

Jewish Chronicle

DECEMBER 17, 1993 — TEVET 3, 5754

Russian reaction

Vladimir Zhirinovsky — former Jewish cultural activist turned xenophobe — is clearly a man of contradictions. But there is nothing unclear in his party's strong showing in this week's Russian elections. Take a population economically battered in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Add an ambitious demagogue willing and able to provide scapegoats instead of solutions. The result is a recipe for reaction, bigotry and further instability. The potential dangers are many: for Jews and other minorities, for the non-Russian republics, and the wider international community. Many, though surely not all, of Russia's Jews will begin or accelerate preparations to emigrate. Our own community can, and should, do whatever possible to help them — while continuing its support for the large number of Russian Jews who will remain. Equally important, however, will be the response of Jews and others, private individuals and governments, to the efforts of President Boris Yeltsin to come to terms with the election result. Mr Yeltsin may well be tempted to co-opt rather than confront elements of Mr Zhirinovsky's appeal. The outside world must resist the temptation to turn a blind eye, or to peddle the rationale that support for Mr Yeltsin at any cost, on any platform, is the only alternative to an eventual takeover by Mr Zhirinovsky. There is a third, difficult but far better option. The support for Mr Zhirinovsky, disproportionately centred in those areas least touched by Russia's uneven economic reform, was a protest vote. The outside world should indeed seek to reinforce Mr Yeltsin's stature as a major world leader — by judicious use of the trappings of summity, by economic expertise and aid. Whatever the result of the inevitable parliamentary horse-trading after announcement of the final election results, the core aim of the international community must be to make reform work: politically for Mr Yeltsin, and economically for the millions of ordinary Russians who have begun to look at the old certainties of Soviet rule with nostalgia.

Continuity

Continuity, the new initiative for Jewish education in all its forms, has got off to an impressive start. Lean, forward-thinking and well-funded, it is determined to do more listening than preaching. Rather than seeking to displace existing organisations, it is positioning itself to identify, encourage and replicate the most imaginative of new approaches to making young and often disaffected Jews aware, and proud, of their Jewishness. The variety of projects in which it has already become quietly involved bodes well for the future. Yet one early signal is gratefully out of synch: the absence from its executive board of any member with Progressive educational ties. The challenge which produced Continuity — the drift of many young Jews away from any form of Jewish identification or affiliation — touches all sectors of our community. If Continuity is to build on its otherwise remarkable start, its response must be equally inclusive.

The eruv debate

The simple planning issue obscured by the Great Eruv Debate is this: will this series of nondescript poles joined by thin nylon tackle benefit and enrich the lives of those who seek it — without cost, much less harm, to others, or a blight on their environment? The answer is yes. Nothing in the past fortnight's appeal evidence has suggested otherwise. Several hundred eruvim have gone up around the world without controversy, much less surreal suggestions of the ilk that a few extra poles on residential roads might turn Hampstead Garden Suburb into Sarajevo. Jews rightly value ethnic tolerance and diversity. How sad that the disproportionate number of Jews actively opposing the eruv seem unwilling to apply that principle to their own co-religionists.

Rabbis' opposition to Arafat meeting

I read carefully the statement published in last week's JC by 60 dayanim and rabbis opposing the meeting between Anglo-Jewish leaders and Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

It is surprising to find the statement devoid of any spiritual content, with no references to Jewish teaching or to the halachah. Instead, it offers a political analysis of the issues, which — as might be expected, given the expertise of the signatories on this subject — is simplistic, naive and at times puerile.

By lending their names to the statement, the signatories have succeeded only in damaging their own reputations and standing in the community.

Leslie Wagner,
Muswell Hill, London N10.

Along with several hundred other volunteers from Britain, I participated in Israel's 1948 war of liberation. Many of these Machal volunteers paid with their lives.

Throughout the past 45 years, we veterans of that first war have looked forward to the day when Israel's place in the Middle East would be finally assured and accepted by the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians.

