwell responded by attacking the circular as containing 'the falsehoods, distortions and misrepresentations of a few fanatics. It is obvious that the late U.S. Senator McCarthy had a lot of admirers in this country who are prepared to emulate his worst practices by distorting the truth and purveying falsehoods'.²⁸⁰

Harold Holt, the Federal Treasurer, then used the opportunity to attack four Labor candidates as Communists or fellow-travellers, one of whom was Sam Cohen. In attacking Mr. Cohen, he quoted extensively from articles in the Jewish press and the *Bulletin*, which gave full details of the V.J.B.D. view that the Council was a Communist front organisation, and stated that he himself believed that the Jewish Council was a Communist front.²⁸¹ In short, Jewish political divisions were now being exploited by politicians for the chief motive of acquiring electoral gain. The Melbourne *Age* responded by accusing Holt of joining 'in the discredited sport of character assassination and of imputing guilt by association'. Importantly, it stated, 'The label "fellow traveller" has never been defined, but the late Senator McCarthy proved how useful it could be in the hands of an unscrupulous dema-

gogue'.²⁸² The use of the term 'fellow traveller' was never properly defined by its right-wing users, and, in McNaughton's words, owes more 'to the hegemony of anti-Communism' than to reality.²⁸³

In 1962, the Council expressed its opposition to former Nazi generals occupying high positions in the new German armies and in the NATO forces, protested to the Soviet Ambassador in Australia regarding the decision of the state bakeries in the Soviet Union to stop baking *Matzos* for the Passover, raised the presence in Australia of Nazi collaborators and murderers of Jewish people, and continued its addresses emphasising the complete right of the Israeli Government to place Eichmann on trial.²⁸⁴ During this year, Council Secretary Ernest Platz reported on his recent overseas tour, maintaining that from what can be seen during a fifteen day visit to the USSR 'there is no discrimination against Jews and anti-Semitism is not encouraged or preached by the Soviet authorities'.²⁸⁵ Noticeably, Platz failed to make the necessarily subtle distinction between the many anti-Semitic organisations openly allowed to operate in democratic Western Europe and the large-scale anti-Semitic feelings prevalent, but not allowed to be openly expressed, at least to foreigners, in totalitarian Eastern Europe.

In 1962, the Council once again stated its Left-liberal agenda, calling itself 'a Jewish body which seeks to co-operate with all liberal-minded people in the non-Jewish community, recognising in them the true friends of the Jewish people and the enemies of anti-Semitism which is invariably associated with Fascism in its various forms. . . I believe this Council can be proud of its twenty years of work in defence of Jewish Rights and of Human Rights'. Sam Cohen, on the eve of his retirement as President and his entry to Parliament, again denied that the Council was a Communist front organisation. With some slight exaggeration, he insightfully stated, 'The very same people who made this charge have also called the ALP Communist dominated. In the view of the Eric Butlers, the *Bulletin*, the DLP, the League of Rights etc., the term Communism covers all political trends not sympathetic to the extreme Right'.²⁸⁶

1962 also saw what Walter Lippmann describes as the 'public villification'²⁸⁷ of Senator Sam Cohen, over his response in parliament to a V.J.B.D. initiated motion on the plight of Soviet Jewry. According to Leibler, Cohen 'openly defended the Soviet system and its persecution of Jews',²⁸⁸ whilst the *Jewish Herald* accused Cohen of 'attempting to sabotage the efforts of a democratic Government to raise the persecution of his fellow Jews before the conscience of the world' and described Cohen's supporters in the 'fellow-travelling' Jewish Council as 'discredited outcasts'.²⁸⁹ (According to Norman Rothfield, the role of some leading members of the V.J.B.D. in initiating this attack was exposed soon after by Cyril Wyndham, the 'intellectual' secretary of the ALP).²⁹⁰ Lippmann, however, while 'disagreeing with one or two sentences of Cohen's speech', sees the basic general theme of the speech as similar to the line adopted by Isi Leibler and the E.C.A.J. in 1987/88 in the light of *glasnost*, that Jews should be allowed to live in the USSR with equal rights.²⁹¹

Whilst the rights and wrongs of Sam Cohen's speech are certainly debatable,²⁹² it is clear that the entire Soviet Jewry debate did become entangled with broader political issues in the Jewish and general community. For example, according to Medding, 'Leibler attempted to neutralise Mr. Cohen's influence within the community, by focusing public attention upon his attitude towards the persecution of Jewry behind the Iron Curtain'.²⁹³ Similarly, Mr. Haworth (the Liberal M.P. who raised the matter of Soviet anti-Semitism in Parliament) 'severely criticised the Jewish Council, Australian Communists and those members of the ALP who had

closed their eyes to this situation'.²⁹⁴ Finally, Mr. Joseph Solvey (a leading Zionist) expressed concern that 'the community might be thought to be involved in a plot to embarrass the ALP by enabling the Liberal Party to make political capital out of a humanitarian issue'.²⁹⁵

In 1963, the Council continued to provide an understanding of Israel's problems, difficulties and point of view. The Council, through its extensive contacts, was able to put the Israeli view to many leading Parliamentarians of all parties. It also maintained its campaigns against Nazi-type anti-Semitic activities, Fascist activity among migrant groups, Eric Butler and Delouth (most outspoken exponent of Nazi views in Australia). The President of the Council, Nubert Stabey, also assured its members that it was not Communist dominated ('I believe that the allegation is being more widely recognised by the community as a lie and that generally it is wearing thin') and that it would not shirk its duty in respect of the Jews in the Soviet Union ('We have previously protested to the Soviet Government when we believed that Jews were victims of anti-Semitism or were suffering from disabilities . . . However we do not believe that to take part in anti-Soviet campaigns is in the best interests of the Jewish people'). The Council also reaffirmed its Left-liberal agenda that had barely changed since 1942. 'The Jewish Council is a non-political body pledged to fight anti-Semitism and Fascism, which uses persecution of the Jews as its first step towards the demoralisation and destruction of peoples, communities, democratic institutions and all forms of liberalism. . . . It seeks to uphold the rights, wherever and whenever they may be violated, not only of Jews, but of all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or colour'.²⁹⁶

