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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

APARTHEID AT HOME FAR RIGHT ALLIANCES ABROAD



IS THIS THE LOGIC OF ISRAELI NATIONALISM?

■ Conjuring Iraq ■ Zygielbojm 75 ■ RAR revisited

■ Culture and resistance ■ Jewish brigadistas ■ Israelis at Auschwitz

EDITORIAL

This summer has seen some remarkable protests on the streets of Israeli cities against Israel's new Jewish Nation State Law which was passing through the Knesset. Some of these demonstrations have been led by dissident Israeli Jews, others by Israel's Palestinian minority, who form 21% of its population; some by the Druze, an Arab ethno-religious group in the north of Israel who serve in Israel's army and police force and have been regarded as a minority who are politically very loyal to the state. Several of the large protests have seen Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arab citizens marching together chanting slogans and holding placards denouncing the law as an "apartheid law" and a "fascist law".

This new piece of legislation has been elevated to the status of one of Israel's Basic Laws, which makes it much harder for the next government to repeal, should it wish to. Its passage through parliament was overseen by Prime Minister Netanyahu, but its proposer belongs to an even further right party, the secular ultra-nationalists of Yisrael Beiteinu. This party is especially popular among Russian immigrants. Its leaders revere the far right Zionist leader of the 1920s and '30s, Jabotinsky, an admirer of Benito Mussolini. Mussolini reciprocated, warmly endorsing "your fascist, Jabotinsky", as the Jew who most understood what Zionism needed to do in order to succeed.

The longstanding racist and increasingly authoritarian tendencies in Israeli society impact daily on indigenous Palestinians, African refugees, non-Ashkenazi Jews, and also on human rights organisations. This law enshrines Israel as an apartheid system where the "right to exercise national self-determination is unique to the Jewish people". Palestinian and other non-Jewish citizens are excluded from this right. It shamefully downgrades Arabic, until now an official language in Israel, spoken and used by Palestinians (and also by Jews from the region). It declares Jerusalem, "complete and united", the capital of Israel, denying any sense that it is a shared city. It describes "Jewish settlement" (ie illegal land-grabbing) as a "national value" that will be encouraged and consolidated.

Avi Dichter, a sponsor of this law and Chair of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, ended the debate on the law with a chilling threat directed towards Palestinian Knesset members: "We were here before you, and we will be here after you."

As Jewish socialists here in Britain, we deplore the racism expressed in the new law and by supporters of it, and we will challenge bodies within the Jewish community who declare their support for Israel but have nothing critical to say about it.

It was surely no coincidence that the new law was passed during a state visit to Israel by Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban, whose own government is one among several

very right wing governments in central and eastern Europe promoting Islamophobia, antisemitism and anti-Roma sentiment in tandem, and enjoying very good relations with Netanyahu. Orban's Fidesz Party has tacked increasingly to the right, outflanking Jobbik, which already had a reputation for antisemitism and anti-Roma racism. Orban was heavily criticised by Hungarian Jews earlier this year when he ran an explicitly antisemitic campaign against George Soros in the run-up to elections, which harked back to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. He said of Soros and his allies: "We are fighting an enemy that is different from us. Not open, but hiding; not straightforward but crafty; not honest but base; not national but international; does not believe in working but speculates with money; does not have its own homeland but feels it owns the whole world."

Election billboards in Hungary which showed unflattering portraits of Soros, said: "Don't let Soros have the last laugh." Many of them were graffitied with phrases such as "stinking Jew".

In Netanyahu's narrowing search for friends in the world, he has been building closer and closer relations with populist right wing governments including those of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Austria.

The white supremacist Steve Bannon is pursuing the same friends. Netanyahu casually dismisses Bannon's antisemitic statements, regarding his strong support for Israel as paramount. Bannon has, for example, declared that did not want his daughter to go to a school attended by Jewish children. He is busy establishing a centre in Belgium to provide support at many different levels to far-right forces in Europe, including in the UK. With Bannon's support, our own far right has seen a dramatic rise in its fortunes. He bankrolled their huge demonstrations held in London in June and July this year, the first attracting 15,000 people and featuring a screened speech to the crowd by Bannon himself.

While anti-racist Jews were among the counter-demonstrators, Zionist supporters of Netanyahu freely mixed with their friends in the English Defence League and Britain First. One *kippah*-wearing speaker at the July demonstration, an Australian Jew and former IDF soldier, told the cheering crowd "I am the world's proudest Jewish Nazi ... Tommy [Robinson] is my friend, Tommy is my leader."

Our campaigns against the far right menace here and elsewhere in Europe, and our solidarity with those taking to the streets of Tel Aviv, stem from the same principles and values. Those principles are summed up best by the Bundist Emanuel Scherer, who called for: "Rights and justice for Jews everywhere without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere."

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Judith Cravitz, Mike Heiser and David Rosenberg..
With thanks to Sue Hughes for additional editing and proofreading.

Cover image: Demonstrators protest against the new Nation State Law.

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News

Israeli objector arrested at home

Plainclothes military police officers arrived at 19-year-old Israeli conscientious objector, Hillel Grami's home on 29th July, six days after he failed to report at the army's induction centre. He was arrested at home and is now in prison. Grami released a statement:

"Recently, in the context of the wave of unarmed Palestinian demonstrations at the Gaza border fence, I took the time to read statements by Ahmed Abu Ratima, one of the organizers, and I was deeply impressed to discover people who endorse unarmed alternatives for dealing with the situation... I believe in civil disobedience – the use of unarmed resistance in order to emphasize the immorality of the regime. I cannot enlist, because from a very young age I was educated to believe that all humans are equal. I do not believe in some common denominator which all Jews share and which sets them apart from Arabs. I do not believe that I should be treated differently from a child born in Gaza or in Jenin, and I do not believe that the sorrows or the

happiness of any of us are more important than those of anyone else...

