

as she has spent a major part of her time in parliament raising the issue of a 'just' defence for Australia. In a similar vein, Suter spends the last quarter of his book focusing on the 'just' defence issue. He sees many positive challenges raised by the Dibb report in particular.

Some of the suggestions he makes to peace activists are not going to please some of us. For example, he must still be the only person in Australia who believes that all of the US bases in Australia can be internationalised. On the other hand he argues that even though Australia is one of the most secure nations on earth, most of the general public don't believe this. Further, most politicians from the major parties are not willing to be upfront on this issue and state the obvious — that ANZUS is an empty treaty.

Thus his comprehensive political strategy is based on the premise that there is little to be gained by attaching or calling directly for the ending of ANZUS, or by the advocacy of 'armed neutrality'. He believes that "It is first necessary to deal with (person's) fears and then to look at the inadequacy of the 'safety blanket'."

It is certain that there will still be plenty to keep peace activists busy in the next few decades — even if we do see a major new treaty on strategic weapons. Both of these books provide something to help us to go about this task enthusiastically. Stuart McMillan's book provides detail not given in our papers on an important government disarmament initiative. It provides, in particular, information about the different political forces at work in such a difficult situation.

Keith Suter provides some real questions about the priority of the work undertaken by the Australian peace movement. He encourages it to understand more fully the social conditions within which we work, and finishes by suggesting a ten-point action plan that is aimed at what he sees as the peace movement's main task: working for multilateral disarmament and enhancing Australia's national security.

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Quite Kosher



Simon Blumenfeld, *Jew Boy*, Lawrence & Wishart, \$19.95 paperback. Reviewed by Matthew Harding.

Simon Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy* first appeared in 1935 and reappears now in a facsimile edition. As Blumenfeld's first novel, it was influential in its time and made it possible for other Jewish writers to have their work published. Most immediately, it is a response to the British capital.

The London of the 1930s is powerfully evoked — a city of contrasts, rich and poor, decadent and austere, a modern day Sodom

and Gomorrah with its "amusement parlours, and stream-lined cars and eight-storey factories". Alec, the central character, is a young Jewish tailor living in the Jewish East End. He belongs to the small, unique community of cafes, libraries, billiard halls, political and musical organisations and education classes which existed between the two world wars.

Simon Blumenfeld and numerous other Jewish writers have acknowledged the inspiration — both political and creative — of this subculture. Alec, too, is a regular at the informal gatherings at Whitechapel Library and the Workers' Circle. They provide him with an ideological perspective on his days at 'the lousy workshop' where he is subject to unrewarding work (both spiritually and financially) and a repressive managerial structure. *Jew Boy* provides unforgettable images of 'the dark, blind, overpowering maw of hard labour'.

The entire novel is seen through Alec's eyes. It traces his 'Odyssey, a painful search for a way of living'. This involves a search for comprehensive social meanings — finally resulting in his decision to join the Communist Party and agitate ('his place was in the ranks'). All aspects of Alec's life come together under a discriminating materialist analysis: the dance-halls he visits, the factory, the filthy East End slums' and the wider world he looks out upon.

Everything linked up with economics; even in dance-halls, these swan songs of a decaying civilisation... bread-line songs, steadily getting more and more doleful. Trade is bad, exports have gone to hell, and we're all bankrupt, but there's nothing we can do about it, so let's dance, and cry our eyes out!

Jew Boy confronts ethnic and class discrimination, the exploitative conditions in the labour market, 'the disease of Unemployment', the sheer struggle of the working class to survive, and the social demands on young Jewish people to marry early. It's full of hard luck stories, of people with no exit, trapped by vicious circumstances. Women like Olive,

who Alec eventually sets up house with, are forced into prostitution. Workers' protests result in retrenchment slips in the pay packets. There is no solution to the immediate problems each character faces; the answer the book argues, lies only in wide-scale structural changes. It is Alec's consistent and impassioned argument that the *workers* are 'the producers of wealth, the rightful owners of the earth'.

While *Jew Boy* strongly asserts the existence of a unique Jewish ethnicity, it sees the position of Jews within the wider capitalist framework. Alec meets Jo-Jo, a black American and communist agitator who has travelled widely. He voices a view Alec has arrived at long before: "We ain't jest Jews, and jest Negroes, we's workers too. We got to know all dese t'ings an' stick to our class at de same time". Alec rejects the theory of Palestine as the true homeland of the

Jews:

As a worker, I won't be any better off in Palestine, maybe worse. I don't see why I should change one set of exploiters for another because they happen to be Jewish.

Alec develops his political beliefs as a result of harsh circumstances over which he has no control: "he worked hard, earned profits for the boss, got fired, and had to stand in bread lines". He watches with dread as the world careers towards fascism and war. Much of his time is spent longing for companionship, sexual fulfilment — and, inevitably, escape.

Despite the miseries of Alec's life, *Jew Boy* maintains a surprising vitality — largely due to the underlying visionary socialism. From the perspective of the '80s, the book is interesting as a precursor to today's literature of dissent. As Ken Worpole puts it in his introduction,

"possibly the most affirmative writing today is being produced as a result of other cultural imperatives, particularly those of feminism and the struggle for identity in the more recent immigrant communities".

Affirmations of a meaningful ethnic identity abound, though, in this text which undermines the image of Jews as cold, self-seeking financiers: "these turbulent excitable people ... had life and colour". The novel ends with Alec's bold assertions of the need to fight for ethnic and class unity — and revolution. In some ways, reading *Jew Boy* reminded me of listening to a '30s blues jazz piece where hope (and commitment) lie just beyond the despair.

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Atta Girl

Who's That Girl, directed by James Foley. Written by Andrew Smith and Ken Finkleman. Village Cinemas. Reviewed by **David Burchell**.

Madonna may indeed be, in the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* reviewer, the "first star to have created herself entirely from her feminine predecessors — not just a few, but a whole album-full". She may well also be just about the worst actress in screen history, if *Who's That Girl* is any guide. But she's a *bona fide* cultural phenomenon, of that there's no doubt. And that, oddly, is what makes her clumsy, mis-paced presence in this good-tempered reborn 'fifties comedy such a perversely entertaining experience.



A force of nature: Madonna and Griffith Dunne.

After all, the whole "dizzy blonde" cliché from the heyday of this genre was essentially a gesture towards the Otherness of the screen Woman — it made her acted upon rather than acting, a spectacle rather

than a character. And *Who's That Girl* does try that line. At one point, the frazzled male lead, Young Lawyer Loudon Trott (Griffith Dunne) exclaims that, no, he can't do that — after all, he's only a man, not