In 1964, the Council continued to work for a sympathetic understanding of the Israeli position, combatted the rise of the Nazi movement in Australia, actively worked against the dangers of the Croatian *Ustashi*, and sent a deputation to the Soviet Ambassador in Canberra which expressed strong criticism of the publication of the anti-Semitic tract *Judaism Without Embellishment*, and in particular stated that the Council had noted with regret that although the book had been criticised in Russia and in *Pravda*, it had not been condemned as anti-Semitic.²⁹⁷

During 1964, a very accurate description of the Jewish Council came from Aviezer in the *Australian Jewish Herald*. 'It just so happens that I think the Council is a "Left-liberal" organisation of a rather predictable and stereotyped sort. . . . They advocate peace and support anyone who supports peace regardless of motive or political affiliation, they are violently opposed to the racial policies in South Africa, they are disgusted and angered at the U.S.'s failure to solve its negro problem, they are guilty about our own treatment of the Aborigines, they are ashamed of the White Australia policy, they are very anxious about the local Nazi party [in fact it explains the whole *raison d'être* of an organisation like the Council], they know that the real threat to Australia comes from Santamaria and McCarthyism . . .' As McNaughton states, 'That such a position was labelled "fellow-travelling" in the 1950s, but is labelled "trendy Leftism" in the 1980s, shows that while the label "fellow-traveller" may sound archaic, the motive behind the labelling is certainly not (i.e. the attempt to marginalise these views beyond effectiveness). Unfortunately, in the 1950s, this marginalisation took a particularly extreme form'.²⁹⁸

In 1965, the Council focused on Fascism and anti-Semitism in Australia, the *Ustashi*, Lithuanian anti-Semites and Eric Butler, supported various organisation which fought for equal rights for Aborigines, provided information to Trade Union leaders about the grave problems confronting Israel in a hostile Arab world, and sent three letters to the Soviet Embassy protesting against the appearance of *Con-*

temporary Judaism and Zionism by F. S. Mayatsky in the Soviet Union. Todd Trevaks, Council President, stated that the Council's policy is that 'the Jewish citizens of the Soviet Union should not be subject to any restrictions which discriminate against them, that they should be free to practice their religion and should be free to emigrate to Israel if they desire to do so'.²⁹⁹

Leibler suggests that this abandonment of the old 'hardline' policy on Soviet Jewry pursued by Cohen and Waten reflects ideological changes in the Australian Communist Party.³⁰⁰ However, it would be more accurate to say that the Council's open criticism of the Soviet Union reflected the lessening of Cold War tension within Australia (the possible impact of such tension on Jewish Council policy is never even mentioned by Leibler) and the consequential movement within the Left as a whole towards viewing the Soviet Union in more realistic terms. Norman Rothfield stated that he wanted to be much more outspoken in condemning Soviet anti-Semitism in the late Sixties, but pro-Soviet hardliners disagreed and others didn't want to split the organisation.³⁰¹ It should be noted that a split did take place in 1967 in the Jewish Progressive Centre over the issue of the Soviet Union.³⁰² Some of its leaders were also members of the Jewish Council executive.

In 1966, the Council continued to take action against manifestations of neo-Nazi and pro-Fascist activities in Australia, focused on the League of Rights, the Australian Nazi Party and radio commentator Norman Banks (who was openly associating himself with Eric Butler), attempted at all times to try and enhance the prestige of the State of Israel, and protested to the Soviet Embassy at the statements by the Soviet Union's U.N. delegates in equating Zionism, Nazism and anti-Semitism which prevented an effective condemnation of anti-Semitism by the United Nations.³⁰³

In 1967, the Jewish Council made a strong statement in support of Israel, condemning the role of the Soviet Union. Efforts were also made to have the appropriate resolution passed at the ALP State Conference.³⁰⁴ Further, Todd Trevaks, President of the Jewish Council, forwarded a letter of protest to the Soviet Ambassador in Canberra, which stated that 'your Government supports the Egyptian Government and the allies of that country when those countries have denied the validity and effect of the United Nations' resolution and have repeatedly threatened to destroy the State of Israel'.³⁰⁵ Interestingly, a survey conducted by Medding in 1967 found that 33.6% of Victorian Jews supported the Jewish Council, 11.2% expressed mixed opposition and support, 29.6% had no opinion, whilst only 25.6% opposed it.³⁰⁶ Clearly, not all Jews shared Leibler's wish that the Council 'would continue to wither away as it had since 1954 only at a much faster rate'.³⁰⁷

In the years 1968-1970, the Council did 'wither away'. The reasons for the Council's decline and demise are varied and will be elaborated on further in the final discussion. Briefly, the Council came to an end because

1. Fundamentally, the creation of Israel created a more positive alternative to the negative battle against anti-Semitism.³⁰⁸
2. Secondly, the Jewish community's commitment to the State of Israel took precedence over every other issue in the community. This led the community to either withdraw its concerns from broader issues altogether, or to tailor its attitudes on broader issues to correspond with the Israeli Government's point of view. Thus, for example, the Israeli Government supported West German rearmament and the entry of West Germany into NATO. The Jewish Council opposed such decisions, but the broader Jewish community (conditioned by the attitude of the Israeli Government) did not.³⁰⁹

3. The Zionist Youth Movements attracted most young Jewish activists and anti-Semitism lost some of its furor.³¹⁰
4. The Council had not attracted young people for a long time.³¹¹
5. The Council's attitude towards the Soviet Union was a continuing issue of debate (even in 1968 due to the events in Czechoslovakia and Poland).³¹²