"... The Israeli regime is elected by eight million citizens, but ... controls thirteen million lives. The most critical decisions concerning the lives of the residents of the West Bank and Gaza are made by ... Israel's government. That government decides which residents of Gaza could enter or depart ... what they could import or export, when they have electricity, where they could fish, and where they may move freely within the Gaza Strip area. The government of the State of Israel decides where the residents of the West Bank could travel, which lands they could cultivate...

"... I reached the decision to make my refusal to enlist public. That is because I believe that civil disobedience could affect a societal change by appealing to the sense of justice of those more privileged, who reside between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Civil disobedience is an appropriate mode of resistance when a regime has lost its legitimacy."

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The defence of language and culture is an integral part of our political struggle, argues Lane Silberstein

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No Sacks please – we're socialists!

The former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks waded into the row over labour and allegations of antisemitism, after the *Daily Mail* released a doctored video from 2013 of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn criticising the behaviour of certain Zionists who had unfairly berated the Palestinian ambassador to the UK. Rabbi Sacks deliberately misread the comments as applying to all Jews and condemned them in a *New Statesman* interview as the most offensive statement made by a senior British politician since Enoch Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech. He described Corbyn's remarks as "divisive and hateful".

Rabbi Sacks ought to be careful about bandying such terms around given his own record when he was Chief Rabbi, when he refused to attend the funeral of a leading Reform rabbi and Auschwitz survivor, Hugo Gryn. Rabbi Sacks described Reform Judaism as a "false grouping" of "those who destroy the faith". One of his first initiatives as Chief Rabbi was a "Jewish Unity Walkabout" in Hyde Park, from which he banned the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline.

Since he retired from the post his own record with regard to stirring "hate and division" has not improved. In 2017 *Ha'aretz* condemned Rabbi Sacks for encouraging Jews in Britain to come to Jerusalem with him for the annual March of the Flags and dance "with our brave IDF soldiers" in the settler enclave inside Hebron. *Ha'aretz's* correspondent Bradley Burston describes the march as "an annual, gender-segregated extreme-right, pro-occupation religious carnival of hatred, marking the anniversary of Israel's capture of Jerusalem by humiliating the city's Palestinian Muslims", in which marchers have ... chanted "Death to Arabs".

When Rabbi Sacks is not marching in East Jerusalem he likes to settle down with a book. One of his favourite books of 2017 was *The Strange Death of Europe*, by the ultra-Conservative Douglas Murray, who shows great understanding for... Enoch Powell. Sacks wrote of the book: "Murray weaves a tale of uncontrolled immigration, failed multiculturalism, systemic self-doubt, cultural suicide and disingenuous political leadership. Accurate, insightful and devastating."

See Roger McKenzie's article on Enoch Powell, p7.

Uri Avnery, 1923-2018

A tribute

The editors of *Jewish Socialist* are sad to hear of the death in Israel of the prolific journalist and fighter for peace with justice, Uri Avnery, at the age of 94. A fearless defender of free speech on Israel, Palestine and Zionism, he used his regular weekly column for *Gush Shalom*, the radical Israeli peace camp, to speak truth to power. His razor-edged columns though, were frequently shot through with sardonic humour.

Uri came to Palestine as a child in 1933 when his family fled from Nazi Germany. He did not just talk about peace: he met with leading figures in the PLO, including Yasser Arafat, at a time when governments and mainstream press outlets in Israel, Britain and the USA all cast Arafat as simply a terrorist who led a terrorist organisation.

In the late 1940s Avnery had been an activist in Irgun, the same right-wing Israeli nationalist and terrorist body as Menachem Begin. But Avnery decisively broke from their politics by the mid-1950s and never looked back.

The Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) had the pleasure of working with Avnery in person in 1983 in the aftermath of the Lebanon War. That year, for the first time in Britain, a high-ranking PLO official shared a public platform with an Israeli peace activist. Issam Sartawi, a cardiologist, who had

taken part in guerrilla warfare in the 1960s, spoke with Uri Avnery.

The London meeting, attended by around 300 people, took place at County Hall, which housed the Greater London Council. Several JSG members were among the dozen or so organisers of this initiative. On the night before the public meeting there was a discussion about who should speak first. Sartawi said Avnery should, because, "You were a terrorist before I was a terrorist." Uri spoke first.

In his speech Avnery suggested that the Israeli Government should consider talking peace with Holland, because, he argued, the Dutch were very nice people. But then he added that Israel was not at war with the Dutch and it would be so much better to try to talk peace with those with whom Israel was in conflict – the Palestinians. He advocated direct talks between the Israeli Government and the PLO.

We send our condolences to his family and friends, and especially to our comrades in Gush Shalom who will continue the work to which he contributed so much.

www.gush-shalom.org



Fighting for Free speech in Britain

While Israel was losing one of its greatest free speech advocates, the attack on free speech within the Labour Party in Britain, over the circumstances of Israel's birth and its current policies, reached a new zenith this summer. Its leader Jeremy Corbyn was bitterly attacked by all sections of the British establishment, especially its media who ran daily stories throughout July and August, falsely accusing Corbyn-led Labour of antisemitism. They were aided and abetted by right-wing bodies who self-define as "leaders" in the Jewish community: the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), the Chief Rabbi's

office, and the rabidly anti-left and pro-Zionist "Campaign Against Antisemitism".