The Israeli government led by Yitzhak Rabin, whom I claim as a friend, took a courageous step in September by agreeing in principle to a peaceful solution of the conflict with the PLO.

I feel sure that the majority of Anglo-Jewry also approves of this step. I therefore fully support the Board of Deputies in its acceptance of the invitation to meet Yasir Arafat.

The signed declaration by the rabbis is a concoction of misplaced halachah and misplaced politics, and

Letters to the Editor

its irrelevance to the problems facing Israel's government was demonstrated last year by the Israeli electorate.

Stanley Medicks,
Machal Association,
Broadlands Close, London N6.

Judge Feinstein and his colleagues were absolutely right to agree to meet Yasir Arafat. The arguments advanced against their doing so sounded as if they were made in complete ignorance of the momentous events of the past year.

Quite simply, if the Israeli Prime Minister can bring himself to shake Mr Arafat's hand, then there is no reason why a delegation of leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community should not do the same.

To talk to Mr Arafat at this stage in the peace process is plain common sense. To refuse to do so is to imply that hostilities between Jews and Palestinians should continue indefinitely. That is an untenable position.

Stephen Brook,
Randolph Avenue, London W9.

The obscene and pathetic spectacle of British Jewish leaders purporting to strut on the stage of international relations is an affront to all the victims of Arafat and his group and brings the entire Anglo-Jewish community into disrepute.

These leaders had no mandate for the meeting with Arafat and have nothing to contribute to the dialogue. The meeting owed everything to their insatiable desire for self-importance and nothing to the needs of our community.

The leadership of the Board of Deputies has forfeited its right to act as the representative of Anglo-Jewry and should resign forthwith.

Michael Gross,
Regents Park Road, London NW1.

Rabbis' opposition to London eruv

There are clearly differences of opinion over the benefits of an eruv in North-West London.

The London Beth Din, which is responsible for the religious needs of the vast majority of London Jewry, supports it. The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (the Adath), which has a small minority of followers in North-West London, does not.

Surely a directive from the Adath, urging its members to refrain from using the eruv, would have sufficed. The London Beth Din could then have got on with arranging the eruv which, after all, would prevent much Sabbath desecration and is thus in the interests of all Jews.

The Adath carries no responsibility for the wider Orthodox community and does not, I am sure, envy the London Beth Din in this respect. It would have been a welcome gesture, to both the Beth Din and the wider community, if the Adath had remained silent on the issue.

All this is relatively trivial, however, when contrasted with the statement (December 10), purporting to come from the Adath rabbinate, that "should such an eruv be erected, we would declare it invalid." Which responsible rabbinate would seek to invalidate the eruv of another auth-

entic rabbinate? Indeed, since when can one rabbinate invalidate the eruv of another?

Knowing some of the rabbinate and leadership of the Adath as men of the highest integrity, imbued with a strong sense of responsibility, I cannot believe that their statement has the backing of the majority of that body.

Whether or not the eruv project goes ahead, I hope that the Adath will find some way of neutralising its statement, so that it retains the esteem in which it is held by its following.

J. H. Sinason,
Castleton Road, Salford.

What a sad indictment when the rabbinate of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations lines up with Lord Soper and Lord McGregor against the majority of the Jewish community of North-West London.

To put the Adath into context, it may well have a membership of 7,000, but its members are primarily in the Stamford Hill area and in parts of Manchester. The Adath membership affected by the eruv would number fewer than 1,000 — and of those, the majority would welcome it. Indeed, they probably consider it a necessity.

That the Adath rabbis did not append their names to the list of objectors to the Board of Deputies' meeting with Arafat prompts one to wonder whether their overriding concern is not, in fact, with the politics of

As a parish priest, and a regular reader of the Jewish Chronicle, I can understand — and, indeed, sympathise with — those members of the Jewish community who feel that the meeting with Yasir Arafat was wrong because of the PLO's history of violence against the Jewish people.

However, I have the highest respect for those leaders who were prepared to meet Arafat, because such meetings can prove to be significant steps in furthering the peace process.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland is that there will always be tragic consequences when two communities become locked into their history.