NOTES

277. JCCFAS Annual Report, 1960–61.
278. Rechter, David, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
279. *The Age*, 6 October 1961.
280. *Ibid.*, 5 October 1961.
281. Medding, P. Y., *op. cit.* (1962), p. 292.
282. *The Age*, 24 October 1961.
283. McNaughton, Sarah, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102.
284. JCCFAS Annual Report, 1961–62.
285. *Australian Jewish News*, 14 December 1962.
286. JCCFAS Annual Report, 1961–62.
287. Interview No. 6.
288. Leibler, Allan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
289. *Jewish Herald*, 26 October 1962.
290. Interview No. 1.
291. Interview No. 6.
292. Its basic outline is given by Medding, P. Y., *op. cit.* (1968), p. 224.
293. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
294. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
295. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
296. JCCFAS Annual Report, 1962–63.
297. *Ibid.*, 1963–64.
298. McNaughton, Sarah, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–103.
299. JCCFAS Annual Report, 1964–65.
300. Leibler, Allan, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
301. Interview No. 1.
302. Rechter, David, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
303. JCCFAS Annual Report, 1965–66.
304. Rothfield, Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
305. Leibler, Allan, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
306. Medding, P. Y., *op. cit.* (1968), pp. 176–177.
307. Leibler, Allan, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
308. Interview No. 7.
309. Interview No. 3.
310. Interview No. 7.
311. Leibler, Allan, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
312. Interview No. 1.

COUNCIL FUNCTIONARIES AND THEIR IDEOLOGY

This section is based on interviews with seven leading functionaries of the Jewish Council. The questioning primarily focused on the development of their Jewish identity and the manner in which this identity could be related to their political beliefs and their involvement in the Jewish Council. Some emphasis was also placed on exploring the similarities and differences between the Jewish community's political orientation in the 'Cold War' period and today, and assessing the manner in which the Council wished to influence the Jewish community.

1. NORMAN ROTHFIELD

Norman Rothfield was born in England in 1912 to a family very active in Jewish affairs, and arrived in Australia in January 1939. In England, Norman was a local Labor Councillor (Marylebone Council), and in Australia, he quickly became involved in the Labor Party and the Sheepskins for Russia campaign. This broader political involvement led Norman into the Council.

Norman has always been interested in progressive issues. He sees the Council's main achievement as the combatting of anti-Semitism, Fascism and other forms of racism. The Council also provided a 'progressive Jewish contribution to the non-Jewish and world scene' on such issues as civil and human rights, the Aborigines, and war and peace. Norman mentioned the activities of Council Secretary Ernest Platz, who enjoyed an extremely good rapport with the Trade Unions. Apparently, Platz was seen as a 'symbol of a Jewish outlook consistent with the Left and Labor Party line on national life'.

Norman himself sees a Jewish identity and a progressive outlook as complementary. He viewed anti-Semitism as affecting the whole of the Australian community and resisted the idea that it could be isolated on its own. He saw it as part of a general malaise. Norman feels Jews have got a contribution to make by taking a leading stand against racism, anti-Semitism etc.: 'This is a speciality of ours'.

Norman stressed that the Council did not work on the basis that Jews should be more Left-wing; rather, it wanted them to join in a general campaign to root racism out of Australian life. Accordingly, he views the 'Communist front' label as being typical of the continuation of a 'Cold War' mentality. Similarly, the Right-wing approach of today's Jewish community leads it to apply the anti-Zionist label to the Jewish Democratic Society, which was formed by Norman.¹

2. EVELYN ROTHFIELD

Evelyn Rothfield arrived in Australia with her husband, Norman, and soon became involved with the Labor Party. Her friends, the Mushin family (the founders of the Council) then persuaded her to become the Council's Public Relations Officer.

Evelyn's involvement in the Council reflected her upbringing, in which she was taught that Jews have 'a special interest in justice. For a Jew, justice is one of the most important motivating forces'. Evelyn held the ethical principles of Judaism to be very important. She felt that a Jew 'had to stand up and be counted, to participate regarding ideas of justice and freedom that are basic to Jewish ethics'.

Evelyn pointed out that the majority of active Council members were on the Left, but also mentioned the presence of Right-wing members in the Forties, including Max Kohane (Council treasurer) and Phil Hayman (an executive member for many years). Evelyn saw this as 'a good thing', both being very active in their time. She also explained that the Council was able to gain the support of the Left 'because they would understand the position of an underdog and the Jews were then still in the position of the underdog'.

Evelyn believes that the Jewish community today is far more Right-wing and less tolerant than it was in the Forties and Fifties. When asked to comment on the recent allegations of government-inspired anti-Semitism in Leftist Nicaragua, which possess some blatant similarities in style, if not validity, to the allegations of Soviet anti-Semitism in the early Fifties (the sources are impeccably Right-wing, like *Com-*



A cartoon from the Sydney periodical *Unity* (July–August 1948) which had strong links with the Melbourne Jewish Council. (Courtesy Isi Leibler.)

mentary magazine, and the allegations have been exploited by the American extreme Right to justify their 'Cold War' support for the 'anti-Communist' Contra terrorists in Nicaragua),² Evelyn replied that she viewed them with suspicion. Her contacts in the USA imply that these allegations are 'without foundation'.

3. SAM GOLDBLOOM

Sam Goldbloom was born in England in 1919 and arrived in Australia with his family in 1922. Sam's father was a Jewish immigrant from Tsarist Russia and very well-versed in Yiddish and Hebrew literature. He was a 'traditionalist' Jew who maintained a 'liberal' Jewish home and became an 'Anglophile'.

Sam found his Jewishness forced on him by the socio-political climate. At state school, for example, he was thrown in the nearby canal by young Jew-baiters. Later on, his Jewishness would become a potent factor in his life as a consequence of Fascism.

