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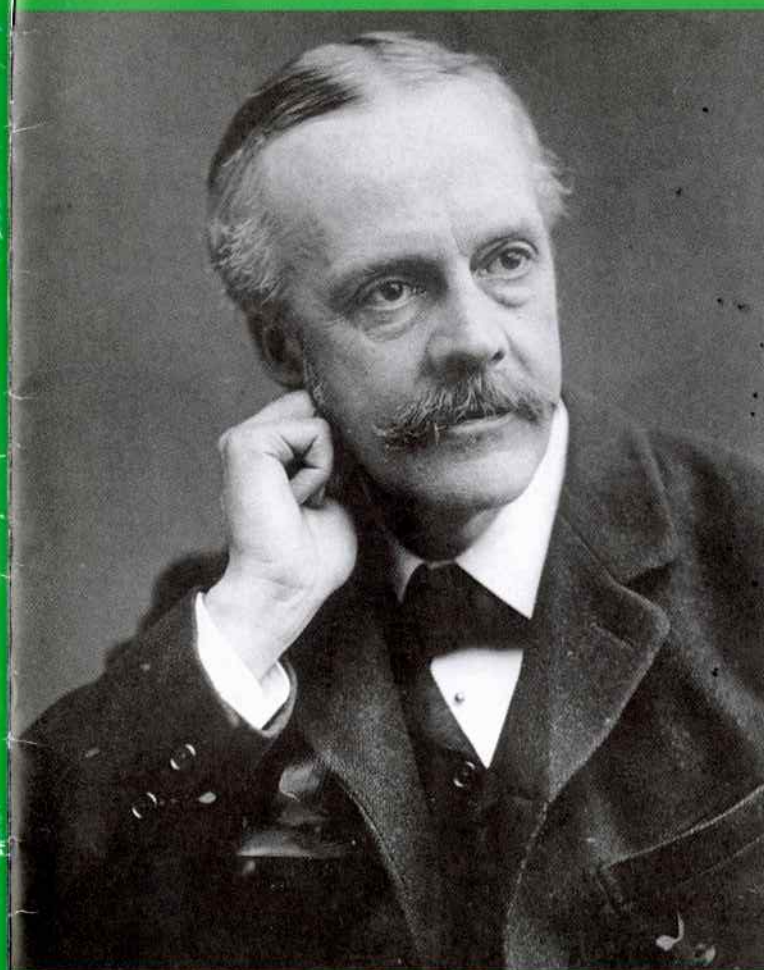
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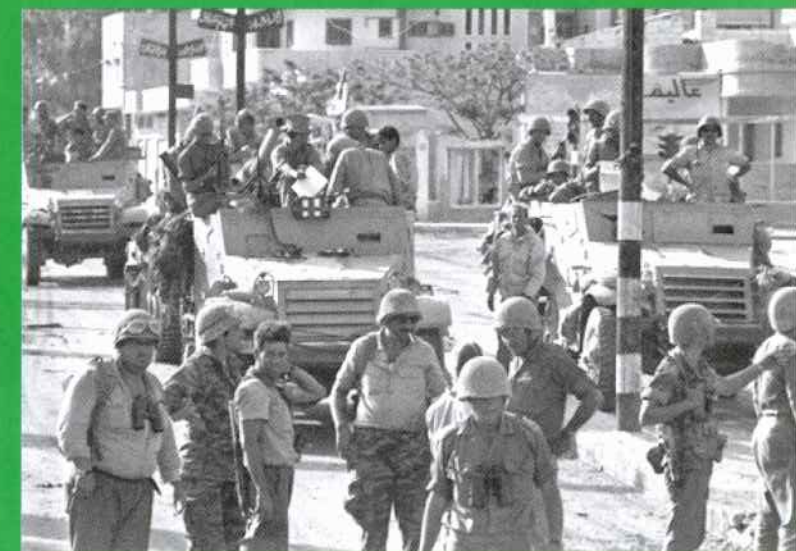
Through this forum we aim to:

- highlight the clash of political, economic and cultural interests in our community;
- encourage the democratisation of all aspects of Jewish life and publicise and support all democratic forces in the Jewish community;
- highlight the struggle for equality for women and gays and lesbians within and beyond our community;
- promote views that link the interests of Jewish people to the interests of other national and cultural minorities and oppressed groups, locally, nationally and internationally, and to a common socialist future;
- counter myths about the 'shrinking', 'dying' and 'assimilating' diaspora by affirming the vitality of Jewish communities across the world;
- counter Zionist ideology, which subordinates the needs of diaspora Jews to the demands of Israeli state nationalism, and justifies exclusivist, discriminatory and repressive practices towards the Palestinian people;
- promote ideas and perspectives that offer a progressive solution to conflicts involving the Jewish people such as the Israel/Palestine conflict;
- expose and oppose fundamentalist ideas and religious coercion within and beyond our community;
- reclaim a 'people's history' of the Jews which connects our historical experience to the struggles of other working people and the oppressed;
- highlight the problems facing minorities in society and within progressive movements and make these concerns central to discussions of socialist strategy here and now;
- support and promote radical progressive cultural initiatives within and beyond the Jewish community;
- promote views which link the struggle to build socialism with the struggle for a healthy and sustainable environment;
- promote a socialism that is culturally pluralist and fully democratic both in its ends and means.

JEWISH SOCIALIST DREAMS



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EDITORIAL

In autumn 1917 two dramatic events took place – one in Russia, the other in London. The Russian Revolution and the Balfour Declaration touched the lives of Jews and socialists very profoundly at the time. Their ramifications are still with us. These two events are often treated discretely but they are more intimately connected than many people realise.

Millions of Russian Jews lived as second-class citizens, confined mostly to the Pale of Settlement, subject to discrimination and random acts of murderous violence under the Tsarist dictatorship.

In February 1917, that dictatorship began to crumble when troops, ordered to suppress huge numbers of bread protesters and striking workers who had taken to the streets, fired instead on their officers.

Soon afterwards the Tsar abdicated. A weak Provisional Government was forced to share the reins of power with the re-established Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies. Under pressure from that Soviet, the Provisional Government enacted an amnesty for political prisoners, allowed freedom of speech, press and assembly, and abolished restrictions based on class, religion and nationality. In a stroke, antisemitism was outlawed, and immigrant Russian Jews in Britain shared the joy felt inside Russia.

The dominant forces in the early months of the Petrograd Soviet were not the Bolsheviks but the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. A Jewish socialist party – the Bund – had representatives there too. By September 1917 the balance of forces had changed. The Bolsheviks felt strong enough to plot an armed uprising. They seized power in October 1917 and a new phase of the revolution began, based on their narrow model alone rather than one incorporating the wisdom of other left and radical parties. By 1921 a bloody civil war had been fought against assorted counter-revolutionary forces, many wishing to restore Tsarism, but non-Bolshevik left parties had been suppressed too. Our articles on pages 6-12 reflect on these processes.

Western powers feared the new Russia. They speculated about who was really behind the revolution. Apart from Lenin, many leading Bolsheviks were Jews. One of several prominent politicians who were convinced that the Russian ferment was connected with "internationalist Jews" was Britain's Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour.

Twelve years earlier, as Prime Minister, Balfour had steered the Aliens Act through Parliament, which dramatically reduced Jewish migration from the Russian

Empire. In debates on this Act, he acknowledged Russian mistreatment of Jews but argued, nevertheless, that Jews were "a people apart". Balfour insisted that Britain had a right "to keep out everybody who does not add to the strength of the community". Several commentators expressed fears that Jewish immigrants harboured dangerous radicals, criminals and revolutionaries.

The British political establishment believed they could undermine these "dangerous" internationalist Jews by supporting Jewish nationalists' aspirations for a Jewish State in Palestine. It fitted their strategic objectives too. When the Belarus-born Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann, met with Balfour, he exaggerated the enthusiasm for Zionism among Eastern European Jews. Balfour made some promises to Arab representatives too. When Israel came into being, though, many Palestinians were forced into exile. But the reservoir of East European Jews, whom the Zionists saw as the inhabitants of the new state, had largely perished in Nazi death camps. Britain's historic obligations, signed by Balfour in 1917, were married with an expression of Western guilt that the Holocaust had not been prevented, and that survivors were languishing homeless in DP camps. That Western guilt did not extend to offering a home for those survivors in Europe. It was expunged instead at the expense of the Palestinians.

Fifty years after the Balfour Declaration came another landmark moment: the 1967 war and subsequent Israeli occupation. In this issue (pages 16-19) we publish the thoughts of diaspora Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian commentators on the legacy of 1967.

That year, the Jewish and socialist world lost one of its most prominent intellectuals and writers. Isaac Deutscher rebelled against the constrictions of the deeply religious Yiddish-speaking family he was born into in the Pale of Settlement in 1907. But instead of adopting the secular nationalist ideology of Zionism, which promised to liberate the Jews, he was captivated and animated by the revolutionary internationalist ideology of Communism, which promised to liberate humanity.

He documented the betrayal of that revolution and participated in the struggle to return it to its true goals, but also remained deeply concerned with the fate of the people and culture he was born into. His powerful and prophetic insights on socialism, revolution, Zionism and nationalism (pages 20-21) can still guide us in the dilemmas we face 50 years later.

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Judith Cravitz, Stuart Goodman, Mike Heiser and David Rosenberg..

With thanks to Sue Hughes for additional proofreading.

Cover photos: Lord Balfour, The February Revolution in Petrograd, 1917, and Israeli troops entering Gaza in 1967.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?



I'm unsure whether Michelle Weinroth's piece "A Bag of Almonds" (JS69) is purely fictional or a description of events that she actually experienced in Israel. However, I am certain that one point of her narrative could not have occurred. She writes of "the hummingbirds' hovering spin".

Hummingbirds are restricted entirely to the Americas. Their Old World equivalents are the Sunbirds, which, although only very distantly related, have

evolved to fill a similar ecological niche. It was probably the local representative of this group, *Cinneryn osea* or *Tzufit* in Hebrew, that Michelle observed (or imagined).

So far, so ornithologically pedantic. But it allows me to tell you an instructive – and true – story.

It was decided to mark the 60th anniversary of the Jewish state by selecting a national bird. Fifty species were nominated, a short list of nine or ten were selected, and 155,000 Israelis cast their votes. The popular Sunbird, the only bird whose range is restricted to Israel and neighbouring countries, was leading against its nearest contenders, the Hoopoe and the White-Spectacled Bulbul. Yet when President Peres proclaimed the National Bird in May 2008, the winner was the Hoopoe – a bird specifically listed in Leviticus as unclean, a forbidden food, and notorious for producing streams of foul-smelling secretions at the nest.

The Bulbul could not be allowed to win because its name is popular childish slang for the male member. But the iridescent little Sunbird, how could that offend? Ah. I have omitted to tell you *Cynnyris*

osea's English name. It's the Palestine Sunbird. Oy *gevalt!* By fair means or foul, that could not be allowed to become Israel's National Bird.

Tzufit appeared in contemporary English reports from Israel translated in various ways, such as "Honeysucker", presumably anything to avoid its real name. That is not the end of the story. There is a belief among Arabs that Israeli ornithologists subsequently lobbied, unsuccessfully, for an alternative recommended international common name, the "Northern Orange Tufted Sunbird".

Who would have thought that a tiny bird weighing a mere seven grammes could cause so much controversy?

Conservationists and ornithologists who put the birds first are able to rise above such pettiness. It was heartwarming when the winners of the Inaugural Champions of the Flyway competition, held in 2014 in Eilat to raise funds to combat illegal killing of migratory birds in Europe, was a joint Israeli-Palestinian team called the Palestine Sunbirders.

The Palestine Sunbird is a popular symbol with Palestinians. The Wikipedia article for the bird states that, "On 5 April 2016 the Ministry of Environmental Affairs (Palestine) had adopted 'Sawsan Gilboa' (*Iris haynei*) as the national plant of the State of Palestine, to go with the Olive tree (as the national tree), Sunbird (national bird)...". Unfortunately, a Google translation of the referenced Arabic source article does not make it clear whether the Palestine Sunbird does indeed now have this official status or was only commended as an important element of the environment to be protected.

PAUL SELIGMAN noticed an inaccuracy in a short story we published in the last issue of Jewish Socialist, and responds with a fascinating tale of ornithology and intrigue

Defying definitions

A controversial document that includes a new definition of antisemitism, has been strongly criticised by the Jewish Socialists' Group. The document has been drawn up by the self-styled "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance" (IHRA).

The JSG issued a statement that describes the basic definition as "uncontentious", but notes that "the document within which it has been published, deliberately employs a host of controversial and highly contested examples relating to the Israel/Palestine conflict and Zionism as an ideology. Its 11 examples of forms of antisemitism, include seven which refer to Israel."

The group warn that "the IHRA definition of antisemitism is being used to muzzle free speech on Israel/Palestine and on Zionism as a political ideology, which like any other political ideology can be supported or rejected and should be open to question." The JSG says it considers the IHRA document "to be potentially dangerous for Jews. If opposition to Israeli policy and state action can be defined as 'antisemitic' in such a manipulative way, then those who rightly continue to stand up for Palestinian rights might start to doubt the credibility of the label "antisemite". Actions targeting the Israeli state may spread to more general Jewish targets,

and genuinely antisemitic statements and actions may be taken less seriously."

The JSG has urged public bodies who are asked to adopt the IHRA definition to recognise the importance of challenging antisemitism but reject this definition in favour of a simpler, clearer and more accurate one it has itself proposed which de-couples it from commentary on Israel/Palestine or Zionism:

"Antisemitism is prejudice, hostility and discrimination against Jews, as Jews, and the use of negative stereotypes of Jews."

The JSG's full statement can be found at: <http://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/news/item/fight-antisemitism-and-defend-free-speech>

Finding a voice

For several decades, Jewish members of the Labour Party who wish to voice their perspectives in the party have found only one Jewish group which has enjoyed a monopolistic position. For most of its life it was called Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) – and in accordance with that name has campaigned for the Labour Party to adopt a friendly position towards Zionism. It has changed its name in recent years – to Jewish Labour Movement – which sounds more inclusive but it isn't. Members are not required to be Jewish or even signed up to

the Labour Party but they are required to agree to a constitution supporting Zionism.

Throughout its history the Labour Party has had Jewish members with conflicting views of Zionism and other Jews who don't centre their identity around questions of Zionism, Israel or Palestine at all. But choice has finally arrived. At a fringe meeting of Labour Party Conference this year, attended by nearly 300 people, a new organisation was launched called Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL). On the platform were Oxford Professor Avi Shlaim, Judge Stephen Sedley,

Palestine rights activist Naomi Wimbourn-Idrissi, and David Rosenberg of the Jewish Socialists' Group.

Its founding statement says its political priorities are: "universal human rights and dignity; justice for all; freedom of expression, and democracy in the Labour party" it stands for "rights and justice for Jewish people everywhere, and against wrongs and injustice to Palestinians and other oppressed people anywhere." It pledges to offer "a space to explore and debate the many questions (personal, social, cultural, political) that are important to us as progressive Labour Jews."

www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk

Golan highs and lows

Noa Gur Golan, 19, is the latest young Israeli to be put in prison for refusing army service on the grounds that she is a pacifist. She is being held in a military prison near Haifa, in a room with nine other women.

She is only allowed to see her family once every two weeks. Golan made her plea not to serve in the the Israeli military in an open letter which referred to the atmosphere created by the Gaza War of 2014

and especially the impact on children: "Children in this country grow [up in an] atmosphere full of hate and fear. They grow up in a reality where violence is the norm... The love I feel towards my

friends from my city Netanya is identical to the love I feel towards my [Palestinian] friends from Hebron... I will not agree to take part in the oppression of another nation ... I do not believe in building walls but in building bridges."

THE JEWISH SOLIDARITY CAUCUS OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

The Jewish Solidarity Caucus is a hub for organising as Jews in the struggle against capitalism and for the freedom and dignity of all. We seek to renew the Jewish socialist tradition, to combat antisemitism, and to forge solidarity between Jews and other oppressed people. Jews have complex individual and communal identities and backgrounds, and it is clear that Jewish liberation is bound to that of all oppressed people. We are an unofficial caucus that does not claim to represent all Jewish members of DSA.

We seek to create the conditions under which barriers to being truly Jewish no longer exist: a society abolished of class; where synagogue membership costs are not exorbitant; where focus and funding does not overemphasize Zionism and Hebrew at the cost of other Jewish political traditions and languages; where the priorities of Jewish institutions are not beholden to a small group of wealthy funders. Jewish

life as it currently exists under capitalism is not freedom, and Jewish collective efforts to realise the prophetic vision of a just world will only be fully realised through socialism.

...Zionism cannot vanquish antisemitism. In the traditions of the Bund or the myriad forms of international socialism espoused by diasporic Jews from Greece to Iraq to Palestine and the UK, it is clear that all people deserve equal rights no matter where they live. Zionism represents a failure to envision a world in which antisemitism has been extinguished.

...Jewish liberation is bound to that of all oppressed people. The injustices we face may differ in specifics and scale, but they are no less enmeshed in the same dominating structure.