These bodies, together with right wingers beyond the Jewish community, were seeking to coerce Labour into adopting the flawed document produced by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which deliberately conflates critiques of Israeli policy and critiques of Zionism with antisemitism.

At the time of writing, Labour's National Executive Committee has agreed to include all the contentious IHRA examples within its Code of Conduct on antisemitism but has added an

important caveat upholding free speech about Israel and Palestine and in defence of Palestinian rights. The Jewish Leadership Council says that this addition drives "a coach and horses" through the IHRA definition. The Jewish Chronicle (JC) has likewise bemoaned the "free speech" commitment. Jewish Socialists have argued that if the JLC and JC are reduced to complaining about Labour's desire for free speech on Israel and Palestine, then their true agenda of promoting censorship, and outlawing views other than their own, becomes ever more transparent.

Further punishment for Palestinian teenager

After enduring eight months in prison for slapping a heavily armed soldier outside her West Bank family home, Ahed Tamimi and her family have been banned from travelling abroad. Ahed and her immediate family, who have all endured severe punishments from the authorities in recent years, were due to leave for Europe at the beginning of September, to visit human rights organisations in Europe and address meetings in Belgium, France and Spain. Yousef Jabareen, a member of the Joint List of Palestinian members of the Knesset condemned this "vindictive move", adding that it

would appear that "an economic and military world power" was afraid of the story of this Palestinian teenager. In July Israel ordered two Italian artists to leave the country within 72 hours after they painted Ahed Tamimi's image on the separation wall in the West Bank.

See Judith Cravitz's article on page 31.



Letter from Hungary

I've lived in Hungary on and off for 14 years. The 2006 General Election saw Viktor Orbán well beaten. Compared with the MSZP leader, Orbán appeared slow witted. After Orbán's loss, I think most Hungarians assumed he'd give up the Fidesz party leadership. He was a joke figure, hanging on despite his obvious unpopularity. It is a familiar story; joke leader gains power during difficult times, consolidates his power and goes on to overcompensate for his feelings of inadequacy.

There is a misunderstanding about the nature of Orbán's antisemitism and racism. Orbán is ruthless in his pursuit of power. He is an opportunist who, to maintain power, will use minorities. He recognises the casual racism in Hungary and uses it to his advantage. This doesn't make him any less racist, but be sure if Orbán felt the support of the Jewish people or Roma was required to maintain power, he would happily give speeches extolling their virtues. He makes nationalist statements that create an environment where it is acceptable not only to voice racist opinions, but to act upon them. Hungary is a perfect breeding ground for this approach and he takes full advantage of it.

I should explain what I mean by casual racism. In Hungary if you have five people together and one is a virulent racist, he can spout his views and the other four will rarely raise an eyebrow. While the other four would not regard themselves as racists, somebody expressing racist views is accepted as casually as somebody saying they hate spinach. This is not always the case, but it is recognisably prevalent. Fidesz are able to tap into this, encouraging racists to be comfortable with their views based on the idea of a nationalistic ethnic identity, while not losing the vote of those who would regard themselves as moderate.

Fidesz have near total control of the media. This doesn't just extend to the mainstream media, but they have also been effective in closing down alternative media. In the UK the alternative press, plus a powerful online presence, have provided a platform for a contrary dialogue. A noticeable feature of this control in Hungary is the high level of trust in the media. For many, if the media says it, then it is true. A large number of Hungarians firmly believe that Luton is a no-go area for whites, because the media tell them so. Even if this incessant message doesn't encourage hate in some, it has been very apparent to me that it is effective in creating fear.

It is easy to see how the message from both Fidesz and its media is taking hold. A recent example was where a hotelier in a small town decided to offer empty rooms in his hotel to about 30 refugees to provide mothers and children with a break from living in tents. It wasn't long before the national press picked up on it, berating the hotelier for inviting thieves and rapists to a respectable town. A community meeting was held where a small minority spoke loudly against the hotelier's plan. His car tyres were slashed. Other residents, if not openly against the plan were influenced not to speak out through the fear of refugees that Fidesz and the media had created. Orbán stated that he understood the feelings of the protestors who slashed the hotelier's tyres.

Some may say that this message of fear is typical of the media the world over. What is noticeable in Hungary is the lack of a counter-argument.

The path to increased antisemitism is well worn. It begins with Hungarians placing more emphasis on their national myths. Fantasies of the pure ethnic identity are taught and sung about in school. Fidesz talks about the threat against Christian Europe. The Jobbik Party talks about a sub-species and there are no consequences for them. Then comes talk of the threat created by aliens to the purity of this fantasy. The impact of this can already be seen. A friend's father, a respected man in his town who is involved with the Jewish community, has begun to see the first signs of rejection. People he would have once regarded as friends have a subtly different response to him. Conversations end when he approaches. These responses are subtle and could be viewed by some as paranoia, but the continual recurrence reflects a dangerous change in attitudes. He also knows that he is referred to as "the Jew". The term "the Jew" is something I've heard in other circles. It's used casually, knowing full well it degrades the person. The steady flow towards the dehumanisation of a people.