Sam's political education developed during his family's three-year stay in Perth in the middle of the Depression. His father owned a small clothing factory, behind which men would gather to grab the 'slops' from a nearby hotel for their meal. This scene of absolute human degradation stuck in Sam's mind. Similarly, an accident which badly damaged Sam's leg and kept him home for nine months allowed him to witness the constant stream of men sleeping nearby in Kings Park and begging all householders for work. Sam, himself, also experienced the frustration of unem-

ployment and the contemporary version of the 'dole bludger' tag for a significant period of time. Thus, his political attitudes were determined by his own experience.

Sam himself became quite involved in the Jewish community in a social sense. He was a founder of the South Judaeen Tennis Club and also re-established the Victorian Jewish Competition Society. This society focused on a wide range of cultural activity including singing, music, poetry, writing and play-writing. Its competitors included Nehama Patkin and the Segal brothers.

Sam's initial introduction to the Jewish Council is very interesting. In 1943, he was stationed at an airforce base in Colac as a flight mechanic. In a recreation hut there, he found a copy of Eric Butler's *The International Jew* which alleged that the war was being fought on behalf of the Jews. Sam was incensed at such a pamphlet being present on an airforce base during the war and was dissatisfied with the response of the base commander to his complaints. This incident played a direct part in producing Sam's later involvement in the Council.

Today, Sam believes the Jewish community is much less respectful of dissent. His primary political involvement is in the Peace Movement. Sam believes it is a shame that he receives input from so many members of the clergy, yet there is little or no comment by the Jewish clergy on the issue of nuclear disarmament or even on the recent Gorbachev/Reagan treaty.

4. ISAAC GUST

Isaac Gust was born in Poland in 1898 in a predominantly Jewish city. As a young fifth grade student he became involved in Socialist groups. In 1914 he left Poland for Russia, where he joined the celebrating crowds in the streets of Mariupol in the Ukraine, when news of the Russian Revolution filtered through.³

Isaac belonged to the Internationalists and was appointed as a delegate to the Jewish Congress of Students in Moscow in late 1917/early 1918. Gust then went to Palestine via Alexandria where he met his girlfriend, Rose Kramer; they were to remain in Palestine from 1920 until 1927, moving to Australia in 1928. Later on, Gust became the Jewish Council's representative at the Board of Deputies. In the beginning, he had 'an easy time', but the Board slowly came under the influence of Zionism, so he withdrew.

Isaac is the only surviving founder of the Council and became involved in the Council because he was politically motivated to mobilise the Jewish community against Fascism; to extract maximum support for the war effort. Interestingly, he sees 'everyone as going their own political way' after Fascism was defeated. In his opinion, the completion of the war left 'no need' for a Jewish Council. It had fulfilled its function.

Isaac sees himself as a Jew by birth, but a Russian Jew who had nothing in common with Poland. He went to a Russian speaking high school. Isaac is not a cultural Jew, he knows no Jewish literature, but he always felt a Jew even when he went to Communist Party classes. In his case, his Jewishness and his Communism didn't compete, 'both were facts'.

Isaac has no contact with the Jewish community today, but believes that the formation of Israel in 1948 led the community to become nationalistic. Consequently, anything that 'didn't conform to that' was viewed with suspicion. 'Right-wing Zionists' wouldn't accept Communists as 'friends or bedfellows'. Gust

had many public arguments with Benzion Patkin. The Zionists opposed the Council because 'it meant mobilising the community for here, not for Israel'.

Gust spoke briefly of Saul Factor, a prominent member of the Kadimah, the Jewish Progressive Centre and, later, the Jewish Council, who died recently. According to Gust, Factor was a 'one hundred per cent Jew'. He was brought up in a Hasidic community in Lodz and was 'a good Communist and a good Jew'. There was 'no contradiction whatsoever'.

5. EVE ROSENBERG

Eve Rosenberg was born in Poland in 1928 and arrived in Australia in 1939, six months before the war. Her father, a member of *Hashomer Hatzair* in Poland, took her to May Day marches in Melbourne. During the war, her family looked towards the Soviet Union as 'showing the way', viewing it as surrounded by enemies. In 1941, Eve's father, who had become a member of the Jewish Progressive Centre⁴ became involved in fundraising activities. Her own political involvement began after the war with her entry into the Eureka Youth League and the Kadimah Youth Organisation.

Eve's upbringing was very Jewish and Yiddish-oriented. She was brought up in Yiddish Sunday School, played in the Yiddish Theatre and, similarly to Lou Jedwab, maintained a very strong cultural identification. All the Left in the Kadimah had 'a very strong cultural identity'. They also used to go to Eureka Youth League camps. There, they sang Jewish songs and felt that their cultural identification was encouraged.

Among the Jewish newcomers, a very large proportion were on the Left. Many had spent the war years in Russia and a number joined the Jewish Progressive Centre because they felt they owed their lives to the Soviet Union.

After working briefly at the Jewish Welfare Society, Eve attained a clerical job at the Jewish Council in 1947. She saw her work for a Council opposing anti-Semitism as 'very allied to her political beliefs'. According to Eve, the Council wasn't just concerned with Jewish problems, but with all racial discrimination ('The Brotherhood of Man concept'). Eve saw no conflict between these specifically Jewish and broader objectives. 'One encouraged the other. [Her] Jewish and Communist loyalty was one, it was very simple'.⁵

'The Council didn't just think of Jews, you couldn't just fight for justice for Jews, it had to be in a broader frame'. This was what appealed to Eve. To her, it was to be admired that the Council was not just narrowly concerned with Jews. It took up specifically Jewish concerns and cases (e.g. racial disturbances against Jewish children at school, etc.), but linked them to broader anti-discrimination and anti-prejudice concepts.