JSC is an unofficial caucus that does not claim to represent all Jewish members of DSA. Further details: info@jewishsocialism.org

CHANGE
THE
WORLD



FACING UP TO ANTISEMITISM

Anti-Jewish discrimination was formally outlawed in the new Russia but attempting to eradicate a phenomenon that crossed social groups and political loyalties was a much more complex task, says **BRENDAN MCGEEVER**

Early morning, 25th October 1917. Workers are taking up strategic points on the windswept streets of Petrograd. In the Winter Palace, head of the Provisional Government Alexander Kerensky anxiously awaits his getaway car. Outside, Red Guards have taken control of the central telephone station. The Bolshevik seizure of power is imminent.

There are no lights or phones in the palace. From his window, Kerensky can see the Palace Bridge: it is occupied by Bolshevik sailors. Finally, an American embassy car is secured, and Kerensky begins his escape from Red Petrograd. As the vehicle turns a corner, Kerensky notices some graffiti, freshly painted on the palace walls: "Down with the Yid Kerensky, long live comrade Trotsky!"

The slogan retains its absurdity a century on: Kerensky, of course, was not Jewish, whereas Trotsky was. What the slogan does point to, however, is the messy and contradictory role that antisemitism played within the revolutionary process. In much of the existing literature on the Russian Revolution, antisemitism is understood as a form of "counterrevolution," as the preserve of the anti-Bolshevik right.

There is, of course, much truth to this claim: the Tsarist regime was defined by its antisemitism, and in the devastating wave of anti-Jewish violence that followed the October Revolution in the civil war years (1918–1921), the bulk of the atrocities were carried out by the White Army and other forces opposed to the nascent Soviet government. Yet this is not the full story.

Antisemitism traversed the political divide in revolutionary Russia, finding traction across all social groups and political loyalties. Within Marxism, racism and political radicalism are often framed in contestation; in 1917, however, antisemitism and class resentment could be overlapping as well as competing worldviews.

The February Revolution transformed Jewish life. Just days after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, all legal restrictions on Jews were lifted. More than 140 statutes, totalling some thousand pages, were removed overnight. To mark this historic moment of abolition, a special meeting was convened by the Petrograd Soviet. It was the eve of Passover, 24th March 1917. The Jewish delegate who addressed the meeting immediately made the connection: the February Revolution, he said, was comparable with the liberation of Jews from slavery in Egypt.

Formal emancipation, however, was not accompanied by the disappearance of anti-Jewish violence. Antisemitism had deep roots in Russia, and its persistence in 1917 was closely connected to the ebb and flow of revolution. Over the course of 1917, at least 235 attacks on Jews were carried out. Though totalling a mere 4.5% of the population, Jews were victims of around a third of

all acts of physical violence against national minorities that year.

From the moment of the February Revolution, rumours of impending anti-Jewish pogroms circulated on the streets of Russian cities, so much so, that when the Petrograd and Moscow soviets assembled for their first meetings, the question of antisemitism was high on the agenda. Actual outbreaks of violence were rare in those early weeks. By June, however, the Jewish press began to report that "crowds of workers" were gathering on street corners to welcome pogromist speeches that declared the Petrograd Soviet to be in the hands of "the Jews". Bolshevik leaders sometimes came face-to-face with such antisemitism. When walking the streets in early July, Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич – Lenin's future secretary – encountered a crowd openly calling for anti-Jewish pogroms. Head bowed, he hurried on. More and more reports came in of similar gatherings.

At times, class resentment and antisemitic representations of Jewishness overlapped: later in July, speakers at a street-corner rally in Petrograd called on the crowd to "smash the Jews and the bourgeoisie!" Whereas, in the immediate context after the February Revolution, such speeches had failed to have any real traction, they now were drawing large audiences. It was in this context that the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies gathered in Petrograd.

This First Congress of Soviets was a historic gathering. More than a thousand delegates from all socialist parties attended, representing hundreds of local soviets and some 20 million Russian citizens. On 22nd June, as reports flooded in of yet more antisemitic incidents, the Congress produced the Russian socialist movement's most authoritative statement yet on the question of antisemitism.

Drafted by the Bolshevik Evgenii Preobrazhenskii, the resolution was titled "On the Struggle against Antisemitism." When Preobrazhenskii finished reading it aloud, a Jewish delegate rose to his feet to give it his wholehearted approval, before adding that, while it would not bring back Jews murdered in the 1905 pogroms, the resolution would help heal some of the wounds that continued to cause so much pain in the Jewish community. It was passed unanimously by the Congress.

The resolution essentially restated the long-held social democratic view that antisemitism was tantamount to counter-revolution. It contained, however an important admission: the "great danger," read Preobrazhenskii, was "the tendency for antisemitism to disguise itself under radical slogans." This convergence of revolutionary politics and antisemitism, the resolution continued, represented "an enormous threat to the Jewish people and the whole revolutionary movement,

since it threatens to drown the liberation of the people in the blood of our brothers, and cover in disgrace the entire revolutionary movement." This admission that antisemitism and radical politics could overlap broke new territory for the Russian socialist movement, which until then had tended to frame antisemitism as the preserve of the far right. As the revolutionary process deepened in mid-late 1917, the presence of antisemitism within sections of the working class and revolutionary movement became an increasing problem that required a socialist answer.

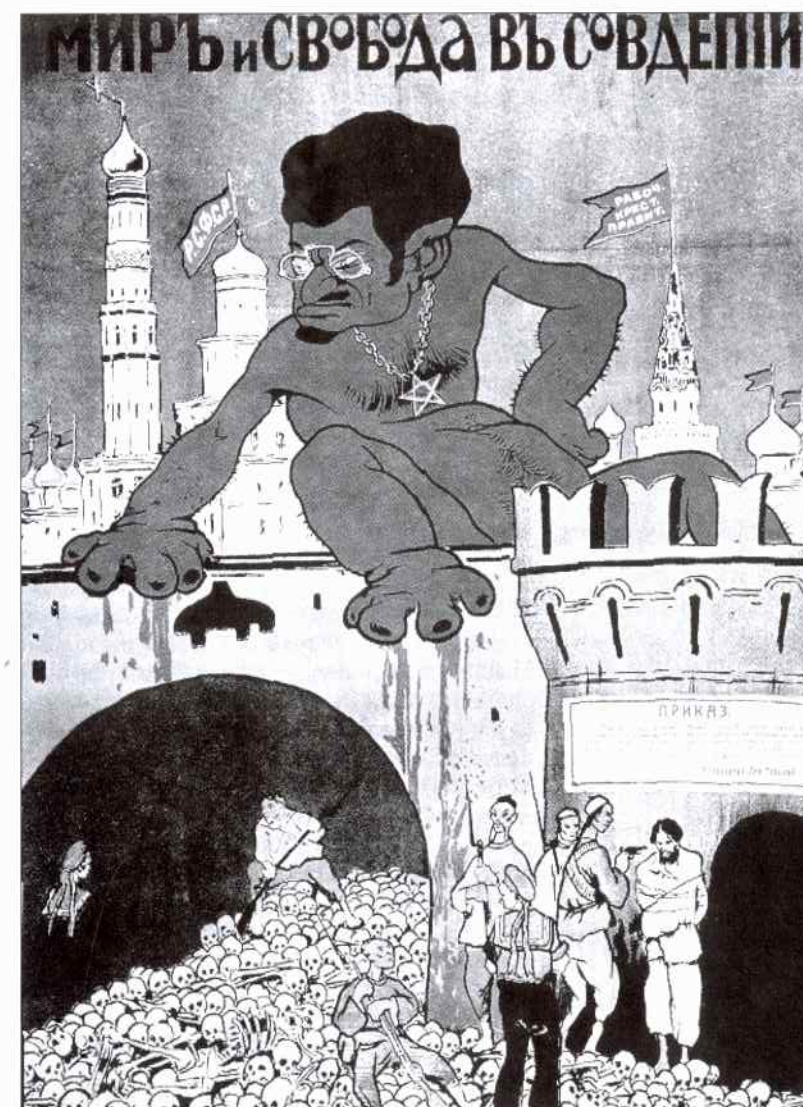
By late summer, soviets had initiated a broad and wide-ranging campaign against antisemitism. The Moscow soviet, for example, organised lectures and meetings in factories on antisemitism throughout August and September. In the former Pale of Settlement, local soviets were instrumental in preventing the outbreak of pogroms. In Chernigov (Ukraine) in mid-August, Black Hundred accusations that Jews were stocking up bread led to a series of violent anti-Jewish disturbances. Crucially, it took a delegation from the Kiev soviet to organise a group of local troops to put down the unrest.

The Provisional Government attempted to initiate its own response to antisemitism. In mid-September the government passed a resolution promising to take "the most drastic measures against all pogromists." A similar statement released two weeks later ordered government ministers to use "all powers at their disposal" to put down pogroms. However, with the transfer of power to the soviets already underway, the Provisional Government's authority was in a process of disintegration. An editorial in the pro-government newspaper *Russkie Vedomosti* on 1st October captured the situation well: "[T]he wave of pogroms grows and expands ... mountains of telegrams arrive daily ... [yet] the Provisional Government is snowed under ... the local administration is powerless to do anything ... the means of coercion are completely exhausted."

Not so with the soviets. As the political crisis deepened and the process of Bolshevisation continued apace, scores of provincial soviets established their own campaigns against antisemitism. In Vitebsk, a city 350 miles west of Moscow, the local soviet formed a military unit in early October to protect the city from pogromists. The following week, the Orel Soviet passed a resolution to take up arms against all forms of antisemitic violence.

In the Russian Far East, a meeting of the All-Siberian Soviet issued a resolution against antisemitism, declaring that the local revolutionary army would take "all measures necessary" to prevent any pogroms. This revealed how deeply ingrained the fight against antisemitism was within sections of the organised socialist movement: even in the Far East, where there were comparatively few Jews and even fewer pogroms, local soviets identified with the Jews on the Western Front suffering at the hands of antisemites.

Without doubt, the soviets had become, by mid-1917, the main political opposition to antisemitism in Russia. An editorial in the newspaper *Evreiskaia Nedelia* (Jewish Week) captured this well: "It must be said, and we must give them their dues, the soviets have carried out an energetic struggle against



[pogroms]. In many places, it has only been thanks to their strength that peace has been restored."

It is worth noting, however, that these campaigns against antisemitism were aimed at workers in factories and sometimes activists within the broad socialist movement. In other words, antisemitism was identified as a problem within the social base of the radical left, and even sections of the revolutionary movement itself. What this revealed, of course, is that antisemitism did not simply emanate from "above", from the former Tsarist establishment; it had an organic base within sections of the working class, and it had to be confronted as such.

For the Bolshevik leadership, revolutionary politics weren't simply incompatible with antisemitism; they were antithetical. As a front-page headline in the main party newspaper *Pravda* would put it in 1918: "To be against the Jews is to be for the Tsar!" Yet it would be a mistake to take Lenin's and Trotsky's statements on antisemitism and "read off" the thoughts and feelings of the rank-and-file. As the events of 1917 demonstrated, revolution and antisemitism were not always in conflict.

Newspaper reports from the summer and autumn of 1917 reveal that local Bolsheviks were frequently accused by other socialists of perpetuating antisemitism and sometimes even harbouring antisemites within the party's social base. For example, according to Georgii Plekhanov's newspaper *Edinstvo*, when Mensheviks

Trotsky depicted in an antisemitic White Army poster, 1919. But antisemitism wasn't confined to the enemies of the revolution

tried to speak at the Moscow barracks in the Vyborg region of Petrograd in mid-June, soldiers, apparently egged on by Bolsheviks, shouted "Down with them! They're all Yids!" Plekhanov, we should note, was obsessively anti-Bolshevik by mid-1917, so this source should be treated with caution.

The claims were widespread, however. Around the same time, the Menshevik newspaper *Vpered* reported that Bolsheviks in Moscow shouted down Mensheviks, accusing them of being "Yids" who "exploit the proletariat." When hundreds of thousands of workers took to the streets of Petrograd on 18th June, some Bolsheviks reportedly tore down Bundist banners and shouted antisemitic slogans. In response, the Bundist Mark Liber accused the Bolsheviks of even being "pro-pogromist."

By October, such accusations had become more frequent. In the 29th October edition of *Evreiskaia Nedelia*, an editorial went so far as to claim that antisemitic "Black Hundreds" were "filling up the ranks of the Bolsheviks" across the whole country.

Such claims were evidently wide of the mark. The Bolshevik leadership opposed antisemitism, and much of the party membership took part in developing the cross-party response to antisemitism at the factory and soviet levels. Nevertheless, the notion that Bolshevism could appeal to far-right antisemites was not entirely without substance. On 29th October, an astonishing editorial in the antisemitic far-right paper *Groza* (Thunderstorm) declared:

The Bolsheviks have seized power. The Jew Kerensky, lackey to the British and the world's bankers, having brazenly assumed the title of commander-in-chief of the armed forces and having appointed himself Prime Minister of Orthodox Russian Tsardom, will be swept out of the Winter Palace, where he had desecrated the remains of the Peace-Maker Alexander III with his presence. On October 25th, the Bolsheviks united all the regiments who refused to submit to a government composed of Jew bankers, treasonous generals, traitorous land-owners, and thieving merchants.

The newspaper was immediately closed down by the Bolsheviks, but the unwelcome support alarmed the party leadership.

What underscored moderate socialist concern about the capacity of antisemitism and revolution to overlap was the way Bolsheviks mobilised the masses, and channelled their class resentment. On 28th October, when the revolution was in full flow, the Mensheviks' Petrograd Electoral Committee issued a desperate appeal to workers in the capital, warning that Bolsheviks had seduced "the ignorant workers and soldiers," and the cry of "All power to the Soviets!" would all too easily turn into "Beat the Jews, beat the shopkeepers." For the Menshevik L'vov-Rogachevskii, the "tragedy" of the Russian revolution lay in the apparent fact that the "dark masses (*temnota*) are unable to distinguish the provocateur from the revolutionary, or the Jewish pogrom from a social revolution."

The Jewish press echoed these concerns. According to a lead article in *Evreiskaia Nedelia*, "comrade Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks call on the proletariat to 'turn their words into action' (*pereiti ot slovo k delu*), but wherever Slavic crowds gather, the turning of 'words into action' means, in

reality, 'striking out at the Yids.'"

However, contrary to these alarmist predictions, in the hours and days immediately following the Bolshevik seizure of power, there were no mass pogroms in the Russian interior. Insurrection did not translate into the antisemitic violence that had been predicted. What the warnings cited above reveal is just how deeply ingrained the fear of the "dark masses" was among sections of the socialist left who claimed to speak in their name. This was especially true of the intelligentsia, who generally approached the notion of a proletarian uprising with horror, due to the violence and barbarity they believed would inevitably flow as a result.

What defined the Bolsheviks during this period was precisely their closeness to the Petrograd masses so greatly feared by the intelligentsia.

However, the overlap between antisemitism and revolutionary politics was real. Just days after the October Revolution, the writer Ilya Ehrenburg – soon to be one of the most prolific and well-known Jewish authors in the Soviet Union – sat down to collect his thoughts on the momentous events that had just taken place. His account stands as perhaps the most vivid description of the articulation between antisemitism and the revolutionary process in 1917:

Yesterday I was standing in line, waiting to vote for the Constituent Assembly. People were saying 'Whoever's against the Yids, vote for number 5! [the Bolsheviks]', 'Whoever's for world-wide revolution, vote for number 5!' The patriarch rode by, sprinkling holy water; everyone removed their hats. A group of soldiers passing by started to belt out the Internationale in his direction. Where am I? Or is this truly hell?

In this startling recollection, the distinction between revolutionary Bolshevism and counter-revolutionary antisemitism is blurred. In fact, Ehrenburg's account prefigures the haunting question that would be posed in Isaac Babel's civil war stories *Red Cavalry*: "Which is the Revolution and which the counter-revolution?"

Despite Bolshevik insistence on framing it as a purely "counter-revolutionary" phenomenon, antisemitism eluded such neat categorisation, and could be found across the political divide, in highly complex and unexpected forms. This would be most sharply revealed six months later, in the spring of 1918, when the first pogroms since the October Revolution broke out in the former Pale of Settlement. In towns and cities of northeast Ukraine such as Glukhov, Bolshevik power was consolidated through anti-Jewish violence on the part of the local cadres of the party and Red Guards. The Bolshevik confrontation with antisemitism in 1918, then, was often a confrontation with the antisemitism of its own social base.

As we mark the centenary of the October Revolution, we rightly celebrate it as a moment of radical social transformation, when a new world seemed possible. The Revolution, however, should also be remembered in all its complications.

Antiracism needs to be cultivated and renewed, continually. A century on, as we grapple with the damage done by racism to class politics, 1917 can tell us much about how reactionary ideas can take hold, but also how they can be taken on and confronted.

WHAT DID THE REVOLUTION DO FOR YIDDISH?

Following the February Revolution of 1917, all forms of Jewish culture and politics flourished, including socialist, Zionist, autonomist and the use of Hebrew and Yiddish languages. The Ukraine became a centre of the Yiddish cultural renaissance, around the *Shtrom* group in Kiev and the *Kultur-Lige*, an educational and cultural centre with its own publishing house. Following the October Revolution, inevitably, different priorities were applied. At the end of 1920 the *Kultur-Lige*, for example, was subsumed under the authority of the Ukrainian *Eukseisia* (*Evreiskie Sektsii*, Jewish Sections in the party and state institutions), which were established in 1918 to combat the influence in it of non-Communists, including Bundists and Jewish autonomists. The *Eukseisia* themselves were dissolved in 1930.