Michael Dakin



Jewish Socialist adds:

Viktor Orbán was re-elected in April 2018. The election propaganda and public statements of Fidesz included antisemitic, Islamophobic, anti-Roma and anti-refugee sentiments. Orbán's public statements about George Soros revived ancient antisemitic themes as found in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, especially the speech he made just a few weeks before the election: "We must fight against an opponent which is different from us. Their faces are not visible, but are hidden from

view; they do not fight directly, but by stealth; they are not honourable, but unprincipled; they are not national, but international; they do not believe in work, but speculate with money; they have no homeland, but feel that the whole world is theirs. They are not generous, but vengeful, and always attack the heart—especially if it is red, white and green." Orbán attacks migrants and refugees as Muslim invaders but blames Soros for their presence in Hungary.

FINDING HER WAY HOME

CAROL ISAACS describes her remarkable work, conjuring up the Iraq that her family left

The Finns have a word, *kaukokaipuu*, which means a feeling of homesickness for a place you've never been to. I've been living in two places all my life: the England I was born in and the lost world of my Iraqi-Jewish family's roots.

As a cartoonist and illustrator (published in the *New Yorker*, *Spectator* and the *Sunday Times*), I am telling their story in a graphic memoir, *The Wolf Of Baghdad*, which has its own musical soundtrack. Based on my family's recollections of their life in Baghdad, the memoir will be shown as a slideshow accompanied by a live band (including me) playing music of Iraqi and Judeo-Arabic origin.

As a musician I have worked in the pop and world music fields with artists like Indigo Girls, Sinead O'Connor and Squeeze. Ironically, my only experience of Jewish music until recently was klezmer (I am a founder member of the London Klezmer Quartet). My parents never played any Arabic music in our house; maybe it reminded them of what they had left behind. They were determined to be British and resolutely to look forward. Only now do I find myself learning *Maqam*, the Arabic modes and scales and songs beloved by the Arab world that happened to be written by the Iraqi-Jewish Al Kuwaiti brothers. During the 1930s and '40s they composed and recorded much of the music that is still listened to today.

The memoir is based on interviews I conducted with family members. Both my parents came from Baghdad but they and their families fled Iraq. Previously life had been good. By the 1940s Jews accounted for a third of the population of Baghdad and were well integrated. The early part of the 20th century was thought to be a golden age for the Jews of Iraq; most considered themselves Iraqi first and Jewish second.



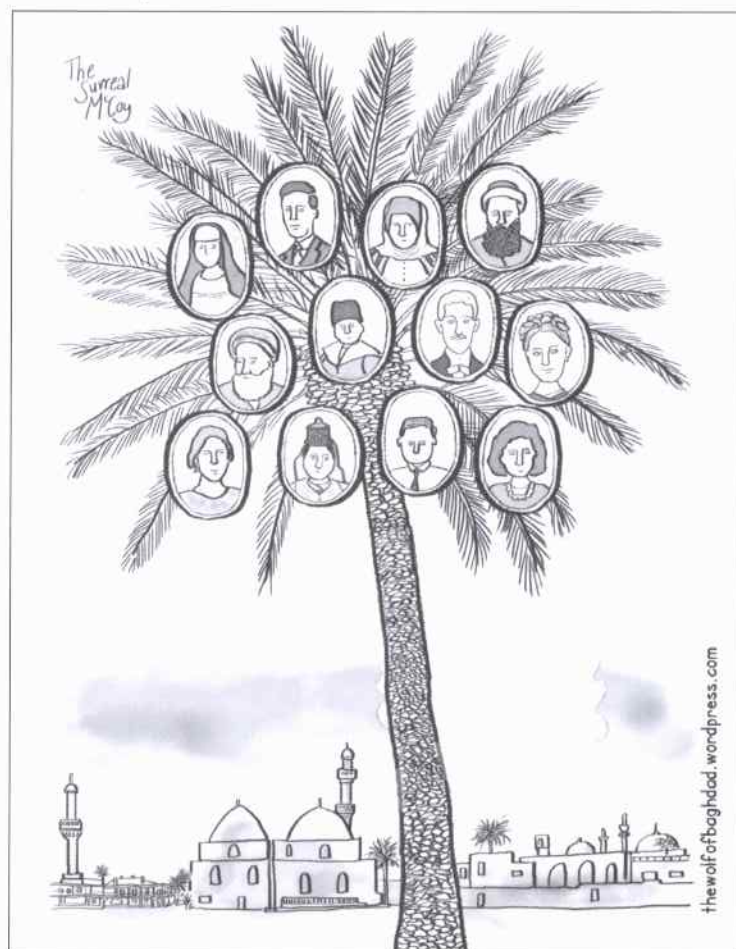
However the rise of Hitler and Arab nationalism led to growing anti-Jewish feeling. And after the shock of the *Farhud* (Arabic for pogrom) in Baghdad in 1941 and the creation of the state of Israel, many Iraqi Jews felt there was no future for them in a country they had lived in continuously for over 2,600 years.

One of my mother's cousins,

who had belonged to the Iraqi-Jewish Communist movement, was arrested after the *Farhud* and imprisoned for several months before escaping to Palestine. An aunt recalled how their Muslim neighbour stood guard with a gun outside their house during that time to keep away the looters. Another family member recalled how they would have to hide their Jewishness by speaking the Muslim dialect and getting rid of any Jewish artefacts in the house.

The graphic memoir is wordless. I would like it to reach out to other Iraqi and other Arab communities to show that as Jews from an Arab land we have more in common than divides us.