Eve spoke briefly of Judah Waten (a good friend), who was very pro-Soviet, but identified his Jewishness through his writing.⁶ He came from an Orthodox background and was involved in literary circles with many Jews (Goldhar, the Bergners, etc.). Although he was probably not as concerned with Jewish identification as Eve, he was very Jewish in many ways.

Eve sees the Jewish community today as being far less tolerant than in that period. In particular, she denounced the 'unjustified' treatment of the Jewish Democratic Society asking 'What are they frightened of?' Eve feels that the Jewish establishment can not tolerate anything 'not of the Right', and that their uncritical support of Israel today is very similar to the Left's attitude to the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

6. WALTER LIPPMANN

Walter Lippmann was born in Germany in 1920 and arrived in Australia in 1938 as a refugee from Hitler's Germany just prior to *Kristallnacht*.

Walter had always been conscious of anti-Semitism in Russia, which 'even goes back to Tsarist days', but his own experience under Hitler made him more aware of Fascism. It also served to strengthen his Jewish identity, which he describes as 'Zionistic'. Walter sees Israel as the 'centre of the Jewish world' and was a very active member of *Poale Zion* in pre-State days.

Walter joined the Council in 1942 because 'a war was going on and the Council was doing a very good job. Its work was of tremendous value'. Walter feels the Council played an important 'educational role' in the community in the Forties, but that this role was lost through the overriding pressure to brand the Council as Communist. It did educate the Jewish community in terms of 'broader Australian issues', but its main concerns were Jewish. For example, it entertained Dr. Evatt before he went to the San Francisco Congress.

In retrospect, Walter feels that the Council's Anti-German Migration Campaign made one mistake. The campaign itself was 'dead right', but it should have been titled 'Anti War Criminals Campaign'. Of course, opposition to all Germans was 'the more popular thing' at that time.

Today, Walter believes that the Jewish Community is suffering from an 'I'm all right, Jack' mentality. He still believes that the welfare of the Jews is most likely to be supported in Australia by people 'slightly left-of-centre'.

7. LOU JEDWAB

Lou Jedwab was born in Poland in 1925. Lou's father was a worker and a one-time member of the Polish Socialist Party. His older brother (born in 1917) was a member of *Hashomer Hatzair* in Poland, which was in some areas the illegal Communist Party's cell within the Jewish community. The Polish Communist Party's membership included a disproportionate number of Jews.

On arrival in Australia, Lou's brother joined the Young Socialist League. From the age of twelve, Lou similarly became an avid reader of Left-wing literature. He also attended *Gezerd House*⁷ and was influenced by his brother's attendance at the demonstration against Von Luckner (Hitler's Ambassador) in 1938.

Lou's home contained works by classical Jewish writers such as Peretz and Sholem Aleichem, his father being a Yiddishist. This cultural base led Lou into the Kadimah Youth Organisation,⁸ which was primarily concerned with cultural and political activities and Yiddish classics. Lou was also involved in the Yiddish stage in the late Thirties to mid-Forties. Clearly, his connection with the Left was not only political, but also cultural.

According to Lou, his political beliefs are firmly based in his Jewish roots. His historical past, his upbringing and his cultural identity form his Jewish being. His political being is based on the political and cultural contribution that Jewish intellectuals have made to the world since Marx. 'Since 1905 and prior to 1905, Jews have been involved in Socialist movements in every country of the world'. Lou mentioned that more than half of the members of the six foreign resistance groups involved in the French Resistance in the city of Paris were Jewish and that General Secretary Eugene Dennis was at one time one of the few members of the American

Communist Party (CPUSA) Central Committee who was neither Jewish nor Negro. Lou also recalls viewing the beautiful films of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman (the famous Jewish anarchists).

Lou sees the Jewish Left political personality from the 1850s as a 'unique individual'. In Lodz, Warsaw, Paris and Latvia, the poor Jewish man studied Marx's writings, as did the more educated Jew in Vienna and Germany. Thus, a politically conscious Jewish worker developed who also created Left-wing Yiddish literature for the masses. For example, in the USA over 300 Yiddish films were made by the 1930s. These were working-class Jews with cultural ties who were also involved in political emancipation.

Lou's involvement in the Jewish Council, therefore, stemmed specifically from this cultural/political nexus in his upbringing. More particularly, in the 1940s, the Jewish youth moved to the Left because of anti-Semitism and Fascism, not for economic reasons.⁹ The Hitler period demonstrated the need for a Jewish defence organisation against these evils. The Council, itself, was not interested in advancing the Left politically; otherwise, it would have raised the issue of the forty-hour week or working-class wages. It was first and foremost a Jewish defence organisation.

NOTES

1. McNaughton, Sarah, *op. cit.* (p. 117) sees 'a particular Right-wing brand of Zionism as having replaced anti-Communism as the community leadership's "civil religion".'
2. See, for example, Jamail, Milton and Gutierrez, Margo, 'Israel in Central America' in *Middle East Report*, May-June 1986, pp. 26-30.
3. *The Age*, 14 November 1987.
4. See Rechter, David, *op. cit.*, (1986), pp. 119-126.
5. See *Ibid.*, p. 94 on 'the perceived harmony between Jewish and Communist interests' as reflected in the Kadimah Youth.
6. See, for example, Waten, Judah, *Alien Son* (NSW, Australia, 1952).
7. The 'House of Culture'. See Rechter, David, *The Gezerd: The Jewish Left in Melbourne in the 1930s*, (unpublished B.A. Thesis, Department of Modern Jewish History, University of Melbourne, 1984), p. 29).
8. See Rechter, David, *op. cit.* (1986), pp. 89-94.
9. See *Ibid.*, p. 93.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The years following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 saw the growth in Melbourne of a broad anti-Fascist Jewish Left, united by the war effort and sympathy for the Soviet Union, which came to be seen (not only by Jews) as an heroic ally.¹ It was within this specific political climate that the Jewish Council was formed. Its objectives accurately reflected the primary Jewish concerns of the period: the attack on the Jews and the democratic communities spearheaded by Hitler and his Fascist allies and the simultaneous acceptance of many Fascist, anti-Semitic stereotypes within Australia.