Most Yiddishists became enthusiasts for the revolution in early 1919, since any alternative was rapidly diminishing. The counter-revolutionary Whites were becoming more extreme and antisemitic, and there was a wave of pogroms, worse than those perpetrated in Tsarist times.

Yet, even if Yiddishists were in a minority within Jewish life, they could nevertheless claim to represent the Jewish masses, for following the Leninist "vanguard" position, they could express the "real" will and objective interests of the people. Hence, Yiddish could become the only legitimate expression of the new proletarian Jewish culture, and even Russian could be held in check, despite its prevalence amongst the Jewish intelligentsia. Yet, the shift of the Jewish population into Russia proper, and significantly to Moscow and Leningrad, involved a greater degree of Russification, though this would take time.

In 1926, 70.4% of the Jews of the Soviet Union declared Yiddish as their mother tongue. This fell to 39.7% in 1939. Gennady Estraiikh quotes a poll in Ukraine in 1918 indicating that only 20% of Jewish parents wanted to send their children to Yiddish schools. David Shneer claims that, "most Soviet Jews, although they spoke Yiddish, preferred that their children spoke Russian".

The official support offered to Yiddish by the new Soviet State, whether in the field of literature, film, theatre or education, was unmatched by that in any other centre of Yiddish speakers. In no other part of the Yiddish world, apart from Poland, did Yiddish culture sustain itself on a major scale in the interwar period. Esther Rosenthal-Shneiderman, a Yiddish teacher in the Warsaw Central Yiddish School Organisation (CYSHO) schools, who moved to the Soviet Union in 1927, described the uniqueness of the Yiddish project in the Soviet Union:

For us, Jewish teachers of Poland, used to constant evil decrees against the secular school system, it was new and joyful (and at times almost unbelievable) that there Yiddish culture not only experienced no persecution, but was actually an official government

concern. We literally devoured the news about how the Soviet state itself took care of Jewish cultural institutions equally as it did of all others. No other state has ever undertaken such an enterprise since the Jews have been living in goles [exile/disapora].

Unlike in Poland, the Yiddishists' project there did not have rivals in Zionism. In the Soviet Union, most political parties, other than the communists, were abolished in 1921, so the ruling Communist Party and the *Eukseisia* had a clear field. David Shneer portrays "an unprecedented burst of secular Jewish artistic and cultural expression." The Yiddish activists "were not passive objects of Soviet policies towards Jews, but rather they actively participated in the creation of these policies." He cites Jeffrey Veidlinger, who argued that the Yiddish theatre successfully navigated round the ideological demands of the state to bring their Jewish agenda to the stage. Granovsky's Moscow State Yiddish Theatre, established in 1920, was taken under the wings of the Commissariat of the Enlightenment, receiving international plaudits, and even went on a European tour. For Shneer, the "tragic" interpretation of the Soviet Yiddish endeavour "puts the end of the story before the story itself". The activists could not have known "what was to come". It was "a history of cultural production, rather than cultural repression."

In 1918, the Soviet state recognised Jews as a nationality or ethnic group (*natsionalnost*), and they came under the authority of Stalin's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs. The various *Sektsii* were concerned with attacking religious education, Hebrew and Zionism. Yiddish was the obvious language of dissemination, fulfilling the needs of the Jewish masses, but not an end in itself, as had also originally been the case with the Bund: Semion Dimansteyn, head of the *Eukseisia*, proclaimed: "We are not, however, fanatics of the Yiddish language. There is no *yidish hakoydesh* [holý Yiddish]." Whatever the aspirations of the Soviet Yiddishists to

BARRY DAVIS examines the new opportunities and the competing pressures surrounding Yiddish in the early years of the Soviet state

Workers of the world unite! In Yiddish



REMINISCENCES OF LENIN



Tsar Nikolai II abdicated after the February Revolution, 1917. The Provisional Government was forced to share power with the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies – a body comprising several socialist groups. Lenin's Bolsheviks ultimately seized control of the Soviet and led the October Revolution. By 1921 non-Bolshevik socialist parties were shut down. In Warsaw, in March 1924, **HENRYK ERLICH**, one of several Jewish Workers' Bund representatives on the Petrograd Soviet, wrote *Reminiscences of Lenin* in the Bund's daily newspaper *Folkstsaytung*. These are some extracts.

I met Lenin for the first time in 1917... Like the majority of my party comrades I too was among the opponents of Lenin's school of thought in the RSDWP [the Russian Revolutionary Party] ... there were a number of questions on which we always differed from the Bolsheviks – even those among us who had outspoken Bolshevik sympathies ... questions concerning the general organisational structure of the party, ... the relationship between the leader and the mass ... the role of the party apparatus in the movement ... questions concerning internal party democracy...

Lenin (had) ... a colossal capacity for work with ... an iron will and iron consistency. He was a passionate factionalist who defended his views and the interests of his faction with fanatical obstinacy. The question of means simply did not exist for him. All means ... were satisfactory if they were capable of serving the interests of his faction.

On the personal level ... (he was) an extraordinarily modest individual. For almost two decades he lived in foreign emigration under conditions of great want. His sole diversion was music.

From 1900 Lenin was one of the most recognised leaders of the Russian Workers' movement. But none of those who met him ... detected any portent of the leader who would shake the world... The turbulent elemental force of the revolution was needed for all the latent possibilities in Lenin to unfold...

3 April 1917. News reached ... the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet that a group of emigrants headed by Lenin would be arriving in the afternoon ... The train arrived. The first person to alight was Lenin ... A broad-boned face ... small, sprightly, crafty eyes, a small moustache and pointed beard, and a head with almost no hair... The appearance of a typical Russian merchant from

Moscow or Ryazan. In his face and in his whole being there was a singular stubbornness and iron power...

All Petrograd ... was one vast discussion club at the time ... Wherever (Lenin) spoke the struggle would reach the highest level of intensity ... In his speeches there was not a shred of lyricism, not a vestige of pathos, no oratorical embellishment ... his speeches (were)... uncommonly simple, the language ... impoverished ... But within those simple speeches there lay a colossal, literally an elemental power. His thoughts would catapult upon the listener with the force of a raw granite boulder. He would overwhelm an opponent with the extraordinary simplicity of his trend of thought which was so well adapted to the level of the mass... the more unsophisticated the listener, the more unbeatable was Lenin the speaker. ... Lenin the genius was born in the fire of the revolution ... And his genius consisted of his ... ability to adapt himself to the *stikhiya*, the spontaneous elemental forces, and to become their reflection and expression.

In June 1917, Lenin advanced the slogan: "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!" Not "capitalism", because the latter is an abstract concept; but the term "ten capitalist ministers" was concrete. The ten were available...

In the First Congress of Soviets ... Lenin delivered an important speech ... he declared ... that in order to smash capitalism in Russia it was sufficient to place one hundred capitalists in prison. Lenin the theoretician, Lenin the Marxist, surely could not have meant that. But such simple and superficial slogans had an electrifying effect...

November 7 1917. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets had opened in Petrograd ... that proclaimed the Soviet Republic and the beginning of the Russian and socialist revolution ... the essence of the socialist revolution, said Lenin, is the "expropriation of the expropriators"; and in its

use Yiddish to transform the Soviet Union's Jewish population, in a Russia cut off from the great Yiddish urban centres in Vilna and Warsaw, the vernacular base of the language still resided in the Ukrainian *shtetl*. Yet, in the Soviet system, the *shtetl* was characterised as "a malignant tumour on the body of the young weak Soviet country", which was, of course, engaged in the economic and social transformation of its Jews; between 1917-27, around a million Jews left the *shtetls* of Ukraine and Belorussia.

From 1924, under the policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation) pupils were required to be educated in their mother tongues in Ukraine and Belorussia, which meant that in those republics there was a greater pressure to attend Yiddish schools. In practice, the rapidity of the move to Yiddish meant that there was a shortage of qualified Yiddish teachers. The idea was to recruit the Jews to speak Yiddish as a further weapon

in their republics to combat Russian, which was seen as a symbol of the oppressive nationalism of the Tsarist Empire. The issue was less urgent in Ukraine than in Belorussia, which had a weaker sense of national identity and culture.

Hence, the most flourishing Yiddish language culture in the young Soviet state took place in the Belorussian Soviet Republic and particularly in the capital, Minsk, with its 50,000 Jews – just over 40% of its total population. In 1922, together with Belorussian, Russian and Polish, Yiddish was one of the four official languages. Belorussia even had a central Yiddish court. In 1925, Yiddish was recognised as the official language in four regions of the Ukraine.

In Belorussia in 1931, the 36,500 pupils in Yiddish primary schools comprised over 50% of its Jewish children. In Ukraine, where the Yiddish speaking population was more than seven times higher, the respective figure was 94,800. In the Russian Soviet Republic, the figures were much lower: 11,000 in 1931. The area had mostly been outside the Yiddish-speaking Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire.

There was pressure from local education authorities to send Yiddish-speaking pupils to the less-crowded Yiddish schools. Yet, many parents preferred to send their children to the non-Yiddish schools as the anti-religious propaganda was against Russian Orthodoxy rather than the Jewish religion. Furthermore, there were no Yiddish secondary

schools, and in the Yiddish schools, the level of Russian as a second or third taught language was admitted even by the *Evskeisia* as being very low. Furthermore, compelling Jewish pupils to attend Yiddish schools gave an opportunity for antisemitic elements not to admit too many Jewish children into the general schools. When the *korenizatsiia* policy was changed in the mid-1930s, the numbers attending Yiddish primary schools sharply declined. The schools in Belorussia were dissolved in 1938, though not those in Ukraine.

In the Ukraine 22.7% of Jews were educated in Russian. Yet, in 1923, 47.4% of all students in institutions of higher learning in the Ukraine were Jews (as compared with 10.7% in 1913), though the Ukrainian Jewish population was 5.4% of the total population. One must suppose that the great majority of these courses were in Russian.

Whilst Yiddish newspapers, journals and books were promoted, Hebrew was not considered the language of the Jewish folk masses but of the Jewish bourgeoisie, of Jewish clericalism and of Zionism. Most Hebrew schools were closed in June 1919, though some vocational schools were allowed to remain in existence until 1921. Private Hebrew classes were permitted until 1922. The Hebrew press was nationalised in 1919 and used to publish materials in Yiddish. The Hebrew *Habimah* theatre, however, which Stalin himself had backed as Commissar for Nationalities, remained in the Soviet Union until 26th January 1926, and Hebrew could still be studied at the university, and by adults, if privately funded. A symbolic change occurred in 1920, when the *Evskeisia* introduced the phonetic spelling of all Hebrew words in Yiddish. This cut the organic link of Yiddish to Hebrew.

Yiddish writers saw their opportunity to disseminate their works and to earn a reasonable living. They were not under commercial pressures but they did increasingly come under political ones. They perhaps embraced the new order more enthusiastically in public than they felt privately. Earlier on, they had suppressed their scepticism, and even came to believe in the validity of their commitment, until it was too late for them to reverse their course. At any rate, in the early stages of the revolution, no one was able to predict the Stalinist outcome and the eventual tragedy of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union.



Two Yiddish posters. One on the virtues of working on the land (above); the other (right) on the evils of religion.

Russian context, he said it means... "Steal what has been stolen from you."

... The strictly scientific, Marxian concept, which means the socialisation of private property, (was) ... transmuted into the petit bourgeois concept of parcelling out, of tearing apart the accumulated private fortunes, ie into the opposite of socialism!

But "steal what has been stolen" was a truly brilliant adaptation of socialist terminology to the process spontaneously underway in Russia at the time...

The slogan "All Power to the Soviets" was not a question of principle for Lenin but a question of expediency, of the ... most direct way that would lead to the power of the Central Committee of the Communist Party...

Lenin cared hardly at all about "internal democracy" even in the socialist camp... During the first All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks with a total of 10% of the votes, quietly prepared a large armed demonstration that was

supposed to compel the Congress of Soviets to adopt the Bolshevik position. By chance the preparation was exposed and the Congress compelled the Bolsheviks to abandon the plan...

He never held back in the matter of the most far-reaching compromises involving programmatic principles. Between one day and the next he dropped the cardinal question of the Russian revolution – the agrarian question – and without wavering adopted the Programme of the SRs [Socialist Revolutionaries] as soon as he became convinced that it better suited the desires of the peasant mass... But in one respect Lenin would brook no compromises whatsoever, in the question of power. Sharing power with any other party was for Lenin totally precluded...

A passionate ideological struggle within the proletarian camp centering on ... Lenin's life will go on for many years. But ... even his most bitter adversaries ... will have to concede that he was one of the ... greatest revolutionaries history has produced.

THE EAST END AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

DAVID ROSENBERG gives a taste of his tour round some of London's connections with the events in eastern Europe

The Russian Revolution of 100 years ago was a political earthquake whose tremors were felt across the world. It had a special resonance and impact in London's East End, which, from the early 1880s, was home to tens of thousands of Jews who fled the Russian Empire where they suffered discrimination, persecution, threats and violence under Tsarist rule. They looked for freedom, security and a better life here, but what happened in the old country was still important for them. Sometimes they took to the streets here to protest about events there.

In late 19th century London you could also find non-Jewish Russian political exiles such as Petr Lavrovich Lavrov who founded a revolutionary journal called *Forward*, and became an associate of Marx and Engels in London. He was joined by Stepniak (also known as Kravchinsky), who arrived there shortly after publishing his book *Underground Russia*. A geographer, anarchist theoretician and former prince, Peter Kropotkin arrived in London in 1886 and helped to found a Society of Friends of Russian Freedom in 1890.

Russian exiles continued to agitate for change in Russia from their London base, speaking at meetings, often at workers' clubs in the East End, writing and sharing literature, and producing revolutionary material to be smuggled back into Russia.

London hosted congresses of the Russian Revolutionary Party (RSDWP) in 1903, 1905 and 1907. The registration centre for the 1907 congress was in a Jewish socialist club in Whitechapel, opposite the London Hospital. Many delegates to these congresses stayed with immigrant Jewish socialists in the East End.

Rosa Luxemburg's first impressions of Whitechapel were unflattering: "A strange and wild part of the city ... dark and dirty.... Groups of drunken people stagger with wild noise and shouting down the

middle of the street ... flower girls on the street corners, looking frightfully ugly and even depraved."

In 1917 thousands of Russian Jews returned home, a number of them voluntarily, to join the revolutionary struggle for a new Russia and a new world. Others went involuntarily, deported for refusing to be conscripted to a British army allied with the Tsarist regime they had escaped from.

Radical East End political figures like George Lansbury and Sylvia Pankhurst closely observed and admired the changes taking place in Russia, but the political establishment were fearful and began to speculate about who was really behind the Russian Revolution.

In a newspaper article in May 1920, one prominent British politician claimed that "internationalist Jews" were engaged in a "world wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation". He added: "This movement amongst the Jews is not new ... It has been the mainspring of every subversive movement during the 19th Century; and now at last this band of extraordinary personalities has gripped the Russian people by the hair of their heads and have become practically the undisputed masters of that enormous empire." The author was Winston Churchill. Meanwhile *The Times* ran anti-communist editorials with titles such as "The Jewish Peril".

Join one of JS contributor David Rosenberg's walks about the East End and the Russian Revolution to find out more. On Saturday 21st October he is leading this walk as part of Philosophy Football's Art of Revolution 1917 festival: <https://www.philosophyfootball.com/events-c40.html> Sunday 12 November he will be leading this walk for JW3: <https://www.jw3.org.uk/event/russian-revolution-and-east-end#.Wba2BoqQzok>

VISIT BUT DON'T JOIN THE HORRORJUNKIES

On a side street leading to Krakow old town's beautiful main square, I'm pulled up short by the glowing sign on the Sycylia Hotel/Restaurant: "Cracow city tour Auschwitz. Salt Mine. Zakopane." It sits beneath a bigger sign: "Pizza Pasta Salad." Further down the street, an even more tasteless, inadvertent juxtaposition: a protruding sign advertising tours to Auschwitz (and that salt mine again) is preceded by another one advertising tattoos. At Auschwitz, where one million Jews and at least 23,000 Roma were gassed to death and cremated in an industrial process, and tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war and Polish political prisoners met their deaths, those not immediately selected for mass murder were assigned a registration number. This number was sewn on to their prison uniform and tattooed on their left forearm.

The number of visitors to the Nazis' largest-scale killing site has mushroomed over the last 15 years from around 500,000 in the year 2000 to a staggering 1.72 million in 2015 – a daily average of nearly 5,000 people, though in summer it may be almost double that on any one day. They crowd into the sturdy brick buildings at Auschwitz 1 camp, whose exterior remains largely unchanged, but whose interior has been converted into harrowing museum displays.

From there, visitors are encouraged to continue their tour by moving on to Birkenau, a bleak expanse a mile and a half away from Auschwitz 1, enclosed by once-electrified barbed wire fences. At Birkenau, dozens of former Polish army barracks, built for 250 people but often housing between 700 and 1,000 in Nazi use, held prisoners temporarily, before most were gassed. You see a railway track that brought deportees through the arch of a huge watchtower, right to the heart of the camp, where gas chambers and crematoria were built near the barracks, for the process of systematic murder.

