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Greville Janner and Derek Taylor, *Jewish Parliamentarians* (Edgware and Portland: Vallentine Mitchell 2008), 228pp + xi, ISBN 9780853038191/9780853038177.

Jewish Parliamentarians has been made possible through the efforts of one of its number; Jewish parliamentarians were only possible because of the Jews Relief Act 1858 when '[t]he principle of a more tolerant and plural democracy had finally prevailed' (11). This volume marks the 150th anniversary. The story is an important and notable one, no least because 'when some ethnic communities in Britain have few or weak central organizations, the Jews are an example of how successfully to approach the problems of relating to government' (2). Indeed, in a subject replete with stereotypes and caricature, one quality does seem to feature: high achievement. 'They have always had a greater percentage of MPs than would have been the case if there had been proportional religious representation' (7).

It is hard to develop themes in a biographical dictionary, but one the authors stress is how so many of their subjects saw no 'incompatibility' between their British nationality and their Jewish ethnicity and/or faith: as Harry Morris put it, 'between being a good citizen of the country and being a good Jew at the same time' (106). The nature of Jewish membership of Parliament is yet another aspect of national life transformed by the First World War, when Jews became more diverse in background and outlook through the dilution of the 'cousinship', and the rise of intermarriage and secularisation. Moreover, real matters of policy arose which were processes rather than events: Palestine and Zionism, anti-Semitism, and after 1945, the state of Israel, about which there is much discussion. Another theme is the broad progressivism of these parliamentarians (John Simon supported Charles Bradlaugh, so furthering the principle of a more tolerant and plural democracy), and certainly until the mid-1970s, a higher proportion were Liberal or Labour in party affiliation. The reasons for so pronounced a shift towards the Conservatives after 1974 are not clear, but appear associated with attitudes towards Israel.

Which is all very interesting. The problem of the book is its quality, a doubt reinforced on almost every page. Just because someone is a peer does not mean that they were 'obviously, never elected as an MP' (113). Winning seven or ten elections in a row is not really a feat when it's a safe constituency (indeed all it requires is the member not resigning or being incapacitated) (*passim*). Over Suez, '[a]ll the Jewish Labour MPs toed the party line and voted against the invasion' (114), as if none of them could have come to that decision independently. Chapter 7, 1955-70, is entitled 'Years of Change' as if the rest of the century was marked by stasis. 'Myer Galpern was Glasgow through and through' meaning, perhaps, that he was from Glasgow (122-3), whilst Arthur Samuel 'was always a Norwich man' (66) meaning, presumably, that he was never not from Norwich. When the book isn't platitudinous it's inconsistent: Labour's decision to readmit Neville Sandelson is described (perfectly reasonably) as 'magnanimity on a munificent scale' (147), but John Diamond, who also abandoned the party to form another intent on replacing it, was 'welcomed back' (99).

Stylistic peccadillos grate even more than usual when found in a reference book. There are personal pronouns and exclamation marks, and there is emoting: 'sadly' – often when someone dies – or 'happily' when something nice happens; John Diamond 'lived to the remarkable age of 96' (99), but when Frank Meyer died '[h]e was only 49' (77). There are clichés ('safe pair of hands', 'ripe old age', *passim*), and fatuities: Arthur Samuel's 'bounty knew no bounds' (67); Gillian Merron 'believes in the possibility of an individual being able to make a difference' (178); we have Lord

Jacobovits to thank for faith schools and the ‘benefits’ they bring (171); aged 85, David Kerr professed that his “‘enthusiasm for living is undiminished”. Long may that continue’ (128; he died six months before publication); Anthony Steen ‘remains a Euro-realist’ (151), whatever that means; Alex Carlile is both ‘a member of the Athenaeum’ and likes ‘association football’ (truly, a ‘remarkable man’) (160); ‘Dodging bullets on Normandy beaches was a long way from Maurice Edelman’s birth in Wales’ (100), unlike most of those in the allied expeditionary force who by implication originated in north-east France; Michael Fidler died ‘peacefully’ (142), no doubt nowhere near Normandy. There is, admittedly, also hilarity in these pages. Bertram Straus MP introduced the Traffic Bill, ‘which limited the speed at which cars could travel in built-up areas. So if you’re convicted for speeding in town, it’s Straus’s fault!’ (54). And it was unquestionably an ‘odd coincidence’, at the very least, that in 1931 the successful candidate in Dudley was a man called Dudley Joel (87).

No sources are given for any information or quotations, and only one suggestion for further reading. Dates of death are stated, usually twice in the same entry, and dates of admittance to Parliament, usually twice, but other tabulations that may have benefitted the reader – education, gender, occupation – are not. Bold page references in the index for the main entry is a basic practice, and a party abbreviation next to names in entries would also have helped. As for editing: some constructions are repeated in successive entries; twice we’re told that there were few Jews in Gloucester (74, 99); Manny Shinwell gets on so well with service chiefs we’re told that twice as well (69, 72); Keith Joseph was apparently one of only two Jewish Tory MPs (121) between 1945 and 1974, yet appendix C lists ten. Some index entries are incorrect, and whilst there is no entry for the SDP, there is for SDP Friends of Israel. ‘England’ is frequently used when ‘Britain’ is meant. There’s a Second World War, but no First. Stanley Baldwin’s most famous utterance is misquoted (83). Michael Fabricant’s (short) entry gives the information (twice) that he has a PhD in economics (167). He does not in fact have a PhD (although he probably doesn’t need a doctorate to know not to use Wikipedia as a source for a published claim, never mind one that is repeated).

This is a paean of sectional self-congratulation masquerading as a work of reference. It has been written by two authors responsible, the jacket informs us, for approaching one hundred books. They don’t appear to have read many (admitting as much in the acknowledgements; Gordon Brown certainly can’t have read this volume given his foreword). There is a valuable and growing literature on Jews in Britain, for much of which the present publisher can claim responsibility; in this case it is guilty of culpability. ‘Not a bad effort’, the authors reflect, typically (188). Would that that could be said of this greatly squandered opportunity.

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