In its ideological underpinnings, the Jewish Council also reflected an older Jewish tradition of support for and concern with broader progressive political involvement. As the section on 'Jewish functionaries' demonstrates, most of the leaders of the Jewish Council were proud, self-identifying Jews, who possessed a strong commitment to the welfare of Jews in Australia and elsewhere. Along with this specific interest in Jewish causes, their 'Jewishness' also led them to maintain a uniquely Jewish focus on issues of social and political justice. Thus, the Council developed a

complementary two-fold identity. It fought explicitly for Jewish rights and implicitly for broader Human rights. It saw the two struggles as being inherently linked.

The Council's 'Left-liberal' focus served it well in the harmonious days of the anti-Fascist united front. However, the end of the war and the onset of anti-Communist paranoia introduced a new debate into the Jewish community regarding its future relations with the broader community. This debate was an extension of the earlier communal debate that launched the Council into existence. The question now, however, was no longer whether the Jewish community should intervene in the broader sphere to protect its interests; rather, the new debate focused on the extent to which such intervention should be specifically linked with either broader political forces or broader political objectives. Thus, what ensued in the coming years was not so much a struggle for political control over the community *per se*, but a battle to decide the type of value system and ideological orientation that the Jewish community would present as its own in its broader political activities.

In many senses, this Left-Right battle reflected a different interpretation of history. The Jewish Left, via its perception of modern European history, believed that a conservative political onslaught would inevitably include a 'backlash' against the Jews. The Jewish Right, in contrast, viewed anti-Semitism as neither endemic to the Left or Right. It claimed to judge contemporary political leaders and movements without any ideological preconceptions. In short, the Jewish Right concerned itself with exclusively Jewish interests, whilst the Jewish Left believed that the welfare of the Jews was inherently tied to broader political developments. Their fight for Jewish rights could not be successfully separated from the broader fight for human rights. In the end, the Jewish Right won a triumph in this ideological struggle that was hardly surprising. Its seemingly apolitical 'Is it good for the Jews?' line fitted comfortably with the broader conservative 'Cold War' consensus. In contrast, the Jewish Council's partisan political activity placed it in opposition to powerful national interests. The failure of the Anti-German Migration Campaign reflected the presence of this crucial broader political resistance to the Council's operations.

Whilst the disaffiliation of the Council from the Board of Deputies reflected the victory of the Jewish Right's more practical 'respectable' line, it was the Jewish Council's inadequate response to allegations of Soviet anti-Semitism that allowed the Right to attain not only complete political control over the community, but also the ability to re-interpret history and convincingly label the Jewish Left as disloyal, Communist-controlled etc. for the next thirty-five years. The Jewish Council's prime mistake lay with its failure to articulate a position on Soviet Jewry that reflected a Jewish, rather than broader, political bias. Of course, in a purely political sense, it was entirely feasible for the Jewish Council to adopt (as they essentially did) the 'Machiavellian line' that the alleviation of 'Cold War' tension and anti-Soviet hysteria was more important than the specific fate of Soviet Jewry. But for a Jewish organisation formed specifically to combat all sources of anti-Semitism, the adoption of such a politically subtle and, superficially, incomprehensible policy could not help but lead to virulent charges of national treason. Essentially, the Council abandoned the classification of 'Jewishness' to the Jewish Right. It forfeited its right to present an alternative conceptualisation of Jewish identity.

Within a historical perspective, however, it is important to look beyond the victors' distortions and focus on the real accomplishments, as well as the failures, of the Jewish Council. Here, the Jewish Council deserves to be lauded for a number of

initiatives that have undeniably stood the test of time. The Council mounted a consistent, never-ending campaign in defence of the State of Israel; the Council identified the presence in Australia of 'Nazi War Criminals'; the Council displayed an admirable concern for the rights of the Aborigines when such sympathy was rare, even on the Left; the Council displayed a political sophistication and vibrant determination in fighting anti-Semitism that was unique amongst Jewish organisations of the period.

To today's generation of Jews, however, in the view of the author, the delegitimisation of the Council has also bequeathed a contemporary political tragedy. As some interviewees have commented, the anti-Zionist label applied to dissenting elements within the present-day community possesses much similarity to the 'Communist front' label employed to discredit the Left in the Cold War period. What is different today, however, is that the conservative Jewish establishment is operating independently of broader political overtones. Australia today possesses no wholesale 'Cold War' or McCarthyist-type attack on political freedom and dissent. It is only the Jewish community that seeks the attainment of *absolute* political unanimity. The inherent sadness of this situation lies in the fact that many young progressive Jews are forced, or at least pressured, to move outside the Jewish community in order to openly express their political beliefs. These persons are often lost permanently to the community. Such intolerance can only be viewed as the consequence of a neo-Cold War communal climate.

NOTE

1. Rechter, David, *op. cit.* (1986), p. 67.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the early days of the Socialist political movement in the Nineteenth Century, Jews, both as individual theorists and activists of the calibre of Marx, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, Leon Blum, Bernard Lazare, Henri Curiel and, more recently, Jerry Rubin, Danny Cohn-Bendit, Herbert Marcuse and Joe Slovo, and as an organised mass constituency, have been conspicuous in their disproportionate contribution to the activities of the Left in almost every continent of the world.