Many visitors to Auschwitz come as participants in educational programmes, and some 300 educators have received specialised training to guide them, in 20 languages. Ever larger numbers also come as casual tourists. After a hearty hotel breakfast they can visit a horror show, a theme park of torture and suffering, and return to their holiday destination (Krakow is just over an hour's drive away) to eat, drink and sample Krakow's nightlife.

I first visited in 1995 as part of a large group of nearly 80 people, organised by the Anti-Nazi League, comprising teachers, students, trade unionists and activists. We came on two coaches

with our own guide, Leon Greenman, an Auschwitz survivor. On the way, he told us the background to the Nazi occupation of Poland, then added harrowing details of his own personal story as we walked around the camp, especially in the bleak expanse of Birkenau, where his wife Else and three-year-old son Barney were gassed almost immediately after they arrived.

At Birkenau a local guide, who had been a youngster in the Polish Socialist Party during the Nazi occupation, answered detailed questions about the situation of the area's local population at the time.

On that visit I felt we had time and space to begin to grasp and reflect on critical aspects of such an enormous and traumatic experience. In 2016, I helped devise the programme for the visit of a smaller group of 24 anti-racist activists and trade unionists ranging in age from their 20s to their early 70s, organised through Unite Against Fascism. When we arrived, the area between the coach park and the ticket office was teeming with people, young and old, from several countries. The atmosphere was noisy and chaotic. It was difficult to distinguish the educational groups from the tourist day-trippers being whizzed around the complex. We were all fitted out with headphones as our guide valiantly tried to take us to crucial exhibits and patiently explain their significance, before being overrun by



another group entering the same room. The quality of educational experience, and the ability of group participants to take in what is there, is compromised by the sheer volume of people in each room.

Of course, the demand for educational visits is a good thing. The highest numbers who pass through are from Poland itself, at a time when Polish politics has shifted alarmingly rightwards. The demand by

DAVID ROSENBERG argues that the huge numbers of visitors to Auschwitz, including day-trippers, are undermining both the site itself and people's ability to understand and reflect on the events that happened there

Crowds of visitors are rushed around, with little time to reflect on what they are seeing.

THE NUMBER OF VISITORS TO THE NAZIS' LARGEST-SCALE KILLING SITE HAS MUSHROOMED OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS FROM AROUND 500,000 IN THE YEAR 2000 TO A STAGGERING 1.72 MILLION IN 2015 – A DAILY AVERAGE OF NEARLY 5,000 PEOPLE, THOUGH IN SUMMER IT MAY BE ALMOST DOUBLE THAT ON ANY ONE DAY.

tourists has more mixed drivers and motives. After Poles, the highest numbers of visitors are from Britain and America. Some are educational group visits, too, but I imagine that tour companies are making a good profit (I was going to say "a killing") out of visitors from societies whose cultural values are increasingly dominated by sensationalism and who are used to treating horror as entertainment.

There is undoubtedly huge demand, but why don't they restrict numbers to no more than 1,000 a day at the times of year when the site is open for the longest hours, and 700 at other times? That would guarantee an experience that would enable visitors to truly reflect on what they encounter.

The displays at Auschwitz I are stomach-churning: huge stockpiles of reading glasses;

are cordoned off. You can look from a distance. The Nazis had tried, not very effectively, to destroy the evidence of them before the camp was liberated by the Russians, and one of the crematoria was destroyed in a revolt led by four women prisoners who were part of the Sonderkommando – a group tasked with helping to collect belongings and dispose of the bodies of those gassed to death.

On this visit I was also disturbed by a change less perceptible to most visitors. Both at Auschwitz I and at Birkenau, display boards have been revamped and standardised. They are now in three languages: Polish, English and Hebrew. While the use of Hebrew is an attempt to demonstrate empathy with the fact that the vast majority of victims here were Jews (under the post-War Stalinist regime Jewish victimhood was obscured by reference to "Polish and Russian citizens"), the daily language of most of those murdered at Auschwitz was none of these. It was Yiddish. On my earlier visit I am sure I remember seeing some plaques and information boards in Yiddish (often alongside Polish). This time I found just one. Others it seems have been removed or replaced with explanations in Polish, English and Hebrew.

The only Yiddish plaque I saw was among 27 granite slabs, side by side, with identical texts: "For ever let this place be a cry of despair and a warning to humanity, where the Nazis murdered about one and a half million men women and children mainly Jews from various countries of Europe." One of the slabs was in Modern Hebrew (Ivrit), the language revived and remodelled by Jews in the late 19th and early 20th century, who later settled from Europe in Palestine as part of the Jewish nationalist project to establish the state of Israel. However, given that the Nazis did not reach Palestine, Hebrew was unlikely to have been the mother tongue of any of the victims.

Many of today's visitors to Auschwitz come from Israel but in 2015, the majority came from Poland, Britain, America, Germany, Italy and Spain. Jews from those countries do not have Hebrew as their mother tongue. Even though the number of Yiddish speakers today is vastly diminished, precisely because of what happened at Auschwitz and at other death camps, and out of respect to the cultural lives and experiences of those who were murdered, their most-widely shared daily language – Yiddish – should surely be represented on memorial boards and plaques. It is a *shande* (disgrace) that it isn't.

From what I know of the growing number of one-day trips to Auschwitz from Britain and elsewhere, some of those among the crowds gathering noisily near the entrance as we arrived would have been back in their own homes in Britain that night or the following morning, immediately removed from the physical context of these events.

We returned to our hotel feeling rather shell-shocked, and gathered in a circle in the corner of the bar to share our reflections from the day. People described how shattering the time we spent at Birkenau was, reflecting especially on aspects of the indignities that women prisoners suffered, described by our guide. Others talked of the processes of desensitisation of the perpetrators,

and marginalisation and dehumanisation of the victims, without which this could not have taken place. We reflected on parallel attitudes towards refugees today, which range from indifference to hostility. Several participants expressed gratitude about how those of us who devised this visit created a compelling narrative within a wider programme that made the Auschwitz visit itself both meaningful and comprehensible.

If Auschwitz was the final piece completing a horrifying picture, those elements that illuminated the process leading to it were absolutely crucial. We arrived on a Thursday and left the following Monday. On the Thursday evening I gave a presentation about the harsh daily life of Jews in 1930s Poland in a changing and ever more threatening political environment of economic discrimination and increasing fascist violence, before the Nazis invaded.

On the Friday morning we visited the old (and currently reviving) Jewish quarter of Krakow, in Kazimierz, to the south-east of the old town. We walked across the bridge – as the Jews had been forced to do in March 1941 – to the tiny walled ghetto area within which they were made to live. Our guide, Mary, pointed to an existing fragment of the ghetto wall, showing how the Nazis designed it in the shape of Jewish gravestones. She described the way that the Nazis disciplined the Jews through creating a Jewish Council that was forced to implement and cascade down Nazi orders. In the afternoon, we visited the square that served as a deportation point. Only a minority of Krakow's Jews were sent to Auschwitz; the majority were sent to, Belzec death camp, 180 miles from Krakow. Mary told us, too, about the attempts at resistance.

In the afternoon we visited an extraordinarily detailed museum created in what was once Oskar Schindler's factory. A profiteer and playboy, Schindler subverted Nazi commands to save the lives of some Jews by insisting on the importance of their labour. In the grand scheme of things his efforts were marginal – though obviously not to the people he saved. The museum itself thankfully treats his work as a side issue, and concentrates more on showing how the Nazis occupied Krakow and managed to control and subjugate the population, the non-Jews as well as the Jews. Prior to 1939, Jews had comprised one in four of Krakow's inhabitants.

That evening I gave a presentation about the most celebrated act of ghetto resistance which took place in the Warsaw Ghetto, describing the co-operation between different left-wing tendencies – Bundists, Communists and left-Zionists. I highlighted especially the role of Bundists such as Marek Edelman, the last surviving member of the Ghetto Resistance Command, who died in 2009, Mikhal Klepfisz, who made and smuggled weapons into the ghetto while being hidden by a Polish-Catholic family, and Zalman Frydrych, who, with help from a Polish socialist railway worker, travelled clandestinely to discover the fate of Jews being deported. When

many ghetto inhabitants believed Nazi claims that they were being deported to the east "for work", Frydrych discovered that they were being deported to their mass deaths at Treblinka. After this information was published, the underground ghetto resistance stepped up its preparation for action.

Having absorbed this programme, we went to Auschwitz already immersed in an understanding of the processes that Jewish and non-Jewish Poles had been caught up in, rather than going in blind just to be shocked, or simply to honouring the victims of a seemingly inexplicable tragedy.

Some returned home on the Sunday. I went back late afternoon on the Monday, which gave me time to visit two other locations in Krakow that convey more of the story.

On the corner of the square inside the ghetto from which the deportations took place, stood a pharmacy run by Tadeusz Pankiewicz, a Polish non-Jew. He and his staff were the only non-Jews allowed to continue working in the ghetto. They used this permission to help Jews in legal and many illegal ways. Today, the pharmacy has been reconstructed as a small but remarkable, interactive museum. Walk slowly through its rooms and open cabinets and drawers. Instead of medicines, there are photos and texts telling the stories of the Krakow ghetto, including tales of different forms of resistance that took place.

From there I walked back across the river into Kazimierz to the Galician Jewish Museum, housed in an old mill that became a factory after the Second World War. Through powerful, well-captioned photos, it tells the story of Jewish life in Galicia (south western Poland), which goes back at least 800 years, and again provides vital context for understanding the Nazi period. It reveals ambivalent and openly antisemitic attitudes in the area after the Nazis were defeated. But it ends on a positive note, celebrating the efforts to rebuild Jewish culture in Galicia today.

Do visit Auschwitz, but don't be a superficial, horror-junkie, day-tripper. Prepare yourself. Spend time, as we did, in Krakow, getting to know the life of the community that was there, how its Jewish community was marginalised, isolated and destroyed, and also find out about the ways people resisted. As for those who maintain the museum complex – please reconsider your responsibilities. Don't be carried away by the crass commercialised demand for visits. Limit the numbers, so you can expand and deepen the experience.

ON MY EARLIER VISIT I REMEMBER SEEING PLAQUES AND INFORMATION BOARDS IN YIDDISH (OFTEN ALONGSIDE POLISH). THIS TIME I FOUND JUST ONE. OTHERS IT SEEMS HAVE BEEN REMOVED OR REPLACED WITH EXPLANATIONS IN POLISH, ENGLISH AND HEBREW.

Unite Against Fascism is leading a trip to Kraków/Auschwitz from 16-20th November. For more information contact info@uaf.org.uk

Bleak Birkenau, surrounded by once-electrified barbed wire fences.

suitcases labelled with names and addresses from all over Europe stacked up; tonnes of human hair; maps showing the remote places all over the Continent where the Nazis rounded up Jews and transported them over many days to this camp, no doubt diverting resources they could have used for their war effort. But that war effort became secondary to the attempt to annihilate all Jews.

Visitors need time and space to absorb these displays. At Birkenau our guide had far more physical space, and our group more solitude, for receiving information and reflecting on it. Our only limiting factor there was that we got to Birkenau at 3pm; it would be dark by 4.30.

Birkenau had changed since my last visit. In 1995 I remembered many poorly built wooden bunkers as well as brick bunkers in which overcrowding, starvation, disease and every possible indignity was people's reality.

Many wooden bunkers have since disintegrated. Though conservation work is going on in several brick bunkers, some can be visited. In 1995 we could walk through the ruins of the largely destroyed gas chambers and crematoria. Now after millions more visitors have tramped through, they



"For ever let this place be a cry of despair and a warning to humanity, where the Nazis murdered about one and a half million men women and children mainly Jews from various countries of Europe."

THE SCEPTICS WERE PROVED RIGHT

The so-called peace process is a deception, and it's time to shed illusions, says **ANTONY LERMAN**

It's impossible to destroy an idea. So for many people the "idea" of two independent states – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and harmony lives on. But the chances of such a scenario being realised are virtually zero, and have been for some years.

Even at the height of international optimism that the 1993 Oslo Accords would lead to such an outcome, it's most likely that one of the reasons why the then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin agreed to do a deal with Arafat was because he thought that locking him in to a diplomatic process subject to international scrutiny was the best way of preventing an independent state of Palestine coming into being. I suppose that, in theory, had Rabin lived, he might have changed his mind. We will never know. But what we do know for certain is that virtually all of the Israeli governments since that time have gradually perfected the art of paying lip service to two states while at the same time increasing Israel's stranglehold over the West Bank and Gaza and encouraging the growth of the settlement population – such that today's leading Israeli politicians barely disguise their fundamental aim of, in some form, annexing the West Bank. In Israel today it's *salonfähig* (socially acceptable) brazenly to deny that there is any longer such a thing as an "occupation".

Without doubt, this outcome is one of the legacies of 1967 – an event that put justice for the Palestinians further out of reach than ever, effectively continuing the nakba process, a catastrophe sometimes spoken of as complete, in the past, but to Palestinians, ongoing.

Back then, to a rather naïve, secular socialist-Zionist like myself, 1967 looked like a miracle. Palestinian rights were not on my horizon. The fulfilment of Jewish nationalism was; so too my own plans to make aliya. This was the urgent question: Is the new *chalutzim* (socialist-Zionist pioneering) creating new kibbutzim beyond the green line? I flirted with saying "yes", but drew back, not so much because I thought it was wrong in principle; more because it was wrong for me personally. It seemed like a legitimate Zionist choice, just not one I wanted to make.

One of many reasons why I eventually rejected Zionism was learning how, at the time, left and right Zionism were already effectively colluding in making Jewish colonisation of the West Bank the central plank of an increasingly aggressive Jewish nationalism, which soon came to be spearheaded by religious fanatics who also saw victory in the Six Day War as a miracle and a sign that the *mashiach* was coming. The emergence of this messianic Zionism – illiberal, anti-democratic, opposed to universal human rights – and its capture of both the state and Judaism more widely is probably 1967's most significant legacy. Its influence extends beyond

Israel's borders into the very heart of diasporic Jewish life. And it provides the ideological underpinning for the permanent subjugation of the Palestinians.

Finding reasons to be optimistic in these circumstances is a very tough call. And not a fruitful exercise in which to engage. If you want to be reminded of what being intoxicatingly optimistic about the future of Israel-Palestine felt like and how completely such euphoria can evaporate, go and see the National Theatre production of "Oslo" (showing at the Harold Pinter Theatre in London until the end of 2017). The 1993 Oslo accords generated genuine hope among millions of Israelis and Palestinians, but by no means all. And the sceptics were proved right. What was presented to the world as the promise of peace and justice between equals was in fact a surrender by the weaker party in exchange for a vague understanding that they would be gifted a rump state, which the stronger party never intended to allow to come into existence. But the myth of a peace process lives on, doing a very good job of preventing the Palestinians from ever obtaining their full human, civil, political and national rights.

"The Middle East peace process may well be the most spectacular deception in modern diplomatic history," wrote Henry Siegman, former head of the American Jewish Congress-turned eloquent and trenchant critic of Israel, in 2007. And it's a deception that even the cack-handed Trump administration is currently sustaining, with its airy talk of a "planned peace initiative" and silence in the face of Netanyahu's recent statement that Israel would be in the West Bank "forever". Even the settlement-supporting US ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, interviewed by the Jerusalem Post, openly spoke of "an alleged occupation".

Any true progress towards something better has to be based on the shedding of illusions. The so-called

"peace process" must be consigned to the dustbin of history. Only then might space emerge for a Palestinian-led, Palestinian-Jewish international political coalition to devise and begin a grassroots civil rights campaign to achieve full equality for the Palestinians, which is not dependent on a state-based paradigm. That might be cause for optimism.



CLASHING ACCOUNTS OF A PIVOTAL MOMENT

In May this year, Israel celebrated Jerusalem Day for the 50th time. This annual event, which has become an important national holiday marks the moment when, in Zionist discourse, Jerusalem was united under Israeli sovereignty. As in previous years, the centrepiece of these celebrations was the March of the Flags, a controversial annual parade where tens of thousands of young Israelis, mostly from the religious national and settler communities, march through the Arab quarter of the Old City ecstatically chanting "Death to the Arabs". The march, and the wider celebration exemplify a crucial aspect of the legacy of 1967: a normalisation of racist narratives and a victory within mainstream Israeli politics of a historical narrative that seeks to exclude Palestinians entirely from the picture. Built upon the foundations of that narrative, of the privileged rights of Jewish people over Palestinians, has been a project of colonisation of the territories occupied in 1967, which has served, settlement by settlement, to erode the viability of an independent Palestinian state.

So 1967 carries a grim significance for Palestinians. In June of that year, Israel defeated the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and absorbed what remained of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in only six days. By the end of the 1967 War, Israel had expelled over 250,000 Palestinians from their homes.

Since then, Palestinian history has unfolded within the context of settler-colonialism and the construction of mechanisms of control which serve to disempower separated Palestinian communities and deny them realisation of their basic rights. For Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, it means a continuing military occupation that controls freedom of movement through a network of checkpoints and barriers, loss of land, demolition of homes, arbitrary detention and imprisonment; for Palestinians in Gaza, it is a blockade which this year

passed its 10th anniversary, and which a UN report in 2015 stated would make life in Gaza unlivable by 2020. For Palestinian refugees, including those expelled in 1967, it means the continuing denial of the right of return, and for Palestinian citizens in Israel, the denial of equality under the law.