You can follow Carol Isaacs' fascinating and beautiful blog at thewolfofbaghdad.wordpress.com



A CHILDHOOD OVERSHADOWED BY ENOCH

It was 20th April 1968, 10 days before my fifth birthday. I was due to start primary school that September on what was to be a less than magnificent educational journey. I was aware long before I started school that to be black in the Black Country was to be the target of abuse and often – and it really was often – physical attack. Years later my mom told me that when she was pregnant with me, she was attacked in the street by a group of young white men. She said that I barely survived the attack. Today this sort of thing would be called a racially motivated attack and the advice would be to report it, amid assurances that your encounter with the police would be taken seriously. In those days you didn't bother reporting it and, as for the police... enough said.

As I looked forward to becoming a big man at five and to my final summer of freedom before starting school I didn't realise that an already difficult time was about to get markedly worse.

That day in 1968 will live forever in shame and dishonour. Enoch Powell, the MP for Wolverhampton South West, just up the road from us, went to the Burlington Hotel in Birmingham, to give a speech to the Conservative Association. His speech would ramp up the levels of white hostility towards black people in the area and across the rest of the country.

In what was to become known as 'The Rivers of Blood' speech, after his alarmist vision of a future that would recreate in Britain 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood', Powell lit a flame in the hearts of racists across the whole country and created myths that were played back to the black community for years. He claimed that white women were unable to get hospital beds to give birth because of black women. He claimed that white children were being denied school places, and that neighbourhoods were being changed beyond all recognition. All of this because of black people. How can I forget? It fed the narrative that this was a deliberate and calculated plot by black men to come over here and 'steal our jobs and our women' as some kind of dastardly and ungrateful revenge for slavery.

A significant part of his speech railed against the very idea of the 1968 Race Relations Act, at that stage a Bill going through Parliament. This was to be the second piece of positive race relations legislation but the first to deal with discrimination in employment. Powell was clear that a new Act would bring about discrimination against what he called the native (ie white) population. Powell felt able to ignore the inconvenient truth that racism

against black workers throughout the country was already at epidemic levels when he rose to speak.

So 10 days later, as I happily blew out the five candles of my little cake, in our two-bedroomed terraced house, things were at fever pitch in the area and throughout the country. It was difficult to tell in those days, in the middle of things as we were and without the aid of today's rapid means of communication, just how bad things were elsewhere. What's clear looking back was that there was a nationwide storm raging, which relentlessly hovered above the heads of the black community. We were not just attacked in the street, – and street attacks got worse. Black people continued to suffer abuse in many workplaces, worsened from an already high point. We were more frequently attacked in our homes. Having dog mess and even petrol bombs pushed through the letterbox was not unusual. Many white people felt that they had been given permission by the establishment, through Powell, to raise their levels of harassment towards the black community. That sounds somewhat familiar today.



East London Dockers and Smithfield meat workers marched in support of Enoch Powell's speech. Later it was revealed that these demonstrations were organised by far-right groups.

After starting school, and over the years following that speech, I lost count of the number of imaginative terms of abuse that some racists managed to come up with. I won't repeat any of the more disgusting ones but I do remember that, for a time, a favourite one was to call black boys Enoch.

Did I react to abuse? Damned right I did. Anyone in my family will tell you that, particularly when I was growing up, my temper was not the most even. So imagine what happened when some idiot called me a racist name at regular intervals. It wasn't always pretty.

The hatred and prejudice in Powell's speech was perpetuated for some time afterwards by TV programmes and so-called comedians who seemed

They found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth, their children unable to obtain school places, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated; at work they found that employers hesitated to apply to the immigrant worker the standards of discipline and competence required of the native-born worker

Enoch Powell

Writing in a personal capacity, Roger is an Assistant General Secretary of Unison.



Powell campaigning in Wolverhampton for re-election in 1970

to think it was ok to abuse the black community. It was often handy to watch these programmes so that you were ready for what was coming the next day in the school playground. Whatever abuse we were subjected to would inevitably be followed by

the phrase "Enoch was right!" Countless times in my school days I was told this or I saw it painted on walls in the area.

Powell was a calculating politician who thought nothing of using race to further his own political ambitions. Do I think he was a racist? Absolutely. Do I think it's a good proposal to put a plaque up in his former constituency to commemorate his service? No I don't. How stupid! Why would we sink so low as to erect a plaque to someone who not only divided his constituency but much of the country? In any case, I doubt such a plaque would last very long. Much better we erect plaques around the country to the black people who were attacked because of that man's dishonest and racist speech.

There is something rather karmic that, in the last General Election, Eleanor Smith, a black woman and former president of Unison, was elected on behalf of the Labour Party. She represents the area in Wolverhampton where, in the early 1980s, I was chased through subways by men with pillowcases pulled over their heads who belonged to the local version of the Ku Klux Klan. It's also the same part of Wolverhampton that Powell used to represent. In the end, last year saw a community resisting and Rivers of Votes being cast.

NOTHING HAD CHANGED EVERYTHING HAD CHANGED

On the 40th anniversary of a racist murder in London's East End, **SARAH GLYNN** remembers a movement born of tragedy that profoundly affected one East End minority

On 14th May 1978 a strange procession made its way from Brick Lane to 10 Downing Street. At its head was a hearse belonging to the local Muslim undertakers, bearing the coffin of a 24-year-old garment worker, Altab Ali, and behind marched some 7,000 Bengalis of all ages. Ten days earlier Ali was walking home from work when he was set upon and fatally stabbed by three teenage boys. It was the day of the local council elections; the National Front was standing 41 candidates and racism was in the air. When the boys – two white and one mixed race – were caught and questioned by the police, they made it clear that Ali had lost his life simply for being a "Paki".