This fact is verified by a countless number of authors. Feuer (1969), for example, refers to the significant involvement of Jewish student leaders in the Viennese revolution of 1848. Similarly, Levin (1977) talks about the considerable influence of the Jewish *Bund* on the early Socialist-Democratic movement in Russia; Frankel (1981) mentions that thirty percent of the political arrestees held in the Russian Empire in 1900 were Jews; Wistrich (1982) quotes Engels as stating in 1890 that 'Marx was of purest Jewish blood; Lassalle was a Jew. Many of our best people are Jews. My friend Victor Adler, who is at present paying in prison for his devotion to the cause of the proletariat, Eduard Bernstein editor of the London *Sozial-Demokrat*, Paul Singer, one of our best men in the Reichstag — people of whose friendship I am proud, are all Jews';¹ Kochan (1970) quotes Lenin as stating in 1917 that 'the Jews have provided an extremely high percentage (compared to the total of the Jewish population) of leaders of the revolutionary movement';² Schapiro (1962-62) describes the Jews as 'pioneers in bringing the light of Marxism from Western Europe into Russia';³ Wistrich quotes Michels as remarking that prior to 1914, 'In

many countries, in Russia and Rumania for instance, but above all in Hungary and in Poland, the leadership of the working-class parties is almost exclusively in the hands of Jews . . .';⁴ Deak (1968) mentions that almost all the truly important positions amongst the leadership of the Hungarian Revolution of 1918-19 were occupied by people of Jewish background; Mosse (1970) speaks of the 'widespread correlation between Jew and Left-wing intellectual in pre-Nazi Germany';⁵ Shindler (1986) details the disproportionate amount of Jewish involvement in the pro-Republican International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War; Lipset (1971) mentions the heavy involvement of American Jews in radical activities in the 1930s and 1940, a phenomenon he describes as 'stemming from continuity with the political values brought over from the ghettos of Eastern Europe';⁶ Perrault (1987) outlines the important role played by Henri Curiel and other Egyptian Jews in the creation of both the Egyptian and Sudanese Communist movements; Liebman (1979) focuses on the preponderance of Jews in the leadership and among the activists of the American Communist Party even into the post-World War Two era and also on the significant Jewish presence in the New Left; Mehnert (1978) discusses the remarkably high proportion of young Jews in the American New Left; and Rubinstein (1982) maintains that 'Among the Western world's leading Marxist theorists and writers at present, possibly one-quarter or more continue to be Jews'.⁷

In more general terms, Brenner (1986) talks about 'the image of the Jew as Leftist in the American mind';⁸ Bermant (1982) comments that, 'at the beginning of this Century, the very words radical and Jew were almost one and many a Left-wing thinker or politician was taken to be Jewish through the very fact of his radicalism';⁹ Friedman (1984) describes the Jews as 'a stronghold of anti-Capitalist sentiment for the past Century';¹⁰ whilst Lipset (1969) points out that 'the history of the relationship between the Left and the Jews indicates that the Jews have been intimately associated with the liberal-Left side of the political spectrum'.¹¹

Other authors focus more specifically upon the development of peculiarly Jewish mass radical movements, including Fishman (1974) who vividly describes the development of the Jewish revolutionary labor movement amongst the Russian immigrants to Britain in the late Nineteenth Century; Epstein (1950) who extensively outlines the industrial, political and cultural history of the massive Jewish labor movement in the USA from 1882 to 1952; Mendelssohn (1970) who focuses on the activities of the thousands of workers attracted to the specifically Jewish labor movement that developed in Russia and Poland between 1897 and 1905-6; Howe (1976) who delightfully describes the Jewish Socialist movement that emerged amongst East European immigrants to the USA, which he sees as 'having transformed the posture of Jewish life by creating a new type of person: combative, worldly, spirited, and intent upon sharing the future of industrial society with the rest of the world';¹² Buhle (1986) who speaks of the Jewish immigrant Socialist movement as 'gaining an importance in the Socialist movement of early Twentieth Century USA that was out of all proportion to the modest size of their community in American society';¹³ and Blumenfeld (1935) who creatively describes the radical culture that flourished among the Jewish immigrants to the East End of London in the Thirties.

In the Australian context, whilst no mass Jewish radical movement developed that was of crucial importance in the broader context of the Australian Left, a few authors document the extent of Jewish involvement in Left-wing political movements. Inglis (1983), for example, describes the involvement of her father (Isaac

Gust) and his Left-wing Jewish friends in an organisation called the *Gezerd*, which supported the Jewish autonomous region of Birobidjan, created in the Soviet Union. (Isaac Gust's experiences during the Russian Revolution were actually outlined recently in an *Age* special on the seventieth anniversary of the Revolution,¹⁴ whilst Wynn (1968) documents the fortunes of Aaron Newmark, one of the prime movers of the *Gezerd*. Similarly, Dow (1983) describes the disproportionate involvement of young Jews in the Fifties in the 'Labor Club' at Melbourne University; d'Aprano (1977) describes the contribution made by her radical immigrant parents to her development into a leader of the Women's Liberation Movement; whilst Rechter (1984) devotes an entire thesis to examining the development of the *Gezerd* from 1931 as the first manifestation of the organised Jewish Left in Melbourne.

Whilst many different theories abound regarding this Jewish predisposition towards a Socialist political identification,¹⁵ it is evident that many authors and radicals find a direct explanation in Jewish tradition and culture itself. Sorin (1985), for example, suggests that Jewish culture, including religious values, was critical to the formation of radical consciousness amongst the American Jewish immigrants (1880-1920). Socialist Jews were vitally in touch with their traditional culture and very much rooted in a transplanted Jewish community. 'The evidence strongly suggests that the Jewish Socialists were a prophetic minority, responding to biblical norms of social justice, interpreted in a modern context'.¹⁶ Similarly, Beer (1976) suggests that 'the Jew has been impregnated by his religion with a sense of social righteousness, which has been deepened by two thousand years of immense sufferings . . . It is almost an instinct with him. It is the legacy received from the legislation of Moses and the teachings of the prophets, who saw the soul of religion in ethics, in man's behaviour to man'.¹⁷ Garner (1986) quotes Bernard Lazare as asserting that 'Jews did not believe in the immortality of the soul. Hence, Jews are impatient with injustice and restless to bring righteousness into the earthly world, the only world they believed existed'. For Lazare this explained Jewish radicalism.¹⁸ Maccoby (1977) draws parallels between Jewish and Communist messianism, and maintains that Jewish revolutionaries were produced by Judaism; and Nedava (1972) quotes I. N. Steinberg (the first Bolshevnik Commissar of Justice) as believing that 'Socialism and Judaism (to his mind identical with the "Socialism" of the Jewish prophets) were complementary'. According to Steinberg, the Bolshevnik 'distribution of land to the peasants accorded with the *Torah's* prohibition of private ownership of land'.¹⁹

Thus, in summary, it can be seen that within modern political history there has been a clear connection between being Jewish and being radical; a progressive political orientation clearly reflects one important strain in modern Jewish tradition and culture.