2017 of course also marks the 100th anniversary of

the Balfour declaration. At the heart of the process leading to the declaration was a familiar political dynamic – the disregard of the rights of the Palestinians because of inferior cultural ethnic or religious identity. In the memorandum he wrote in 1919 defending the declaration, Balfour wrote: "The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."

So the events of 1967 and the Balfour declaration are not, as Israel and its allies would want us to believe, events to celebrate. They are instead opportunities to reflect upon an enduring injustice. 1967 did not represent victory by one power over another in a longstanding dispute between nationalisms, but rather an exertion of power by one people over another, justified by claims of superior ethnic, religious or cultural entitlement.

For 34 years since the Oslo accords, Western governments have formulated a foreign policy founded upon the notion of two states, with Israel withdrawing to the 1967 borders. The policy has rested upon the fiction of a willingness on the part of Israel to allow the establishment of a Palestinian state. This fiction has been exposed by a continuing process of settlement expansion under successive Israeli governments, confident that the international community will not hold them to account. Israel's response to UN Resolution 2334 in December 2016 which reaffirmed the two-states policy and "reaffirmed ... that Israel's establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity", but with no sanctions attached, was to announce the biggest West Bank settlement expansion since 1992.

There are only so many times that Western leaders can warn of the window closing on a two-state solution before they are forced to acknowledge that it has closed. Meanwhile the international movement calling for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions until Israel ends the occupation, which recognises the right of return and acknowledges the equal rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel, continues to grow in strength. The movement is rooted in an understanding of the Palestinian struggle being part of a wider struggle against racism and the imposition of unjust structures of power. The development of new alliances against racism in the aftermath of Trump's election and the rise of the far right across Europe, has created crucial spaces for the re-examination of the complex dynamics of power that sustain Israel's control. It is this movement, inspired by the continuing *sumud* (steadfastness) and resistance of the Palestinian people that give us, in this year of grim milestones, reasons for hope.

BEN JAMAL, Director of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, reflects on the conflicting Palestinian and Israeli narratives, as they respectively commemorate and celebrate the anniversary of the Six Day War

IS THERE ANY HOPE LEFT?

Israeli peace activist, army refuser and spokesperson for Gush Shalom, **ADAM KELLER**, explores the small but growing possibilities for a way out of the conflict

The symbolic date of 5th June 2017 – the 50th anniversary of Israel's military occupation of the Palestinians – has come and gone. It was marked by a reasonably large rally in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square, plus a few more political and artistic events. A week later, it was back to occupation as usual. One more reason to doubt whether the two-state solution is still a realistic option.

Can hundreds of thousands of settlers be removed from the West Bank, or have their numbers already reached a point of no return? In 2005, the settlers in the Gaza Strip, who numbered around 8,000, were physically removed by the army. This was a very big strain on the IDF resources. On the other hand, back in 1962, France's De Gaulle did manage to remove a million and half French settlers from Algeria by the simple expedient of removing the soldiers and letting the settlers remove themselves. An Israeli De Gaulle (if we ever get one) might be able to do the same on the West Bank.

A much bigger problem is that most Israelis no longer believe peace to be possible. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the Oslo Process, as actually carried out by actual Israeli governments, ended in miserable failure – though one can argue endlessly over why that happened and especially whose fault it was. So, if you define "Oslo" as "Peace" it would be reasonable to conclude: "We tried to make peace, and it did not work". As to the reason why it did not work, most Jewish Israelis have come to accept the official narrative: that Israel made "great concessions" and "generous offers", to which the Palestinians responded by suicide bombings and the lobbing of missiles; that Palestinian violence is endemic, motivated by a blind hatred, part and parcel of a worldwide "terrorist wave". Are there counter-arguments? Sure there are, but only a minority want to listen.

Opinion polls still indicate that most Israelis are willing to give up the Occupied Territories in return for peace – but they only regard this as a hypothetical possibility. If a peace deal were to be presented to the Israeli electorate as a done deal, the majority would probably vote "yes". But until and unless this happens, they wouldn't lift a finger to bring it about – neither mass demonstrations nor mass voting for peace-oriented parties. Which leaves us in the position of waiting for outside pressure.

From 2008 to 2016 we kept hoping for Obama to have an all-out confrontation with Netanyahu but every time it seemed in the offing, Obama backed off. Had he let the UN Security Council condemn the settlements in the first month of his first term, rather than as an ineffective parting shot by a powerless lame duck, things might have been different. And the European Union, Israel's biggest trading partner, never showed any real inclination to use its economic leverage, even when it was in much better shape than it is now.

So is the two-state solution dead? If it is, then the solution is dead, period. The idea of taking up the one-state solution instead in the belief that Jewish Israelis who reject a Palestinian State on the West Bank would be ready to embrace millions of Palestinians as their new fellow citizens of Israel, ignores the most basic realities of Israeli society and politics.

Yes, it is quite possible that the solution is dead. This is not a Hollywood film, and nobody has guaranteed us a happy ending. There may be no solution; Israel could just go on becoming ever more oppressive, more racist, nastier and more disgusting as long as the country maintains its military superiority and the US is able and willing to continue to back it. (And when Israeli superiority and/or American backing come to an end, several outcomes can be conjectured – most of them nasty, too.)

Is there any cause for optimism? I can point to no strong, coherent, clear-cut cause. But some glimmers can be discerned in the dark.

- Netanyahu is deeply mired in corruption investigations, and his term seems near its end. There is no guarantee that he will be replaced by somebody better – but perhaps...
- In the recent crisis around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound, the Palestinians, for the first time, used the methods of large-scale, non-violent civil disobedience – and it worked, gaining them an important moral victory. This might have longterm results.
- Among many other drastic effects, the Trump presidency might bring about a final discrediting of the American monopoly over mediation between Israel and the Palestinians. Eventually, a better, more even-handed mediator might emerge.
- Perhaps most important: an increasing number of American Jews, especially young ones, are strongly critical of Israeli government policies. The advent of Trump has widened the rift. Most American Jews are disgusted and horrified by him; most Israeli Jews are rather pleased with him. There is a historical precedent: one of the factors which made the Portuguese finally give up their colonial empire was coming under strong criticism from the Brazilians, with whom they have a shared language and history.
- Today Hadas Tal, an 18-year old Israeli woman, begins her second month in military prison, and her fellow refuser Noa Gur Golan is already on her third. They both reject the idea, widespread in the Israeli media and public discourse, that female soldiers' participation in suppressing the Palestinians constitutes a form of "women's empowerment". Hadas and Noa prefer to spend a prolonged period behind bars than take part in this kind of state-sponsored feminism. So long as Israeli society can produce such young people, there's hope.

VERTICAL OPPRESSION, HORIZONTAL ANSWERS

EYAL WEIZMAN revolutionised the way we understand Israel's system of domination of Palestine. His book, *Hollow Land*, demonstrates how an evolving vertical system of domination has hardened into a geographically unique structure that he calls "Vertical Apartheid". These extracts are taken from the book's preface.

[A] former Israeli general, until recently the chief commander of the West Bank, claimed that the Israeli military had become "world champions in occupation" and has managed to turn its control of millions of Palestinians into "an art form", as if this two generation long degrading and lethal regime is some sort of a sport or managerial challenge...

The domination of more than four million Palestinians has stopped being an economic burden and proven to be profitable. The people under occupation are a captive market (literally) for many surplus Israeli manufactured goods. Private industries, including international companies working in the Jewish settlements, prosper thanks to tax breaks, low rents, government subsidies, and a Palestinian labour force that is rendered cheap and flexible because it enjoys no civil or labour rights. Israel's international exports – many of them military – are also steadily growing...

Within the Israeli political system there is currently no serious opposition to the settlement project ... Dissent is confronted with paranoid fervour and righteous rage. Activists are vilified as traitors, spied upon, threatened, and arrested. State officials, and even the prime minister, now openly refer to human rights groups as "the third strategic threat" (after Iran and Hizbullah) treating them as foreign agents and spies... Civil society groups calling for boycott of and disinvestment from the Israeli economy and culture – one of the last peaceful means to challenge Israeli hegemony – are made illegal locally, foreign activists promoting it are no longer allowed into the country...

In 2008, a global financial crisis overwhelmed the world economy and devastated real estate markets worldwide. At the same time, in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem the number of houses and settlers has nearly doubled: there were 400,000 settlers there in 2007 and there are about 750,000 today...

This number includes the residents of ... 13 Jewish outposts inside Palestinian neighbourhoods in occupied East Jerusalem...

[T]he wall and other physical barriers have expanded. Hundreds of miles of fencing systems and prefabricated concrete elements have been erected on Palestinian lands to protect Jewish

settlements... Separation, in space and by law, is the most fundamental component of Israel's system of colonisation. Even when settlers, Palestinians, and soldiers are brought together in the same incident... each group is still bound by different laws. The applicable law for the settlers is the Israeli civil law, by which settlers enjoy full Israeli civil rights... The reality for Palestinians is a military dictatorship in which civil and human rights rarely apply. In military courts ... the conviction rates for alleged violence against settlers or occupation forces are 99.74 per cent. For soldiers the ratio is inverted...

In recent decades, techniques of domination, land grab and separation, more intensely exercised in the 1967 occupied areas, inspired the further separation of Jews and Arabs within Israel itself...

The built environment – and its destruction and construction – is ... the means by which domination takes shape...

The policy of separation ... also creates divisions between Palestinians. Physical barriers now cut apart the three main districts occupied in 1967 – Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank – and separate them from the Palestinians in Israel. The Gaza siege is enacted through a perimeter barrier composed of a similar system of roads, concrete walls and fences to that of the more famous West Bank wall.

When I started my research into ... this territorial system, I approached the challenge as every architect might... I drew a cross section through it. An architectural cross section cuts through the visible layers of a building – facades, internal walls, floors – to expose the structures, systems, and infrastructure that run through them – columns, beams, air ducts, plumbing, electricity or information systems – as well as the relation between floors and rooms. The section revealed the depth of Israel's colonial project, because, like a building, the "architectural project" of the occupation was arranged in layers. The Oslo Accords of the mid 1990s – which promised an incremental pathway to reconciliation... divided the territory into three principle political floors: the surface, landlocked pockets of which were handed over to Palestinian control; the subsoil, including water and mineral resources; and the airspace above Palestinian areas, which was left in Israeli hands, primarily

those of its air force...

This fragmentation into settlement hilltop islands over Palestinian valley enclaves necessitated a further degree of three-dimensional complexity: a mesh of separated roadways that could connect islands to islands and enclaves to enclaves. This completely divided the movements of Jews and Palestinians in three dimensions without the two ever crossing, or crossing only minimally.

A Jewish-only road network, the "apartheid roads" started connecting the hilltop settlements with bridges that span over Palestinian fields and with tunnels that burrow underneath Palestinian towns. This type of infrastructure has in recent decades been greatly extended... Every Palestinian town and village has thus been fully enveloped by Israeli space in three dimensions. If Palestinians want to drive out of their enclaves, they encounter a fence, a wall, or an Israeli checkpoint...

[T]he decolonisation of Palestine will require ... the fundamental "delamination" of Israel's vertical apartheid...

The only ethical future is for 13 million people between Jordan and the sea to have citizenship, freedom to move and live wherever they want, historical recognition and modes of restitution. This could be achieved in the context of three, two or one state, certainly not one of an ongoing colonisation and occupation.

...The vulnerability of the politics of vertical apartheid lies in its totality and all encompassing logic ... All empires eventually collapse ... When agents of separation try to compartmentalise things vertically and horizontally, what is needed is the construction of collectivity between the people coming from the different zones into which Palestine has been fragmented, from the diaspora, from anti-apartheid Israeli activists, and with international solidarity.

Co-resistance – civil society actions that oppose and seek to terminate Israel's regime of domination – is small but kicking, and it manifests itself in inclusive, unarmed struggle: civil and human rights work, solidarity campaigns, exposures, and demonstrations. The lines of solidarity that are formed there around these small but committed communities-of-practice are the nuclei around which a new politics could one day be constructed.

Hollow Land: Israel's architecture of occupation by Eyal Weizman, is published by Verso, £14.99.



The Israeli capture of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in 1967, which this year has been the site of successful Palestinian non-violent resistance.

To get Gush Shalom's email briefings on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories, contact info@gush-shalom.org (write "Subscribe" in subject line).

ONE OF THE

On the 50th anniversary of Isaac Deutscher's death, **STEPHEN MARKS** assesses the life and thought of an extraordinary Jewish Marxist

The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays, by Isaac Deutscher, ed Tamara Deutscher, 1967, has been republished by Verso this year.

It is a mark of those who have had an impact on the way the world thinks, that to later generations their achievement risks seeming commonplace. So it is with Isaac Deutscher 50 years after his death. The retrospective teleological view of history, which sees the Soviet Union of Stalin as the inevitable and legitimate lineal descendant of Lenin and October – or indeed of the original sin of Marx and Engels – is no longer unchallenged or seen as self-evident.

Likewise, the view of Jewish history and identity which proceeds with an equal unproblematic inevitability from Biblical origins, through lachrymose exile, to the long hoped-for Zionist redemption, is no longer as beyond question as it was – though, alas, both specimens of the political undead still roam the earth and have still to receive the final stake through their ideological heart.

For those who, like me, first came to political awareness in the early 1960s, it is still an effort to recall the stifling blanket of post-war Cold War consensus, which, even then, was only beginning to be challenged. For sure there were a few isolated and heroic swimmers against the stream, often in small, obscure and mutually quarrelsome sects, who challenged both orthodoxies – and the two challenges did often tend to go together.

But for me, at least, it was the work of Deutscher, and especially his masterly three-volume life of Trotsky whose third volume appeared in 1963, which first made me aware of the volcanic explosion of mass creativity and movement which was the reality of the Russian Revolution. Its tremors, like some primeval Big Bang, continue to be felt to this day.

Why was it Deutscher who played this role for many of us? He deployed an extensive and prodigious knowledge of sources which few were even aware of, expressed in an eloquent and compelling style. On his arrival in Britain in 1939 he had no English, but, like Joseph Conrad – another Polish refugee master of English who learned the language from scratch in mid-life – Deutscher set himself to learn English from the beginning.

Yet this is only one of many surprises in an implausible and impressive biography. After an initial false start as a 13-year-old rabbinical prodigy, he published mystical poetry in Polish with Jewish themes, as well as Polish translations from Hebrew, Latin, German and Yiddish poetry.

In 1927 he joined the semi-legal Polish Communist Party (KPP) as editor of its clandestine press, and in 1931 visited the USSR, where he was offered, and turned down, professorships at Moscow and Minsk. The same year he was expelled from the KPP for opposing the insane “social fascist” line that equated social democracy with fascism. And in 1938 he was one of the few



NON-JEWISH JEWS

delegates to the founding conference of Trotsky's Fourth International to oppose its foundation as premature.

His talents and extensive knowledge attracted both the Economist and the Observer to retain him as a specialist correspondent. But in 1949 he left Fleet Street for biography, to write, first, his life of Stalin and then his Trotsky trilogy. He returned to more direct political activity in the mid-'60s, addressing mass student audiences and the first Teach-in against the Vietnam War.

As a rare survivor of the two submerged continents of pre-war independent revolutionary Marxism, and of East European pre-Holocaust Yiddish politics and culture, he remained, until his death in 1967, a link with a murdered past.

Of course both on Stalinism and on “the Jewish question” his views were contestable and sometimes seriously wrong, even when allowance is made for his ability to respond to positive movement and change. Despite his eloquent and illuminating denunciations of Stalinism he continued to regard the system as capable of socialist reform and even, to his everlasting shame, refused to support the Hungarian uprising in 1956.

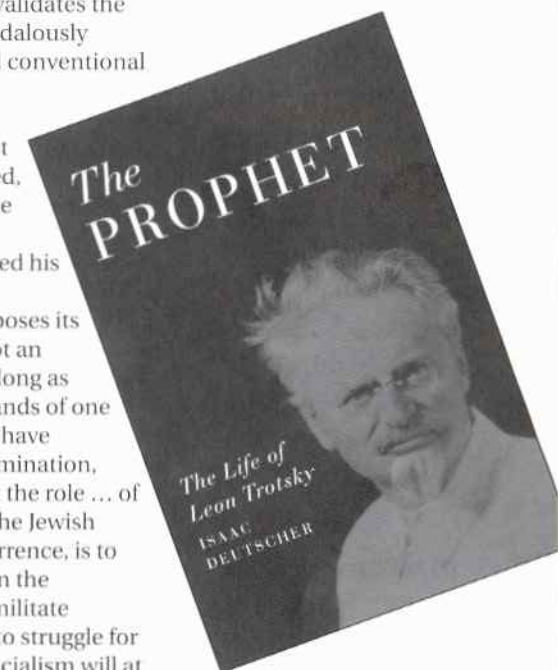
On Palestine, though never a Zionist, his writings on Israel in the 1950s reject it more from a general rejection of all nation states than from a specific solidarity with Palestinian resistance to settler-colonialism. But his last article on Israel after the 1967 war, remarks on the irony that Zionism, which sought to rescue the Jews from their traditional middleman role, only succeeded

in reproducing it on a larger scale in the Middle East as an enforcer for western imperialism.