This funeral protest is seen as the seminal event in the evolution of Bengali antiracism in the East End of London, but it needs to be looked at as part of a decade of racist violence and antiracist mobilisation. As the UK's immigrant population grew, so did the scapegoating of immigrants for all manner of unconnected social problems. While polite society adopted racist immigration laws, skinhead gangs took a more directly brutal approach. Among the London Bengalis, the first moves into self-defence were aimed at providing protection from "Paki-bashing" gangs in 1970; more significant mobilisation did not occur until the second half of the decade. By that time, family reunification had brought a new generation of young Bengalis who were growing up Britain.

Everyday racism made families afraid to go out but they felt unsafe in their homes too. National Front paper sales provided a rallying point for racist youth violence. Bengali mobilisation took the form

of a mass squatting movement in response to a chronic shortage of housing and institutional racism in housing allocations, as well as protection from and protests against racism. Activists from the radical black organisation, Race Today, played a leading part in organising the squatting movement, and in 1976 they set up the Anti-Racist Committee of Asians in East London, which organised vigilante patrols to protect against the increasing racist violence. That year also saw the establishment of the first Bengali youth groups, which took a prominent part in anti-racist struggles.

While Altab Ali's murder and the protest it inspired are now commemorated in the park that bears his name and an annual memorial day, this did not signal the end of racism or racist violence. Bengalis were organising regular vigils to try to exclude the National Front paper sellers from their Brick Lane pitch, but violence continued, and on 11th June a mob of some 150 skinhead youths rampaged down the street throwing bottles and stones through shop windows. Bengali protests couldn't stop the National Front making a deliberately provocative move into new offices in Shoreditch that September. The police were persuaded to set up a police station in Brick Lane, but the force itself was deeply and institutionally racist, preferring to arrest antiracists rather than racists. When the violence did eventually retreat from Brick Lane, it focused on other places where Bengalis were more isolated. Altab Ali was not the first Bengali victim of racist murder and nor was he the last. Ishaq Ali was killed in Hackney just a month after Altab Ali's death, and there have been

other attacks and murders since. Electoral support for the National Front was falling, and the organisation imploded after its disastrous result in the 1979 general election, but, far from disappearing, their ideas infiltrated the rhetoric of mainstream politicians.

From the outside it might appear that little had been achieved but for those who took part in the protests, the difference was palpable and profound. Nothing had changed, but everything had changed. As numerous recollections of these events testify, this was the moment when the community as a whole took courage from their collective actions and began to believe that they had rights in this country and the ability to defend them. There had been mass mobilisation before, in support of

Bangladeshi independence, but this was different. Suroth Ahmed's account is typical of how those times are remembered:

"I came to Britain in 1972. To my observation we had the mindset that we, the Asian and the Bengali people don't have the right to be here. We are here only to work, not to demand any rights of our own. We have to hide ourselves from the white racist, we have to be indoors after sunset, and we have to group together to be safe ... But after the killing of Altab Ali, the scenario was completely different... We never expected such huge number of people would come out to protest the killing... And I believe we never were unconscious

of our rights after that. The Bengali community developed after that incident day by day... It was like the people were sleeping, unaware of their rights and dignity, suddenly something woke them all; they begin to realise their power of unity..."

"Here to stay, here to fight" was already a popular slogan with the Asian youth movements, but the sentiment, if not the militant language, was now reflected in a new confidence shared with the community at large.

This qualitative change in community confidence echoes the Battle of Cable Street some four decades earlier, where the impact on the protestors had also been more significant than the immediate impact on the fascists. Confidence was vitally important, but on its own it was not enough to undermine the racist threat. And beyond this, these two seminal antiracist struggles were very different, reflecting the different nature of wider progressive politics in the two eras. East End Jews still lived relatively segregated lives, even in the 1930s, but their politics, dominated by the

Communist Party, stressed the importance of working-class unity to address fundamental structural inequalities. Their prescription for reducing racism was to attack the social problems on which racist scapegoating can feed.

By the 1970s, class politics was giving way to the politics of identity. Race Today and other ethnic minority activists promoted separate organisation and a suspicion of what they called the "white left". Little attempt was made to create links with the wider working class and create a joint struggle against the economic forces holding everyone back. While organised left groups came to the East End to show support, "Black and white unite and fight" was often more an empty slogan than political reality; and for most of those involved,

structural forces were not analysed or addressed. As inequalities grew under the Thatcher government, identity politics cut across the class-based understanding and organisation needed to fight back. Identity politics focused energy away from the wider struggle for a fairer system, leaving people still looking for a scapegoat, and separate organisation made it harder to prevent immigrants being seen as "other".

The emphasis, both from the Bengalis and from antiracist politics more generally, was generally limited to ensuring ethnic minorities received their fair share of the cake, rather than achieving more

fundamental change. Many of the young men (and traditional mores meant they were almost all men) who were mobilised in the antiracist struggles of the 1970s went on to fight for their community through a Labour Party that was soon shifting to the right. And although the Bengali community continued to grow in prominence and confidence, racism has not gone away.

By the 1990s, after over a decade of Tory attacks on the working class, the British Nationalist Party awakened memories of 1978 as it persuaded some of those suffering from falling living standards and lack of work and housing to blame their situation on their immigrant neighbours. And more recently, with growing inequality and now also austerity, we have seen the rise of UKIP and of the EDL. Without a class-based politics that addresses the inequalities on which prejudice thrives, racism will continue to reappear.