THE JEWISH COUNCIL

The first history of the Jewish Council as an organisation was written by Allan Leibler (1967), who attempts to demonstrate that the Jewish Council's central organisational features, policies and reactions clearly designate it to be a 'Communist Front Organisation'. Unfortunately, Leibler's view of the Council is, in my opinion, quite distorted by his conservative preconceptions and an inadequate use of sources; for instance, Leibler failed to consult any of the functionaries of the Council, whilst accepting as non-partisan the claims of its arch-enemies. Clearly,

Leibler's thesis is primarily useful as a representation of the conservative 'establishment' view of the Jewish Council.

Similarly, Medding (1968), whilst providing an adequate description of the Cold War context in which the Jewish Council and its opponents operated, labels the Council a 'fellow-travelling' organisation and failed, in my view, to examine its activities from the viewpoint of a detached, unbiased historian.

Unfortunately, most recent Australian Jewish historians have accepted Leibler and Medding's inadequate explanations. Blakeney (1985), for instance, cites Medding in suggesting that the Jewish Council's effectiveness declined after 1948 due to the Communist sympathies of some of its executive members; Elazar (1983) repeatedly identifies the Jewish Council as a 'Communist front organisation'; Rubinstein (1985) cites Leibler in identifying the Jewish Council as a classical 'Communist front organisation from 1945 onwards'; and Rubinstein (1986) describes the Jewish Council as a discredited 'Communist front organisation'. Interestingly, Kampeas (1987), a former member of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, in a review of Rubinstein's *Chosen: The Jews in Australia*, describes her description of the 'establishment-despised' Jewish Council as a 'Communist front' as 'reflecting a mild kowtowing to vested community interests'.²⁰

In the last few years, two attempts have been made to present an historical and ideologically sensitive view of the Jewish Council. McNaughton (1984) presents an effective critique of Leibler and Medding's accounts of the Jewish Council and accurately identifies the Council as a 'Left-liberal body set up in the 1940s in the spirit and within the network of other similar Left-liberal organisations of the time'.²¹ In turn, Rechter (1986) correctly places the Jewish Council within the local Jewish context, identifying it as indicative of a 'broad Jewish Left which emerged during the war and immediate post-war years as a significant force in the Jewish community, reflecting both a world-wide Jewish phenomenon, and a short-lived Australian acceptance of Left-liberal views'.²²

The intention of this essay, therefore, was to go somewhat beyond McNaughton and Rechter's detached assessments of the history of the Jewish Council as an abstract political organisation. In short, the author endeavoured to delve more deeply into the key events of the period and, particularly, to examine both the hidden and declared motivations and aims, as well as the successes and failures of the primary actors in these events. Finally, some attempt was made to identify more explicitly the specifically Jewish ideological underpinnings of the Jewish Council.

NOTES

1. Wistrich, Robert, *Socialism and the Jews* (London, 1982), pp. 34-35.
2. Kochan, Lionel (ed.), *The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917* (1970), p. 63.
3. Schapiro, Leonard, 'The Role of the Jews in the Revolutionary Movement' in *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 40, 1962-62, p. 156.
4. Wistrich, Robert, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (London, 1976), p. 2.
5. Mosse, George L, *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left and the Search for a Third Force in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York, 1970), p. 204.
6. Lipset, Seymour Martin, *Rebellion in the University* (Harvard University, 1971), p. 8.
7. Rubinstein, W.D, *The Left, the Right and the Jews* (London, 1982), p. 123.
8. Brenner, Lenni, *Jews in America Today* (Al Saqi Books, London, 1986), p. 30.
9. Bermant, Chaim, *The Jews* (London, 1982), p. 160.
10. Friedman, Milton, 'Capitalism and the Jews' in *Encounter*, June 1984, p. 75.
11. Lipset, Seymour Martin, 'The Socialism of Fools: the Left, the Jews and Israel' in *Encounter*, Dec. 1969, p. 24.

12. Howe, Irving, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976), p. 323.
13. Buhle, Paul, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (1986), p. 46.
14. Saturday Extra, 'Children of the Revolution', *The Age*, 14 November 1987.
15. Cohen, Percy S, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews* (London, 1980) and Rothman, Stanley and Lichter, Robert, *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians and the New Left*.
16. Sorin, Gerald, *The prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals 1880-1920* (1985), preface and p. 3.
17. Beer, Max, *Fifty Years of International Socialism* (1976), pp. 104-105.
18. Garner, Reuben, 'Bernard Lazare' in *Midstream* June-July 1986, p. 24.
19. Nedava, Joseph, *Trotsky and the Jews* (1972), p. 102.
20. Kampeas, Ron, 'Aussie Chronicle' in *Jerusalem Post*, August 1987.
21. McNaughton, Sarah, *Liberalism and Anti-Communism in the Melbourne Jewish Community in the 1940s and 1950s*, (unpublished B.A. Honours Thesis, University of Sydney, 1984), p. 112.
22. Rechter, David, *Beyond the Pale: Jewish Communism in Melbourne*, (unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1986), p. 13.

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