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Outlook

Canada's Progressive Jewish Magazine



"Unearthing" — LISA KOKIN

The Inside Story

The Truth about Jewish Resistance
The 'New Positioning' of Buchenwald
Challenging the Myths • Art, Book & Festival Reviews

Readers Write or Wrong

Takes issue with Usiskin

Dear Editor:

Roz Usiskin's otherwise excellent review of *Deborah, Golda and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* by Letty Pogrebin (*Outlook*, March 92) contains a troublesome statement. Usiskin writes that the author of the book was "confronted with anti-Semitism" and gives as an example the United Nations' infamous "Zionism - is-racism" slogan.

I beg to differ with Usiskin's apparent premise, which is that equating Zionism with racism is tantamount to being anti-Semitic. Although political Zionism may be considered by many Jews to have been their national liberation movement, the fact is that for the Palestinian people it meant the denial of their national rights and their eventual subjugation to an apartheid-like system of discrimination as practised in the Occupied Territories.

It is true that the 1975 UN "Zionism-is-racism" resolution was an example of sheer hypocrisy, since it was sponsored by Arab dictatorships and supported by regimes that were themselves disgustingly oppressive. But in its justifiable indignation over the resolution, the mainstream Jewish community avoided — and continues to avoid — a fundamental question. That question is whether Zionism, as practiced today by the Israeli government, is used in a racist manner to discriminate against non-Jews.

The following facts should help dispel any doubt:

- Almost 90 per cent of the land in

Israel is controlled by the Jewish National Fund, an agency which forbids the sale or lease of its property to non-Jews.

- A full two-thirds of Palestinians under Israeli rule (the 1.8 million in the Occupied Territories) are denied the same right to vote which is freely given to Jews living alongside them.

- The 1950 Law of Return invites Jews worldwide who have never set foot in Israel to "return" and receive instant citizenship, while the

indigenous Palestinians who fled or were expelled are not permitted to go back to the land of their birth.

The list could go on. When confronted with these facts that would evoke outrage if the victims were Jews, apologists for Israel feebly counter that certain "restrictions" against non-Jews are permissible and even necessary since Israel was founded to be a Jewish state. That argument is as logical — and racist — as claims by supporters of

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Our cover story

JEW AS A VERB: TO OVERREACH; cheat; beat unfairly at a bargain; as to jew one out of a dollar. Hebe. Hymie. Jewish American Princess.

With these and other epithets, Berkeley artist Lisa Kokin opened her second solo show, "Unearthing" at the Or Gallery in Vancouver.

The exhibit consists of 23 shovels randomly placed throughout the room. On each shovel, a derogatory name for Jews is either burned into the handle, or written on the blade. The words and descriptions range in offensiveness, from the old European favourite, "kike," to more subtle terms like "pushy," and "That's funny, you don't look Jewish."

Kokin made the list of words and slogans off the top of her head. She also found an old dictionary which had the Jew in verb and adverb form. "It was my intent to convey a sense of the gamut of derogatory names used for

the past several centuries," she stated. "I wanted to use old, rare words like 'kike' and 'yid,' and a wide scope of phrases that are more common now. In this way I wanted to comment on contemporary anti-Semitism."

The shovels serve a dual purpose — signifying burial and the mass graves of the Holocaust, and the digging up, or unearthing of racism.

Kokin has deep-seated feelings about being Jewish, and a strong cultural memory of persecution. But before shifting to Jewish themes, much of her art focused on Latin America. "It got to a point where I realized my own experiences are just as valid as other minority groups," she explained. "Art is an inward expression, so the change in my approach to my own heritage is rooted in who I am."

Jews and non-Jews will be touched and maybe a little shocked by Kokin's aptness at revealing the complexities of racism and its historical consequences.

"I'm not trying to be didactic with this exhibit, I just hope it will speak to people about xenophobia. I hope it touches, provokes and makes people think." □

— Laura Tulchinsky

Jack Cowan: A Tribute

Jack Cowan's death leaves a void which will be most difficult to fill. One of the pioneers of the progressive Jewish movement in Canada, Jack Cowan provided leadership qualities of unequalled parallel.

As president of the United Jewish People's Order for many years, Jack Cowan's devotion, dedication and selflessness were rare qualities that served the organization through many difficult years.

Jack was also one of the founders of the *Canadian Jewish Outlook*, a progressive magazine now celebrating 30 years of existence. *Outlook* remains as a testament to the farsightedness of its early pioneers.

His creative talent became a vital force in building a strong, secular Jewish culture in Canada, a legacy that will be passed on to future generations who seek to know and to understand the Canadian Jewish experience.

We are deeply saddened by the death of Jack Cowan, described elsewhere as a 'self-made' man. He will long be remembered. We honour his memory.

United Jewish People's Order — Winnipeg
Winnipeg Outlook Committee
United Jewish People's Order — Vancouver