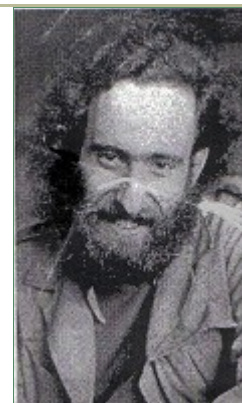


SATURDAY, OCTOBER 06, 2007

Reuben Goldberg



THE Cable Street anniversary this year was also the 10th anniversary of the untimely death in Barts Hospital of a very fine comrade whom I am proud to have known as a friend, though sadly for too short a time. Reuben Goldberg was only 45 when he learned he had cancer.

I'd first seen Reuben on television, being chaired in triumph on the shoulders of a crowd of Asian youth in Manningham Lane, Bradford. The victory they were celebrating was over Ray Honeyford, a headmaster who had written in the right-wing Salisbury Review condemning multiculturalism and was seen as racist by many young Asians, and lauded as such by many British racists.

Nowadays those hacks who want to hunt with the pack are praising Honeyford's far-sightedness in supposedly foreseeing the riots and terrorism which they blame on multi-culturalism and Muslims who should have been taught more "Britishness" in school. .

<http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/opinion.cfm?id=1707832005>

How this would have inured them to prejudice, having the BNP march into the neighbourhood, or seeing British imperialism join the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, I'm not clear.

Even some people whose families came here from the same neck of the forests as my grandfather are pontificating about how people who come here must conform to "our values", or else. Well, much as my parents' generation might have had the mame loshen (Yiddish, lit. "mother tongue") knocked out of them in school, they passed on enough for me to see a tochas lecker trying to get in with the Islamophobes.

<http://www.blogger.com/profile/15738739357659141969>

And to think that his Dad, Chaim Bermant, was ahead of me in the queue to shake hands with Yasser Arafat when he came to London (and in the throng for the drinks table come to that. Though Latvian-born he was in the thick of a crowd of fellow-Glaswegians). But I digress. Though I should point out that at the time when Yiddish was being suppressed, attempts were also made to stop Welsh kids

from speaking Welsh. This failed. But young Bermant, and come to that Scotland on Sunday readers might consider how far they want this "Britishness" cult to go.

At the time of the Honeyford row, no one was talking about religion. The forces on the ground were the Left, the Indian Workers Association, and later the Asian Youth Movement. But knowing Bradford, I realised a lot of those Asian youth must be Muslim, and hearing the newsreader say they were celebrating with Labour Councillor Reuben Goldberg, I felt this was A Good Thing, and told my friends in the Jewish Socialists' Group "we ought to recruit that bloke!"

As it happens, I think people had made contact with Reuben through campaigns like the National Assembly Against Racism, but it was after he moved down to London to work in Newham that he became an active JSG member, as well as becoming a Unison shop steward and working with Newham Monitoring Group.

Though always a source of strength to the many campaigns he had been involved in, both in Bradford and London, Reuben was no narrow 'politico' nor blind hyper-activist. In the time I knew him he always stuck firmly by his principles, but never tried to 'lay down the law'. People remembered him as someone who contributed ideas, and as a warm human-being, friendly and fond of kids, and notwithstanding his modesty, a very cultured person. He loved music, and books - he had run a bookshop in Bradford, and a collection of his own books was donated after his death to the library there.

He was particularly fond of the works of Bertold Brecht and Heinrich Heine. When I last saw him he had asked me to bring an anthology of Heine to him in hospital, and believing he might have a year to live, told me he wanted to work on writing a book about Heine in that time. He had got another friend to bring him some klezmer tapes. Although Reuben was in great pain he managed to enjoy political and cultural discussions with comrades who came to visit him at that time.

What was less tolerable to him as he lay helpless was another patient, a born-again Christian type, who insisted on coming over to preach salvation to his captive Jew, and clearly enjoyed it the more annoyance he caused, when Reuben wanted to turn over and sleep. I am sorry to say having politely asked this guy to desist I looked around desperately for a nurse to tell him to shut up. Perhaps I should have sent the Jesus botherer down to casualty even if it gave him his chance to feel a martyr for his faith, or "our values" as they say. So, the first time I saw Reuben he was being raised aloft by Muslims, the last time I remember he was being persecuted by a sodding Christian.

It was after Reuben's death, going to commemorative meetings in Bradford and East London, that I

learned more about the extent of his activity, from Schools Action Union (something shared with another late comrade, Bernard Misrahi), president of Bradford University Student Union, Bradford 12 Campaign (young Asians accused of planning violence when they had wanted to fight off a feared fascist attack), Thornton View Hospital campaign, Labour Campaign for Travellers Rights, - you name it, it seemed he was there.

I was pleased to meet again Geoff Robinson, whom I'd previously met through Workers Aid for Bosnia, and who now as secretary of Bradford Trades Union Council led the tribute to Reuben at a memorial event. (alas Geoff too is no longer with us)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/otherlives/story/0,,1780774,00.html>

There were also some young activists in the 1 in 12 Club, anarcho-syndicalist from what I gather, but carrying on some good local activity of which Reuben would approve.

<http://affinityproject.org/groups/1in12.html>

Labour MP Rudy Vis was among friends of the family at a stone setting for Reuben at Bushey.

In his too-brief lifetime Reuben Goldberg was able to do more good than many of us manage in a much longer span, and made a wide range of friends. (Who are welcome to share memories, including anything about how Reuben was ousted from his council seat, which is a side of things I've not touched) .

I wish he was with us now, or that we could find more like him to take up the fight.

[Jewish Socialists' Group](#)

[Newham Monitoring Project](#)