I fear that Israelis and Palestinians could make the same mistake by keeping their focus on the past and not addressing fully the opportunities of the present and the hopes of the future.

I sincerely hope that the courage of those leaders who were prepared to meet Yasir Arafat will be rewarded with the sight of two communities learning to live in peaceful co-existence and growing in mutual respect for one another.

(The Rev) Oliver J. McTernan,
St Francis of Assisi,
Pottery Lane,
London W11.

As one of those who, while clearly being pro-Israel, was often upbraided for criticising the policies of the Israeli government, I welcome the debate about the role of the Board of Deputies. Discussion is healthy.

It was with great trepidation that I read your editorial (December 10) — which way would the JC go? I was relieved that you came down on the side of dialogue. Thank you.

Vivien Lichtenstein,
Co-editor, *Jade*
(Jewish-Arab Dialogue in Europe),
Elgin Avenue,
London W9.

the United Synagogue. Is it not time that the rabbis acted on behalf of the communities they were appointed to serve?

M. C. Friedmann,
Russell Gardens, London NW11.

It is unfortunate that so many British Jews, through a lack of Jewish knowledge, consider themselves entitled to interpret and condemn those parts of the halachah with which they disagree simply because, from their standpoint, such laws do not "fit in" with their opinions or practice.

Herbert N. Frank,
Franklyn Gardens, Edgware.

Your report (December 10) states that I told the Barnet eruv inquiry that "they should have set up" an ultra-violet laser-beam eruv. In fact, I simply suggested that such an eruv would be less environmentally and socially insensitive than the currently proposed poles on public land linked with nylon fishing line.

An ultra-violet eruv could be constructed using a single laser and a series of roof-mounted mirrors. The invisible beam would create a perfect uninterrupted boundary. It would involve no public land and it could incorporate a siren, so that, if the beam were broken, people could drop whatever they were carrying.

Brian Simpson,
Milton Park, London N6.

MORE LETTERS ON NEXT PAGE

Quote unquote

A bizarre madness seems to have taken hold of a North London suburb.

The Guardian, on the eruv controversy

All eyes turned to the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery as the most famous tea-towel in history was borne to its appointed place, atop the head of a diminutive and smiling Yasir Arafat in desert khaki.

Matthew Parris sketch on the PLO leader's visit to the House of Commons, The Times.

Put Mrs Arafat alongside the current crop of Tory Cabinet wives and she wouldn't look out of place. Her husband may favour traditional headwear, but her style blends Parisian chic and Sloane conservatism.

The Independent

He was a good joke, then a bad joke — now he's no joke at all

The Times, headline on Vladimir Zhirinovsky

Emma — compact, neat and dark, the daughter of what she describes as Woodstock Jews — is what university hippies felt their children would turn out to be if they were heavily doped with rock festival radicalism and hardback reading.

John Diamond profile on precocious teenage journalist Emma Forrest, in the Mail on Sunday magazine

JEWISH CHRONICLE

25 FURNIVAL STREET, LONDON, EC4A 1JT, ENGLAND
Telephone: 071-405 9252 Fax Numbers: Editorial Dept.
071-405 9040 Advertising: 071-831 5188

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS UK, £45.00. Europe All-up Service, £65 (inc Eire)
Abroad (except Europe and North America), £60.00. United States, Air Freight \$84.00.
Canada, Air Freight C\$112.00
Air Mail rates can be obtained on request to the Newspaper Sales Manager.

POSTAGE THIS WEEK. Inland 43p. Europe All-up service 88p. Abroad (surface mail) except Europe 80p.
Selling price in Eire 68p. Jewish Chronicle (USPS 257-040) is published weekly by Jewish Chronicle
Newspaper Ltd. Second-class postage paid at Long Island, NY and additional mailing offices. Postmaster:
Send address changes to JEWISH CHRONICLE, c/o Speedimex USA Inc, 35-02 48th Avenue, LIC, NY 11101-
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