Sarah Glynn is author of *Class Ethnicity and Religion in the Bengali East End*, Manchester University Press, 2014.



CULTURES OF

Forty years ago, tens of thousands of young people flocked to the first two Carnivals Against the Nazis organised by Rock Against Racism. This innovative, exciting, political and cultural phenomenon started with a letter by **RED SAUNDERS**

The UK in the 1970s. Dark depressing times. The hope of the '60s had evaporated. The economy was in one of capitalism's cyclical crisis phases. The IMF had imposed massive cuts on a passive Labour government. Unemployment, especially among youth, started to increase dramatically and led to widespread misery and disillusionment, laying fertile ground for fascists to spread their ideology. We on the left were class-oriented; they on the right were Nation and Race. We said "Blame the Bosses", they said, "Blame the blacks. Two million unemployed, two million blacks – send 'em back. British jobs for British workers." Sounds familiar?

But there is a long tradition and culture of antiracist solidarity, and not just on the far left. In the late 1950s the continued racist attacks on the isolated West Indian community in Notting Hill from Mosley-inspired Teddy Boys, unfettered by police, led to brave self-defence by the community. In the aftermath of the riots, musicians formed the Stars Campaign for Interracial Friendship. SCIF raised funds for legal defence and set up clubs to encourage young people to mix in informal music sessions. There were similarities to Rock Against Racism which would emerge 20 years later.

In the early 1960s I was a young London mod doing my photographic apprenticeship. Immersed in the urban youth culture of the day, I was taken by a friend to a folk club in East London, and there I saw an agitprop theatre group called CAST (Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre). They did a brilliant high-energy play about the Vietnam War. This was my "Road to Damascus" experience. Within three months I had joined them. They changed my life.

CAST was also part of the "Majority rule for Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)" campaign, culminating with one of the first gigs ever at London's Roundhouse in December 1966. Now it is a famous cultural landmark; then it was a derelict railway shed. "Psychodelphia v Ian Smith" was a gig at which we put on poets, Cast, African drummers and Pink Floyd, booked for £25 if my memory serves me well.

I was soon cutting my teeth with left culture and changing my lifestyle and outlook completely. We were performing our own material to venues all over the country and in Europe, and participating in all the great Vietnam sit-ins and demonstrations, involving tens of thousands of people. We performed in streets, parks, occupied factories, and at political rallies. These were amazing times and experiences that would help me later with Rock Against Racism (RAR) campaigning.

In September 1976 the music press reported Eric Clapton's racist rant at a gig in Birmingham, when he said: "Support Enoch Powell ... Wogs out ... Keep Britain White!" That was the motivator for me to write the letter that sparked RAR:

"When we read about Eric Clapton's Birmingham concert when he urged support for Enoch Powell we nearly puked. What's going on Eric? ... So you are going to stand up for us and you think we are being colonised by black people. Come off it. You've been taking too much of that Daily Express stuff. You know you can't handle it.

"Own up. Half your music is black, you are rock music's biggest colonialist. You're a good musician but where would you be without the blues and R&B? You've got to fight the racist poison, otherwise you degenerate into the sewer with the rats and all the money men who've ripped off rock culture with their cheque books and plastic crap.

"Rock was and can still be a real progressive culture ... Keep the faith. Black and white unite and fight. We want to organise a rank and file movement against the racist poison in rock music. We urge support for Rock Against Racism. All those interested please write to RAR Box M 6 Cottons Gardens, London E2.

"PS: Who shot the sheriff, Eric? It sure as hell wasn't you.

The letter was published in all the music papers and some of the left press. Within two weeks we received over 500 letters – a complete shock. Suddenly it was, "Wow, ok, we need to do something and fast." There was a flurry of activity to reply to the letters, make contacts around the country, start working on our propaganda, think about image, logos, logistics, venues, how to beg, borrow or steal equipment, and meet bands and musicians. Within a month we had two gigs: one at the Princess Alice pub in east London, the second at the Royal College of Art, featuring Limousine, Carol Grimes, 999, and Matumbi – the first reggae band to join RAR. That was always going to happen. That was at the centre of the RAR manifesto: to bring black and white bands together to play on the RAR stage: "We want rebel music, street music. Music that breaks down people's fear of one another." That was what it said in the front cover of the first Temporary Hoarding, RAR's fanzine. The next gig was in Leeds and we were up and running.

The founding group at the centre of RAR was maybe 20 people maximum. All shared a general culturally left and united front antiracism. We were all in our mid-20s or early 30s, and well versed in self-organised activity from the underground press, radical left, counter culture, graphics, music and



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theatre. And we were serious, culturally mixed music fans – if not fanatics. We were an ultra-political, ultra-creative collective of head bangers about to collide with the punk reggae explosion with open arms.

The sheer passion, energy and anger required to challenge the status quo, where racism, homophobia and misogyny were the norm, was itself a challenge. Many early punks flirted with fascist imagery and Nazi nihilism. Homophobia was rampant. That was why we linked up with the Tom Robinson Band early on. One of the great moments at Carnival One was when he performed "Sing if you're glad to be Gay". RAR gave a political direction to punk rock which otherwise may well have gone down that path of nihilism.

Bob Marley was already making a name for himself and as an ambassador for rasta/reggae music. Punky Reggae Party was released, but it was the DJ Don Letts, with his regular DJ sets at punk rock clubs and gigs, who popularised and influenced musicians and fans with reggae music. And when political punk's biggest band, the Clash, released *White Man at Hammersmith Palais*, the ball was rolling. Reggae was cool.