On Jewish identity he is mainly remembered for his concept of “the non-Jewish Jew”, the great heretics who transcended Jewry in a somehow Jewish way. But in the wake of Trump and Charlottesville, and while Theresa May openly labels those of us who are proud to be “citizens of the world” as “citizens of nowhere”, it is this perennially relevant warning which validates the continuation of an identity that scandalously refuses to fit into any of the accepted conventional definitions:

Let this society suffer any severe shock, such as it is bound to suffer; let there be again millions of unemployed, and we will see the same lower middle class alliance with the Lumpen-proletariat, from whom Hitler recruited his following, running amok with anti-semitism. As long as nation-state imposes its supremacy and as long as we have not an international society in existence, as long as the wealth of every nation is in the hands of one national capitalist oligarchy, we shall have chauvinism, racialism, and, as its culmination, antisemitism. That is why I think that the role ... of those who are aware of the depth of the Jewish tragedy and of the menace of its recurrence, is to remain eternal protesters: to maintain the opposition to the powers that be, to militate against the taboos and conventions, to struggle for a society in which nationalism and racialism will at last lose their hold on the human mind.

Left: Isaac Deutscher
Below: the first of
Deutscher's trilogy on
the life of Leon Trotsky



WHAT ELSE DID ISAAC DEUTSCHER SAY?

“The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition ... Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Freud ... They all went beyond the boundaries of Jewry. They all found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting ... did they have anything in common with one another? ... as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilisations, religions and national cultures ... their minds matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilised each other. They lived on the margins ... of their respective nations. Each of them was in society yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.” (1958)

“Early in my life I rebelled against Jewish religious orthodoxy but I was attracted by ... secular Yiddish culture ... I still see before me the masses of young and old, workers and artisans and paupers, who flocked in the evenings to listen to the readings of poetry and drama. They often

came in their working overalls... Nowhere in the world ... were people so thrilled by listening to their writers and poets as were the Jewish workers of Warsaw and of the Polish-Lithuanian provinces... As Marxists we tried theoretically to deny that the Jewish labour movement had an identity of its own, but it had it all the same ... that language, vigorous, pithy, constantly renewing and enriching itself, was to become, almost overnight, a dead language.” (1966)

“If instead of arguing against Zionism in the 1920s and 1930s I had urged European Jews to go to Palestine, I might have helped to save some of the lives ... extinguished in Hitler's gas chambers ... Even now, however, I am not a Zionist ... From a burning or sinking ship people jump no matter where – on a lifeboat, a raft, or a float. The jumping is for them an “historic necessity”, and the raft is ... the basis of their whole existence. But does it follow that the jumping should be made into a programme, or that one should take the raft-State as the basis of a political orientation?” (1954)

“The world has compelled the Jew to embrace the nation state and to make of it his pride and hope just at a time when there is little or no hope left in it. You cannot blame the Jews for this; you must blame the world. But Jews should at least be aware of the paradox and realise that their intense enthusiasm for ‘national sovereignty’ is historically belated.” (1958)

“... the state of Israel ... came into being not ‘as a sublime fulfilment of history's cycle’ but as an act of Jewish despair – and a monument to the grimmest phase of European history, a phase of madness and decay ... The Jews were conditioned by the circumstances of their history to rise above the limitations of the nationalist outlook, to overcome the fetishes of state or empire, and to look forward to supra-national forms of social existence ... Israel cannot be expected to give the world ... the lead in abandoning the nation-state ... but Israelis might at least take a more sober view of their predicament ... and beware of being carried away by their new fangled and already red-hot nationalism. They also better get used to the idea that their state is not above criticism; it is an earthly creation not a Biblical sanctity, not a ‘chosen’ nation-state.” (1958)

“The Palestine Arabs, more than a million of them ... have lost their lands and their homes ... it was the Arabs who were made to pay the price for the crimes the West committed towards the Jews. They are still made to pay for it, for the ‘guilty conscience’ of the West is ... pro-Israeli and anti-Arab. And how easily Israel has allowed itself to be bribed and fooled by the false ‘conscience money’” (1967)

“... what then makes a Jew? Religion? I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist. In neither sense am I, therefore, a Jew. I am however, a Jew by force of my unconditional solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated. I am a Jew because I feel the Jewish tragedy as my own tragedy; because I feel the pulse of Jewish history; because I should like to do all I can to assure the real, not spurious, security and self respect of the Jews ... paradoxically, I come unexpectedly close to the fears of an orthodox Jew and a Zionist. I do not believe that antisemitism is a spent force. I fear that we may be living in a fool's paradise in our Western welfare state. The trustful feeling of freedom from antisemitism may well be one more illusion”. (1966)

TWEETS, BLEATS AND COMPETING ATROCITIES

Vying for top place in the victimhood stakes is setting activists against each other and undermining the struggle against racism and other forms of oppression, says **JULIA BARD**

"It is not true that suffering ennoble the character; happiness does that sometimes, but suffering, for the most part, makes men petty and vindictive." So wrote Somerset Maugham in 1919 in *The Moon and Sixpence*. Nearly 100 years on, some elements on the left have taken an unexpected turn in a "suffering ennoble" direction, and it's not helping the struggle.

I recently reviewed an American book about antisemitism, which, like most collections of chapters by people from different backgrounds, was a mixture of good and bad analysis and politics. But the thread that ran through a lot of the contributions was about "white privilege", and this crystallised my growing concerns about the direction some activism is taking. Some of the writers seemed to struggle with the idea that a Jewish person could be, or pass as white, and also be a target of racism and discrimination. Others railed against the white (Ashkenazi) Jews for their privilege in relation to black (Mishrahi or Sephardi) Jews. All kinds of biological characteristics and communal affiliations were there, positioned relative to each other on a ladder of suffering and oppression, and those with fewer credentials were urged – or urged themselves, in a *mea culpa* kind of way – to "check their privilege" as a prerequisite for taking political action.

So far, so American, some people might think. But this individualisation of responsibility for other people's oppression is much more all pervading than that, and the result is that we are asked to see the task we face as more like a charitable act than political activism. As if each "privileged" individual giving up a little of what they have to someone less fortunate will redress the cruel, violent legacy of centuries of injustice and oppression.

In this world, victimhood becomes a credential, and the main demand is to turn the status quo on its head. Social media are awash with well-intentioned activists who do little more than demand answers to supposedly rhetorical questions. "How come white people are never called terrorists?" "Why haven't we heard about the atrocity in X?" "Where were the media when Y happened?"

Actually, despite the complexity of the issues, we have a pretty good understanding of why the media, and the political and economic institutions they represent, will put a lone gunman in Las Vegas higher up the agenda than the Spanish state violently attacking its own citizens, and the Catalan crisis above the hundreds and thousands of Rohingya Muslim refugees fleeing Burma.

What has gone missing in these rhetorical questions is any understanding of power. The demand to call every atrocity – especially those carried out by white people – a terrorist attack is a case in point, because it ignores the power invested in the very definition and use of the word "terrorism". This is a term used by states to describe military actions by dissident, anti-state groups. It embodies the power differential between states, and

the individuals or groups carrying out the attacks – usually emanating from groups that are suffering from racism or some other form of discrimination. This is not to justify those acts, simply to say that sticking the label "terrorist" on a white bloke will not do anything to challenge that state power.

Instead of doing the difficult intellectual task of understanding the structures and resources that create and perpetuate inequality and injustice, complex issues about the media and political power are reduced to epithets, assumptions and rhetorical questions. These are shouted into the echo chamber of social media, to bounce back reassuringly in the form of "likes", "loves", "laughs" and hashtags, with no need to get tangled up in the multilayered reality in which people can be both oppressors and oppressed, victims and victimisers, powerless and powerful, in different circumstances.

It is true of course that women are not equal to men, Muslims are not equal to non-Muslims, Black people are not equal to white people, working class people are not equal to middle class people, Jews are not equal to Christians. But although that inequality is a starting point for our activism, injustice does not necessarily confer insight and understanding – or even clean hands. The enemy of my enemy is often not my friend. There are inequalities within and between groups. Those inequalities go deep, are subtle, layered, historic and intertwined. But instead of facing the difficult reality that we can and must defend people against injustice while at the same time challenging them for oppressing others, we seem to be sliding into a great stew of oppression, which we give a fancy name – like "intersectionality" – and compete to be on the top rung of the ladder of suffering, out of range of criticism. All ingredients in this stew seem to be equal. There is no way of suggesting or acting on the fact that one overarching element – such as class, which cuts across society, is based on a set of economic and social relations, and is manifested in institutions invested with greater or lesser power – may have more political significance than another. This is not to suggest that its impact on a particular individual might be more or less, but that in order to challenge oppression of all kinds, we need to understand their relationships with each other and their meaning and role in the systemic network of injustices.

Political activism is about change. If you think it's biologically determined or even predicated on personal experience or family history, then obviously there's no point in trying to change anyone. If they're white and male, they're obviously a lost cause. Black? Up one rung. Jewish? Hmmm... That needs some supplementary questions. Zionist? No. OK, up one rung. Child of Holocaust survivors. Up a rung. Muslim? Up a rung. Woman? Another one needing refinement. White? Stay where you are. Working class? Up a step...

This reminds me of meetings in the 1980s, where some people started every intervention with a string of "qualifications". "Speaking as a working

class, Jewish, disabled, lesbian single mother...". Having bought themselves comprehensive insurance against criticism or disagreement, they could then go on to say any half-baked or wrong-headed thing they liked. And they often did.

We on the left need to have the intellectual capacity to hold two different, even conflicting ideas in our heads at once, and not to read off people's politics from their biological characteristics, their family history or the community they were born into. We all need to know and understand our history as a dynamic, conflicted narrative, which we reinterpret in the light of our own actions and interactions, as a resource for the huge and unpredictable political struggles on the horizon – not as a certificate of merit.

FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES

There are many challenges facing minorities in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. They face racism and discrimination in everyday life as well as physical violence, including attacks on mosques and synagogues. Attacks in France, such as the Charlie Hebdo and Paris bombings, and in England, in Manchester and London, pose particular challenges for Muslim minorities.

One school of thought holds that it is not possible to look at Islamic terrorism in isolation. Rather, it must be seen in the context of Western imperialism, going back to 19th century colonialism. Groups like Daesh (Isis) are characterised as a reaction to this imperialism, and a way of fighting back. Few hold this view so starkly, but there is a more widely held argument that any anti-imperialist, or at least anti-American action, is to be, if not supported, at least condemned in the same breath as pointing to the many deaths caused by, say, the American invasion of Iraq. Theorists of modern Islam such as Sayyid Qutb (one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) developed a challenging form of political Islam at the same time as, and in reaction to, Western colonialism. But to understand and give context does not have to mean to offer sympathy or support.

An opposing view places the blame on Islam itself.

Political campaigning is predicated on the conviction that people can change. If we believe that an individual's stance is tied to their biology or their community, why waste our energy on trying to convince them that they can make the world a better place? We can and must extract ourselves from the atmosphere in which victimhood is used to stifle disagreement and impose orthodoxies. We all have a responsibility to analyse the political forces that are driving and sustaining the racism, inequality, discrimination and injustice we are enmeshed in. We need to challenge them in the streets, in our workplaces and in our communities, and reject the Oppression Olympics that will only create new rarefied elites, set allies against each other, and undermine all of our struggles.

It identifies particular attitudes within Islam towards women and counterposes these to views in the wider society. At its most toxic this may be accompanied by an extreme right-wing political agenda, such as that of the Dutch Freedom Party, who campaign against the building of mosques and have called for the Koran to be banned. This might also be seen as contributing to the election of Trump.

A fearful symmetry is at work here. In line with its ideological worldview, it is in Daesh's interest to portray what it characterises as the struggle between Islam and the West as one of binary opposites. Equally, European far right politicians and those across the Atlantic have combined their ideological conviction with electoral opportunism.

In the face of this, the Left and the progressive movement have been determined to defend the Muslim community. The all-embracing term Islamophobia has been taken to mean both the extreme of physical attacks on mosques but also attacks on some religious practices and on the Muslim community as a whole.

Anyone looking at this from a Jewish socialist or progressive perspective can be allowed a touch of unease. We are very familiar with Jewish community leaders who claim to speak on behalf of

the whole community, whilst defending sectional interests – whether religious or pro-Israel – and then justifying this in the name of some real or supposed outside threat. We are reluctant to take without question anybody's claim to be speaking on behalf of the whole community, particularly when they may have an agenda. This is also the case even when figures such as Tariq Ramadan use the language of human rights to justify an unquestioning acceptance of traditional religious practices.

The word "fundamentalism" has been used as an all-embracing term to indicate that there are similar forces in many religions, including the three

Could moments in the history of the Jewish socialist Bund help to throw light on the problems that fundamentalism poses for Muslim communities, particularly in England and France?
MICHAEL HEISER believes that they can.



monotheistic ones, who are trying to impose their agenda. Groups like Women against Fundamentalism (WAF) have highlighted the very real impact that this makes on the lives of Muslim, Jewish and Christian women. The word has its problems, like the lack of any clear definition of what religious practices are or are not fundamentalist, but it is widely used and can aid the current discussion.

Many debates centre around the position of women and how they dress. Here a language of rights may not be sufficient when faced with an active fundamentalist movement such as the spread of Salafi mosques in Muslim communities. In the Jewish community formerly secular people may turn to religion for all sorts of reasons, including the influence of movements such as Chabad. A language of rights will defend their right to do so whilst not looking at the reasons, internal or external, which have led them to that decision or showing that there are other responses which may be equally valid.

It is also valid to point out that, in the name of modernisation, some Muslim majority countries have banned women covering their heads in public places. That was formerly the case in Turkey, and Erdogan and his version of political Islam have used it. But when it is done by force, and by military regimes, again citing Turkey, it poses particular problems.

We must also recognise different meanings in different countries in different situations. For example, the Muslim woman who formerly dressed with an uncovered head who decides to dress with a niqab is a world away from a woman who has worn a hijab since the accepted age in childhood and continues to wear one as she works as a lawyer or doctor – a commonplace sight in 21st century Britain.

In France, on the other hand, the wearing of the hijab in school has been challenged in the name of secularism. I remember a case around 10 years ago when a North London school with a large proportion of hijab-wearing female students was on an organised trip to a French partner school in the Paris suburbs. As they all assembled for an event, the French noticed the hijabs and booed them. Other female and male students, Muslim and non-Muslim, from the English school defended their classmates in the name of anti-racism.

How do we interpret this? On the one hand we see the high anti-racist consciousness of the London students. On the other hand they may not fully have appreciated that there is a strong French secular anti-racist and anti-communist tradition which interprets any religious sign, be it a cross, Star of David or hijab as a threat to this tradition, which dates from the French Revolution. Clermont-Tonnerre's famous dictum cites the Jews as the classic example: "To the Jews as a nation nothing, to them as individuals everything." This has led to challenges for the French Jewish community, particularly Jews who due to their background in Eastern Europe were not willing to become simply "Frenchmen (and women) of the Mosaic persuasion". But there is also a strongly French Jewish secular tradition which is not seen to the same extent in Britain.

Today, this French secular current of thought contributes towards the challenges for the second and third generation of French Muslims, whose parents and grandparents may have immigrated

from Algeria or Morocco and who adapted to drinking alcohol and eating pork as they settled in a different country, but who now find a Salafist imam encouraging them to adopt a much stricter Muslim religious practice in the name of authenticity. The alternative – to assimilate, and become "French people of the Islamic persuasion", may be equally unappealing.

When the agencies of the state intervene, another dimension is brought in. Last summer the headlines were full of the French police intervening to stop Muslim women wearing burkinis on the beach. It was not so widely reported that the garment had already been banned in some resorts in Morocco. It is difficult for the state to force an edict on minorities without being seen as racist. But Muslim women who wish to wear bikinis and not burkinis to the beach should also be supported without anyone, particularly a religious leader, telling them that they are any less Muslim as a result of their choice.

As we celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Bund – a secular Jewish socialist movement – some moments in Bundist history may throw new light on the challenges that Muslims face. One particular instance was work on the railway in Russia in the revolutionary period. The railway had been closed to Jews under the Tsarist autocracy, but in the period of revolutionary ferment it was opening up. However, Jews it meant would have to work on a Saturday, which traditional Jewish practice forbade. The Bund took the stance that it was more important to struggle for Jewish rights to work in an important industry such as the railways and, for this, they were attacked by conservative forces within the community as people who promoted "desecrating the Sabbath". Those Muslims who do not insist on women adopting a particular form of dress would be very much in line with this.

At the same time, the Bund promoted a Yiddish-based cultural Jewishness. It sometimes came under attack within the Jewish community and within synagogues, particularly in the period between February 1917, when it first became legal, and 1920 when its existence as an independent party in the Soviet Union became nonviable. Faced with an attack mounted from a pulpit, a Bundist leader said "the synagogue is not to be touched as a place of prayer. But the moment it is used to attack one political party it loses that untouchability". Perhaps something similar could be said by Muslims fighting aggressive political Islamism within their community.

The arguments are complex and subtle, and this piece has only begun to touch on them. We urgently need to understand the debate that is going on within British Islam and bring to bear the Jewish experience in a more nuanced way than the Jewish leader who suggested that the onus was on Muslims to call a national demonstration to separate themselves from the radical Islam that supports Daesh and Al Qaeda. (This leader would probably not take kindly to Muslims calling on him to organise a demonstration protesting against discrimination against Muslims in Israel/Palestine.)

One way of doing this is to make links with those fighting in the name of a secularism that sees a place for Muslims as Muslims alongside other minorities but is willing to question all elements of religious practice, particularly when they affect women.

SONGS OF LOVE AND HARDSHIP

Mordechai Gebirtig's songs and poetry span 50 of the most important and turbulent years of Jewish history in Poland. His most famous song, *Es Brent* (It is burning), was written in response to rising antisemitism and pogroms in Poland in 1936-37; it is one of the most frequently performed commemorative songs at Holocaust memorial events. A rallying call to the Jewish community to recognise the growing dangers, the song has a stirring melody and foretold the horrors that were to come.

"Mordechai Markus Bertig", was born in Krakow on 4th May 1877. During his lifetime, most of his songs and poetry were well known only within a small circle of friends and intellectuals; the songs that became known publicly spread rapidly among the 10 million Yiddish speaking Jews of Eastern Europe and the Americas, and became folksongs almost immediately – the author unknown. About 90 of his songs and poems survived the war years: lullabies; songs about love, nature, nostalgia; poverty, unemployment, workers' rights; and songs about Jewish struggle against

antisemitism. He captured in song and poetry the lives of his family, friends and the wider community.

Gebirtig lived most of his life in Kazimierz – the Jewish section of Krakow, named after Kasimir the Great, a Polish king who had allowed the persecuted Jews of central Europe to settle near the capital of Poland (then Krakow) at the time of the Black Death (1348). Gebirtig and his wife Bluma had four children, three of whom survived into adulthood (Shifra, Basia and Lola; Reyzel died aged 18 months). Of the three daughters, the eldest, Shifra, married Henokh Stamberger in 1935; for the wedding, Gebirtig composed one of his most famous songs (*Reyzele*) as a wedding present.

Gebirtig was the child of poor storekeepers, Yitzhak and Shifra Bertig; he had a brother, Leon, who was four years older. Gebirtig studied in a *kheder* from the age of five or six until he was 10, then in mandatory Public School. At 14, he began a three-year carpentry apprenticeship. His brother Leon married Hela Lindenbaum who was the sister of Mordechai's future wife, Bluma. Two brothers married two sisters, which was not uncommon at the time. After the marriage, Gebirtig worked in his brother Leon's second-hand furniture business for the next 30 years.

At an early age, Gebirtig taught himself to play the wooden flute, though he never learned to read or write music. For his songs, he memorised melodies he created on the flute. Fortunately, for posterity, he met Julius Hoffmann – composer, conductor and musicologist – who had moved to Krakow from Odessa in 1900, and Hoffman wrote down the melodies of Gebirtig's songs. Hoffman moved among the wealthier echelons of Jewish society in Krakow, at the other end of the economic spectrum from Gebirtig and his family.

In his mid-20s, Gebirtig joined a group of Yiddish actors, some professionals, others talented amateurs. As well as acting, he wrote songs for the theatre group; but these have not survived, though some of his songs have the feel of theatre songs. Avram Reisen, the famous Yiddish socialist poet and contemporary of Gebirtig, wrote theatre reviews in Krakow at the time. Commenting on the young actor, he wrote: "...The most outstanding of all players was Mordechai Gebirtig in the role of the blind Zachel... It is to be expected that with time he will become one of its most famous actors..." But Gebirtig suffered from a heart disease and his poor health, prevented him from continuing his stage career. When the First World War began, Gebirtig was enlisted into the army but was

This year marks the 140th anniversary of the birth of the Krakow-born Yiddish songwriter, poet and singer, Mordechai Gebirtig. **STEPHEN OGIN** describes a life of struggle and creativity during troubled times



A shrine to Gebirtig in the basement of the tenement where he lived. Recordings of his music plays here, night and day.

Photos: David Rosenberg

assigned to work in the military hospital in Krakow instead of being sent to the front because of his health problems.

He joined the Socialist Party early in his life, possibly during his apprenticeship, and then the Jewish Social Democratic Party (which later merged with the Bund). His first published poem, appeared in the Yiddish newspaper, the *Sozial Demokrat* in 1905, entitled *The General Strike*; the poem deals with the workers' right to strike. His best known song about workers' rights was *Arbetslozer Marsh* (March of the Unemployed). The Bund was an integral part of a movement promoting Yiddish language and culture within a framework of ideas about national-cultural autonomy for the Jews of Eastern Europe. Other political parties sharing this agenda were Shimon Dubnov's *Folkspartei*, and Left Poale Zion.

In 1918, Mordechai Gebirtig met and became lifelong friends with one of the local leaders of Poale Zion – Nechamia Zucker who organised the Amateur Performing Circle, a laboratory for poets, musicians, playwrights, Yiddishists and Hebraists. Gebirtig produced a new song or poem for each weekly meeting of the Circle. Some of these songs found their way into the wider world, although the author of these "anonymous" folksongs was unknown. In 1920, the famous American Yiddish actors Molly Picon and Jakob Kalisch visited Krakow (many years later, Molly Picon played Yente the Matchmaker in the film *Fiddler on the Roof*). Nechamia Zucker wrote in his memoirs, "...[They] came to our Sabbath gathering. Enchanted by Gebirtig's virtuoso performance, Molly Picon spontaneously embraced and kissed the very surprised Gebirtig. [The actors] offered to buy the exclusive rights to the ... songs

Hulyet, Hulyet, Kinderlekh (Frolic, frolic, children) and *Kinder Yorn* (Childhood years) at \$25 each. This was the first time Gebirtig earned money as a songwriter ... He invested some of the \$50 in a new publishing house founded by a member of the Circle, and this was how his first book of poems/songs was published: *Folks shtimmelekh* (Voices of the People).

To raise money to publish Gebirtig's second book, *Mayne Lider* (My songs), published in 1936, the Hoffman family used their connections with wealthy Jewish families to organise what was, in

effect, a benefit evening. Gebirtig gave a solo performance of some of his songs, starting with his most searing indictment of poverty (*Der zinger fun noyt* – the singer of hardship). Julius Hoffman was, unsurprisingly, not entirely pleased with Gebirtig's choice of first song for that evening; nonetheless, the wealthy audience raised the money and the book was published.

Gebirtig continued to write poems and songs up to the end of his life in the Krakow ghetto. In late May 1942, anticipating that the end was coming for him and his family, Gebirtig copied all of his songs into several children's copy books which he put into



a metal box, painted black. Julia and Hanka, the daughters of Julius Hoffman, hid the box in a coal cellar where they were living, outside the Nazi-created ghetto. Gebirtig was shot dead on 4th June while being marched towards freight wagons destined for Belzec death camp. After the war, the manuscripts were taken to Israel and handed to Abba Kovner, the poet and partisan leader of the United Partisan Organisation near Vilna. Kovner immediately understood their importance. The manuscripts are now in a Kibbutz archive in Israel, and also in the Yiddish Institute, YIVO, in New York.

TO RAISE MONEY TO PUBLISH GEBIRTIG'S SECOND BOOK, MAYNE LIDER (MY SONGS), PUBLISHED IN 1936, THE HOFFMAN FAMILY USED THEIR CONNECTIONS WITH WEALTHY JEWISH FAMILIES TO ORGANISE WHAT WAS, IN EFFECT, A BENEFIT EVENING. GEBIRTIG GAVE A SOLO PERFORMANCE OF SOME OF HIS SONGS, STARTING WITH HIS MOST SEARING INDICTMENT OF POVERTY (DER ZINGER FUN NOYT – THE SINGER OF HARDSHIP).

Find out more

Mordechai Gebirtig, his poetic and musical legacy, Gertrude Schneider (ed), Praeger, USA.

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs; volume five – The Mordechai Gebirtig Volume, Sinai Leichter, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Mordechai Gebirtig – Bard z Kazimierz, (Polish), Natan Gross.

A passion for cinema and politics

Sir Gerald Kaufman 1930-2017

Sir Gerald Kaufman, Father of the House of Commons, died in February this year, aged 86. He was born in Leeds, Yorkshire, in 1930, the youngest of seven children of orthodox Jewish immigrants from Plonch (Polaniec) and Staszow, Poland, in the Russian Empire.

His father was an active trade union member in the tailoring trade and his mother had to leave Poland because she read subversive literature, so it is hardly surprising that Gerald took an interest in politics. After working for the Fabian Society, he followed journalism with scriptwriting for the BBC's satirical programme, *That Was The Week That Was*, became an aide to Prime Minister Harold Wilson, and finally entered Parliament representing the constituency of Ardwick (later Gorton) in Manchester for 47 years until his death.

Kaufman never served at Cabinet level. He was a junior Minister in Wilson's 1970s Labour government and held several senior Shadow positions under Foot and Kinnock in the 1980s and '90s. He is remembered for his book *How to be a Minister* – required reading for aspiring MPs. His outspoken views were not always consistent, and they received mixed reactions. Although he called himself a leftwinger, he was on the right of the party, loyally supporting Tony Blair. He famously described Michael Foot's radical manifesto as the longest suicide note in history.

Initially an ardent supporter of Israel and proud of his parents' blue and white JNF box, he attacked the Israeli government's policies, met with Yasser Arafat, and supported the Palestinian cause. In 2009 he was well received as a speaker at the Jewish Socialists' Group's public meeting, "After the war on Gaza", where he shared a platform with leading Palestinian academic and advocate Karma Nabulsi. These outspoken views attracted much criticism, particularly from the Jewish community, and he received a considerable amount of hate mail. Kaufman dealt with this swiftly by filing them in his waste paper basket (along with his weekly complimentary copy of the *Jewish Chronicle*).

Outside politics, Kaufman's greatest passion was the cinema, particularly Hollywood musicals. His love for films began when his mother took him to see Disney's *The Three Little Pigs*, and later he enjoyed *Yidl Mitn Fidl*, which he regarded as a masterpiece. Kaufman watched thousands of films, his favourite was *Singin' in the Rain*, which he claimed to have watched in every cinema in Leeds; and he wrote *Meet Me in St Louis* about the film of the same title. He described his infatuation with films in his autobiography *My Life In The Silver Screen*.

He was also an avid reader. Aged three, he was given a book by a shopkeeper who was impressed by his ability to read; that was possibly the origins of



Gerald Kaufman made several visits to activists in Israel and Palestine.

what later became a library of several thousand books. Prior to studying at Oxford University, he had won a scholarship to fee-paying Leeds Grammar School, an achievement for a Jewish working class lad. He was unhappy there, and made himself particularly unpopular when he asked for a copy of *Das Kapital* for a school prize. He enjoyed thrillers and regarded Raymond Chandler as "the King".

Kaufman is remembered for his iconic outfits, not caring what people thought of his brightly coloured striped clothes, and caring even less whether they matched. This unusual taste was closely followed by his love of ice cream and chocolate. He also had a passion for travel. He loved his family and, despite his busy diary, always found time to support family events. Although not a particularly religious person, he spoke fondly of the pleasure of being with his six siblings and their families, sat around the Seder table. He marked significant birthdays with family parties at his Manchester home.

Kaufman was not the easiest person to get on with. Although tributes following his death mentioned his kindness and concern for those marginalised by society, they also referred to his irascible and waspish manner. He was not one for small talk, and didn't enjoy talking politics with his family and friends, but discussing movies and television dramas guaranteed his enthusiasm. He had a remarkable memory for detail, and even shortly before his death he would put visitors right if they dared to confuse Irving Berlin with Cole Porter.

It is perhaps appropriate to leave the last word to Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn. When paying tribute in the Commons, Corbyn said that, after Kaufman's funeral he asked family members how they would remember him. They told him that Gerald Kaufman was "an awesome uncle".

Gerald Kaufman leaves two nieces and four nephews – and I am proud to be one of them.

Stuart Goodman

KAUFMAN IS REMEMBERED FOR HIS ICONIC OUTFITS, NOT CARING WHAT PEOPLE THOUGHT OF HIS BRIGHTLY COLOURED STRIPED CLOTHES, AND CARING EVEN LESS WHETHER THEY MATCHED. THIS UNUSUAL TASTE WAS CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY HIS LOVE OF ICE CREAM AND CHOCOLATE.

The courage to defend the truth

THE DIS-APPEARANCE OF EMILE ZOLA: LOVE, LITERATURE AND THE DREYFUS CASE

by Michael Rosen
Faber and Faber,
£16.99

The food continues to be revolting, their vegetables are always cooked without salt, and they wash their meat after they have cooked it. I am sick of it. I would give you a hundred francs for a steak cooked by Mathilde.

Emile Zola

The Disappearance of Emile Zola is that rare bird of a book that is an archeology of a largely unknown past, painstakingly researched, where every page turns its face to the present.

In writing this fabulous book, Michael Rosen has engaged in a labour of passion and let two sides of his brain go at once; the meticulous explorer of nerdy detail and titbits of Zola's life at the end of the 19th century in what was a semi-self-imposed exile in London and southern England, and the novelist who weaves together the complex and fascinating interactions between Zola and his unchosen hosts.

From a position of perhaps being the dominant man of letters in France, celebrated and famous in his home of Paris and in his trips to London, Zola had become a titan of French literature. *Germinal*, the seminal documentation of labour and resistance, had taken the literary community by storm. Several years before his exile to London, Zola had already been wined, dined and celebrated at the high literary tables of London, in lavish balls and honorific events at Crystal Palace.

The book charts the course of Zola's strange exile, from his secret arrival in London with no bags, and supposedly with francs sewn into his jacket, an arrival which sees a celebrated giant of letters with poor spoken English reduced to attempting to purchase socks "by pantomime". It is a task which, as Rosen remarks, "does not seem though to have (enabled) Zola to equip himself with a pair of underpants."

The publication of *J'Accuse*, his passionate public defence of one Captain Alfred Dreyfus, made Zola a hunted man. At perhaps the height of his literary fame, financially comfortable, celebrated, and a symbol of French literary progress, Zola had chosen to speak – and to not remain silent – in defence of a man he had not even met.

The literary circle and the fashionable milieus in which he mixed had, almost en masse, become engrossed in a national scandal, at the heart of which was a state perpetrated image of the traitorous Jewish captain who had sold France's soul and become the target of blame for the military defeat of France. At that moment, one of France's

most famous writers had chosen to speak up for the relatively minor French military official against whom, falsely, the entire weight of the French state and military hierarchy had been deployed.

Zola's publication, *J'Accuse*, is a passionate cry, published by a man at the height of his fame, who need not have spoken out. It was not simply of a rejection of the antisemitism, nor of the manner in which the fraudulently corrupt Dreyfus case was used; it was also a defence of Zola's understanding of what the French state should be, what France could and should mean. To tell the truth is not to be a traitor. Zola's heart was ripped in two as he grappled with a desire to face a court and demand justice from a state he then believed in, and a growing knowledge that that state itself would never give him justice. On a par with this is the manner in which so very many of the French progressives and radicals were able to rhetorically fall in behind the persecution of Dreyfus with the inferred and explicit "otherness" of the Jew Dreyfus, an easy consensus of the essential non-Frenchness of the Jew in France, often given a left glaze by references both to money and treason.

This can seem a mere historical exercise, until one looks up to see the latest supposedly left meme on the screen repeating the Rothschild global conspiracy stories. In this regard we are both far from Zola's intervention in the Dreyfus case, and yet, perhaps not.

It is woven into this story, that the relevance of Rosen's book shines through the ages, from the dust and dirt of an exile in a railway station in the late 1890s to the present day. As I have been rereading Rosen's book, on my computer I have the words of Ahmet Sik, the editor of the Turkish paper *Cumhuriyet*, jailed and awaiting trial in a profound breach of justice by a state that has bent and twisted words in the hope of bending and twisting the man.

I will continue to respect truth more than myself and continue to refuse being one of the conformists that deny the truth. For this, it is obvious that a price must be paid. But do not think that this scares us. Neither I nor the "journalists on the outside" that I am proud to be friends with, are afraid of you whomever you might be. Because we know that what scares the tyrants most is courage. And the tyrants should know that no cruelty can prevent the progress of history. Down with tyranny, long live freedom.

24th July 2017, Istanbul.

In these words, Zola's spirit lives on. The courage to speak truth to power lives on. The true beauty of this book is not simply to render an arcane piece of history about Zola in London passionately human, but to do so in a manner that shouts down the ages and still echoes today in the streets of London and the south that Zola himself frequented.

Phil Buyum Jackson

Shared history of a disparate community

There's nowhere called Yiddishland, except it is everywhere. It's a state of mind. You don't have to be fluent in Yiddish, you don't have to be Jewish (though both of these make life easier). And you don't all have to be in the same state of mind as the other inhabitants, other than to value the diaspora and have an interest in the shared history of a disparate community of Yiddish speakers.

Not every part of Yiddishland in the past was a happy place, Hersch Mendel, quoted in this book, remarked that he "cannot remember one single joyful hour" at kheder (religious education classes). He became a revolutionary. This was one of the periods, when Jews lived in abject poverty. Yaakov Greenstein recalls "a neighbour's farm where there were eight children at home. The father went from village to village with a colleague, collecting scrap metal. They had a cart but no horse to pull it; one of them took the front, the other pushed, and they went along the roads, in this way, among the goyim, from dawn to night." For some, the answer lay in socialism which could lead to family problems such as disapproval from religious parents, annoyed because the Bund (the main Jewish socialist organisation) published its daily newspaper on *Shabbos*, the Sabbath.

The revolutionary Yiddishland that people like Mendel and Greenstein joined was that of the Bund, of Poale Zion (the socialist-Zionist group) and even the Communist Party, where they had their own battles to survive and hold on to their Jewish culture. This is the milieu that the authors cover, the world not of industrialists or prominent figures but "the tailors, shoemakers, furriers, carpenters, tinsmiths and other Yiddish craftsmen ...", internationalists who were "exploited in the wretched workshops of Warsaw, Bialystok and Vilnius."

Revolutionary Yiddishland was first published in France in 1983, when there was a critical mass of people still alive from that period to interview. The new English-language edition keeps their memory alive, as the best parts of the book are the interviews, quotes and reminiscences of those who were the history that younger people can only experience secondhand. We read of people like Pierre Sherf, wounded while taking part in the Spanish Civil War, a volunteer in the French army against the Nazis, and then active in the underground Resistance with other Romanian immigrants in France. People like Hanna Levy-Haas from Sarajevo, another member of the Resistance, this time to the Italian occupation of Montenegro. As an elder, living in Israel, she became active in the women's movement and against the war in Lebanon.

Those who were Communists had the greatest problems over the Molotov/Ribbentrop pact. Unease would be an understatement, and in France the Yiddish left paper *Naie Presse* could barely hold the Party-line. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, Adam Rayski said, "And so, for us to become ourselves again – that is Jews, Frenchmen, anti-

fascists – we needed Hitler's aggression." But it was not over yet with activists like Artur London arrested as part of the antisemitic Slansky round-up in Czechoslovakia. The fact that he survived being in Mauthausen concentration camp helping to prove his culpability. This was the revolution betrayed.

Brossat and Klingberg return to the early debates within the Jewish socialist world, including the warning of the Bund leader Henryk Erlich against the likely Bolshevik dictatorship. Erlich was later murdered by Stalin's men. Organisations split over their attitude to the Russian Revolution, leading to now long-forgotten groups like the Faraynikte and the Kombund, the latter being the group of Bundists who went over to the Communists after the Revolution, as did many members of Poale Zion. Odd to think that the British descendent organisation of Poale Zion in this country is the right-wing Jewish Labour Movement.

Within Russia, policy on Jews changed constantly. Yiddish schools flourished, while Yevseksia (the Jewish section of the Communist Party) sought Jewish agricultural colonisation in the Crimea, more popular than the Birobidzhan Yiddish "homeland", and more successful economically. That Birobidzhan was designated a republic in 1936 did not stop the Jewish leadership there being decimated in the Great Purges of 1937 and '38. Editors, bureaucrats, committed Communists were wiped out. Anybody with a Bundist or Poale Zion history was at particular risk. Colonisation projects were closed, newspapers were suppressed, and Yiddish was replaced in most schools by Russian. Brossat and Klingberg write, "by the end of the 1930s the entire 'national' and 'democratic' gains of the Jewish population had been reduced to nothing."

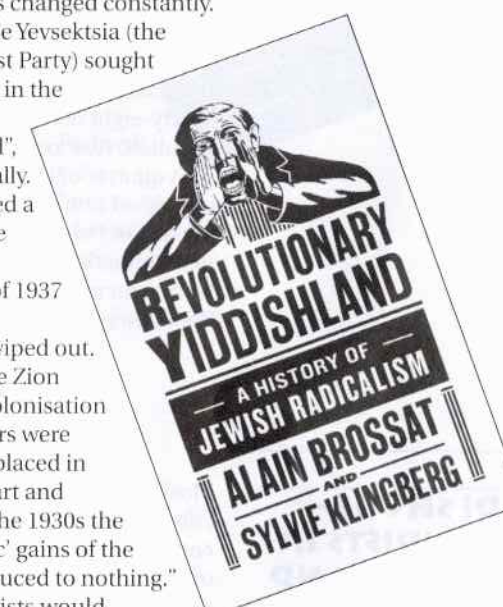
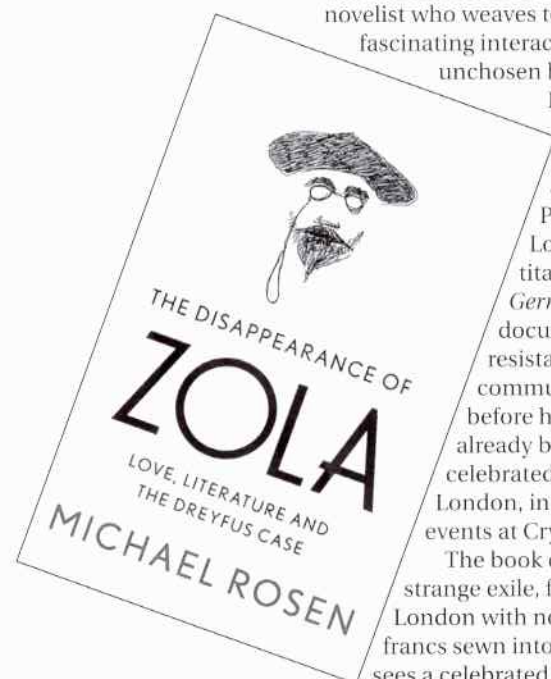
Committed Jewish communists would continue to be arrested, post-war, with the closure of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Russia. The final spasms being the antisemitic Gomulka purges in Poland in 1968 and '69, when the "anti-party element" David Szarfhar, expelled from the CP, said that "five minutes of a certain speech by Gomulka had done more for that [the desire to emigrate to Israel] than decades of Zionist propaganda."

Ironically, Israel became the home for many of these revolutionaries, including Sylvie Klingberg's own father, Marcus Klingberg, who, despite everything, spied for the Soviet Union. He was finally arrested in 1983 and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Sylvie Klingberg became an activist in the Israeli socialist group Matzpen which was an anti-Soviet breakaway from the Israeli Communist Party. They must have had some interesting family discussions!

Ross Bradshaw

REVOLUTIONARY YIDDISHLAND – A HISTORY OF JEWISH RADICALISM

by Alain Brossat and Sylvie Klingberg
Verso, £16.99



Inspiring and heartbreaking

TWENTY YEARS WITH THE JEWISH LABOR BUND: A MEMOIR OF INTER-WAR POLAND

Bernard Goldstein, translated from Yiddish and edited by Marvin S Zuckerman
Purdue University Press, 2016

In 1930s Warsaw, Bernard Goldstein usually carried a revolver. He was not a policeman, soldier or gangster – but a trade union organiser of the Bund, a Yiddish-speaking political party and movement that fought for socialism, equal rights for all minorities, and a secure Jewish future in Poland. Forced to operate illegally between 1920 and 1922, they functioned in precarious semi-legality until World War II. Police smashed up the Bund's premises in Warsaw's Praga district in the early 1920s, and viciously beat their members during May Day actions. The authorities arbitrarily banned meetings, and at moments of high political tension the government tried to prevent the Bund's daily newspaper being published. But the Bund also experienced beatings, window smashing, and the use of knives and guns against their members, from political rivals fighting a turf war.

Historians usually cast Zionists as the Bund's main ideological opponents. Zionists argued that Jews could only achieve equal rights in their own national state. They recruited and trained growing numbers of young Jews for emigration to Palestine. But although Zionists had support within the Jewish bourgeoisie, and even had MPs, they were largely irrelevant to Jewish working class struggles in interwar Poland. Goldstein doesn't mention Zionists until page 86 when he describes a unification convention of Jewish trade unions. Thirty-eight delegates were present, 28 of them Bundists. Just four represented Labour Zionists.

A quarter of all workers in 1930s Poland organised in trade unions were Jewish (Jews made up 10% of Poland's interwar population). Economic discrimination barred them from working in Government-controlled enterprises. They eked out their living as metal, leather, textile and

slaughterhouse workers. As meat porters, tailors shoemakers and bakers. As transport delivery workers, clerks and housemaids. The Bund made considerable efforts to recruit female workers, who were excluded from many trades and less likely to be literate, into its *Yidishe Arbeter Froyen* (Jewish Women Workers) organisation.

The Bund's bloodiest and most significant daily battles within the working class, were not against Zionists, but against another smaller determined group, with a high proportion of Jewish members, and no qualms about hiring underworld enforcers in sectarian battles over who would represent and lead workers' struggles: the Polish Communist Party (KPP). Goldstein's graphic descriptions of the actions of KPP members and hired thugs, especially during the period when Stalin characterised the party's left opponents as "social fascists", make your hair stand on end. In Warsaw, the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) both suffered from the KPP's political sectarianism and thuggery.

In the highly charged and violent political atmosphere in Poland, after Pilsudski's coup (supported by some elements of the Left), the Bund made ad hoc self-defence arrangements to protect large public events such as rallies and May Day marches. Many ordinary Polish Jews hoped that Pilsudski would rein in the further right forces espousing open antisemitism such as the National Democrats (Endeks) and the *Narowtses* (their violent street-fighting movement based among students). But through the 1930s the physical threat to Jews, socialists and trade unionists grew in intensity. With the simultaneous eruption of violent turf wars with the KPP, the Bund decided to create a permanent militia.

Goldstein, a trusted and experienced militant, was appointed to head this militia. Born in 1889, in Siedlce, eastern Poland, he cut his teeth in the bloody struggles against Tsarist rule. At 16 years of age he was wounded by a policeman's sabre while being arrested at an illegal forest gathering of revolutionaries. Before the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Poland's War of Independence in 1919, he had already endured several periods of imprisonment and exile for trade union and political activities.

As a union organiser he built workers' confidence and militancy and encouraged them to join the Bund too, so they could link their economic struggles with a socialist political strategy. Goldstein had longstanding links with non-Jewish PPS militants and self-defence workers. When antisemitic groups were trying to divide Polish workers on ethnic/religious lines, a joint response by Jewish and non-Jewish workers had enormous strategic as well as practical value. He describes occasions when PPS fighters melted into crowds being whipped up into an antisemitic frenzy. The antisemites would suddenly find themselves attacked, not only by the Bundist militia, but simultaneously from people ostensibly standing within their ranks.

But the book is far from a glorification of male-dominated physical battles. Its short chapters – a series of vignettes – show Bernard Goldstein's many sides and reveal him as a very enlightened person and ahead of his time in taking strong and courageous stands for women's rights and children's rights in both personal and political contexts. Some of the stories he tells of his work supporting troubled individuals are truly inspiring, others heartbreaking.

In threatening circumstances the Bund and PPS strengthened their unity in action, recorded political victories, and looked with hope to the future, a hope embodied for Goldstein by the

Bund's rapidly growing youth movement, *Tsukunft* (Future), and its organisation for 10-15 year-olds, *SKIF* (Socialist Children's Union). Towards the end of the book, Goldstein describes taking a visiting Bund supporter from America, Mikhel Merlin, to a SKIF summer camp in July 1939.

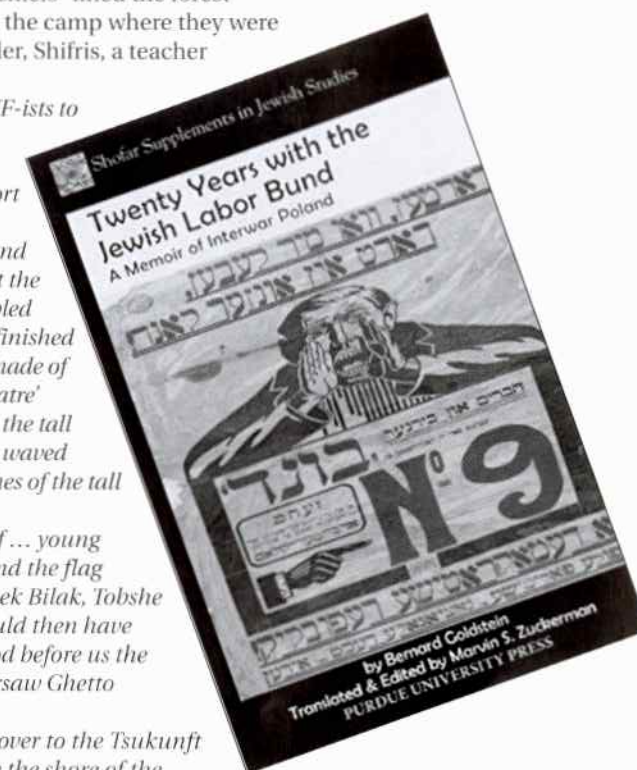
"SKIF-ists with little red flags and in ... blue shirts and blouses with red kerchiefs" lined the forest road as they approached the camp where they were greeted by the camp leader, Shifris, a teacher from Grodno.

Shifris mustered the SKIF-ists to attention around the camp flag. The SKIF hymn was sung and short speeches began... He [Merlin] looked all around ... at the canvas tents, at the tables and benches cobbled together from plain, unfinished boards, at the 'kitchen' made of stones, at the 'amphitheatre' around the campfire, at the tall mast of the red flag that waved among the green branches of the tall pine trees...

In the two columns of ... young SKIF-ists, arrayed around the flag stood: Yurek Blones, Janek Bilak, Tobshe Davidovitch ... who could then have imagined that here stood before us the future heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising!

From there we drove over to the Tsukunft camp, located ... beside the shore of the Vistula... At dusk we drove home. None of us imagined that we had just seen for the last time the flower of our Jewish youth in Poland in its full loveliness and radiance.

David Rosenberg



Yiddish activists

Most studies on the Bund (the General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia) have concentrated on its genesis in the Russian Empire or its growing influence in interwar Poland. The exception to this is David Slucki's study on the Bund after 1945. He looked in detail at the Bund in Poland (up to 1949), Australia, France and Israel. Now Tamara Gleason Freidberg complements this with a study on the Bund in Mexico.

Many Bundists left Poland in the 1920s and '30s, chiefly for economic reasons, but also to escape antisemitic persecution. Indeed, the Bund even co-operated in an emigration bureau in Poland. By that time, immigration restrictions meant that there was little possibility of people emigrating to America or the UK. But they were able to go to Western Europe (France and Belgium), to Australia, and to Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico).

In the case of Mexico, there were few immigration restrictions until 1934. Initially some Jews went there because they had aimed to go to the United States but ended up staying in Mexico City. They quickly set up a Yiddish-speaking community. Most were of working class origin,

although in Mexico many of them became traders. There, as in many other countries where there was mass immigration from Poland, the Yiddish-speaking groups active on the Left organised politically; the main currents were Left Poale Zion, the Bund and the Jewish Communists.

Ironically for a movement that has as one of its key principles *doykayt* (hereness), initially the Bund did not see itself as an international organisation. Bund branches abroad saw their job as raising money for Bundist secular schools in Poland. The justification was that it was only in Poland, where there was a mass Jewish working class, that the conditions existed to struggle for national cultural autonomy according to the Bund's vision.

However this changed initially during the war. A Yiddish language journal, *Forois*, made its first appearance in 1940 and continued until 1967. This was initially aimed at the tasks of the war: helping refugees and publicising the plight of the Jews in the ghettos in Poland. The Bundists in Mexico had close links with the Bund in Poland and later in the United States. Thus they were among the first to know of what was happening in the ghettos and

in Latin America

extermination camps of occupied Poland. Dispatches that Szmul Zygielbojm sent to the United States were passed on to Mexico. There, in meetings with trade unions and the Left, they tried to publicise his call for action and the circumstances of his suicide. They also organised meetings to protest against the deaths of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in captivity in the Soviet Union. On that occasion, the meeting was disrupted by pro-Soviet attendees, who considered this to be an anti-Soviet provocation.

After the Holocaust, when the Bund redefined itself as an international organisation, the Mexican branch played a full part in the New York-based international co-ordinating committee and executive.

As secular Jews, Gleason Freidberg says, Yiddish was very important to the Bundists in Mexico, and they saw it as essential to their Jewish identity. They collaborated with others Jews in setting up a Jewish *Kehila* – an official community with institutional structures. There was some irony in this, says Freidberg, because the Bund in Poland had, at first, had an ambiguous relationship to the *Kehila* elections there, seeing them as dominated by the religious and traditional elements. But in Mexico

they believed that the organisation of the *Kehila* was crucial to the perpetuation of secular, Yiddish-based culture.

Freidberg says that they worked only in Spanish at the time of the *Kehila* elections; they produced a leaflet in Spanish aimed at the younger generation, explaining why they should vote for their list. They do not appear to have been able to have set up a youth organisation, like SKIF in Melbourne or CLEJ in Paris, although they did co-operate in running Yiddish language schools. I would like to have learnt a bit more about whether the organisation itself attempted to operate in Spanish or whether there was any allied Jewish socialist organisation carrying on the Bundist tradition with a younger generation.

Di Shvute, the title of the book, is taken from the anthem of the Bund. Gleason Freidberg says it was sung before the war to remind the Jews of their old home, Poland. After the war it was sung at important events, such as meetings and commemorations, and increasingly at funerals. It became ironic to hear rich factory owners singing *Briders un shvester fun arbet un noyt...* (Brothers and sisters of work and poverty...). Mike Heiser