The National Front (NF) were having problems with how to deal with this phenomenon. One of their leaders, Martin Webster, described reggae music as only "fit for monkeys and degenerates". Leeds NF branch set up "Rock Against Communism", which failed to create a far-right music culture. Most of its skinhead supporters were more interested in making violent attacks on RAR gigs and those of RAR supporting bands like Sham 69 and Angelic Upstarts. This raised the question of security and self-defence. We put no faith in the police and had no dealings with them. To us, they were NF supporters or at best reluctantly neutral. Local RAR groups had to deal with it. You had to stand up, and it could be frightening. Hopefully the gig would pass off without major trouble but there was always that added tension. There were many violent incidents and full-on attacks on RAR gigs around the country, mainly in areas where the NF and British Movement were strong and confident. People were hospitalised and

some badly injured. If a gig was in an NF area, we would look for wider support in the community from trade unionists or black and Asian youth in the area.

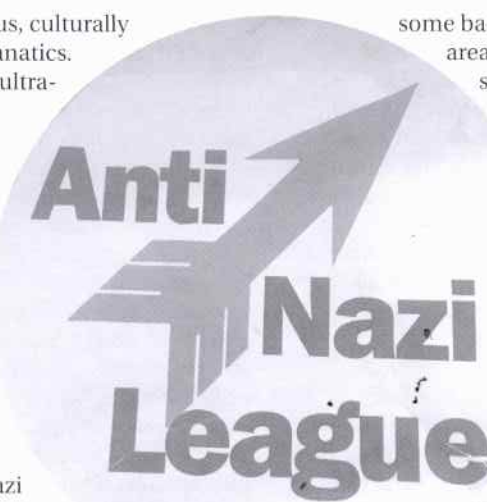
Our RAR fanzine, Temporary Hoarding (TH) was very important to us. It provided regular reports from different RAR groups across the country, where people could give feedback and share experiences. As well as interviews with bands, the issues it covered were amazingly diverse. It was our vehicle where we could shine a light and elaborate on all the big issues of the day and give background to

our antiracist and solidarity politics, share our belief in and love of the graphic power of radical design, which we fused with the prevailing explosion of punk graphics. TH was a small fanzine. Our largest print run was about 10,000 for the Northern Carnival, but we punched above our weight. It boosted RAR, as the RAR phenomenon grew across the UK.

The 1970s were bad but it is even worse now. Fifteen years of the "war on terror"; the rabid nationalist tabloid media promoting non-stop Islamophobia; the free flow of Nazi hate on the internet; antisemitism, Trump, jihadi terror attacks; racist Tory Brexit; bickering and sectarianism. But I hope the resistance and fightback can look at how many similar problems from the 1970s were confronted. The important lessons learnt then are still relevant now.

RAR was a simple and very powerful idea, as valid today as it was 40 years ago: to mix music, culture and politics to fight racism amongst youth. RAR was a magnificent shooting star. I gave it six crazy, frenetic years of my life. Forty years later people still want to know about it. But you can't just repeat it and create RAR Two.

Everything is of its time and context. Resistance is in our history and our tradition. There are youth from Bangladesh to Mexico City, and from Cape Town to Los Angeles, raging at injustice and using all the new cultural tools to fan the flames of a new resistance. It is not easy. It must be political, and it must be prioritised because racism is one of the most dangerous poisons in our world today. Love Music Hate Racism!



LOOKING BACK

Canada's progressive Jewish journal closed its doors in 2016 after more than 52 years. Its last editor, **CARL ROSENBERG**, reflects on this unique platform for discussion, dissent and creativity

Some readers of *Jewish Socialist* may be familiar with its Canadian counterpart, *Outlook: Canada's Progressive Jewish Magazine*. Alas, with our Spring 2016 issue, we at Outlook said goodbye to our readers, editors, contributors and volunteers after fifty-two and a half years (although most of us hadn't been at the magazine quite that long). We struggled uphill for a long time with the difficulties of sustaining a print publication with a small and specialised—although devoted—readership, and we finally had to let go.

Outlook's roots were in the left-wing Yiddish press in Canada. It was founded in Toronto, originating as the English-language supplement of the *Vochenblatt* before launching its first issue in October 1963. Many of its readers, especially in the early years, were of the generations influenced by the movements described in Ester Reiter's article, "The Jewish Left: A Brief History of Our Struggle to Create a More Beautiful World" (*Outlook*, Nov/Dec 2013 – our 50th anniversary issue), and more extensively in her outstanding book *A Future Without Hate or Need: The Promise of the Jewish Left in Canada* (Between the Lines, Toronto, 2016). In her article, Ester eloquently described the legacy of these movements: "They attempted to weave together their identity as Jews with their internationalist class politics ... They supported a rich cultural milieu, creating a network of *shules* (schools) for children, teaching Yiddish, as well as libraries, choirs, mandolin orchestras, wind orchestras, sports groups, dance groups and theatre groups. ... The cultural life of the Jewish left was the equivalent of a university for working-class

women and men. ... For this community, culture and political engagement went hand in hand."

Many of these groupings came together to form the United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) in 1945. UJPO actively supported *Outlook* in many ways, and many of its members wrote for the magazine and took part in its editorial collectives in several cities.

Over the years, UJPO members and activists were joined by Jewish-Canadians from a variety of other backgrounds – academics, professionals, the union movement, Palestine solidarity activists – seeking a progressive Jewish alternative. *Outlook* gave a home to diverse voices: liberal Zionist; non- and anti-Zionist; Yiddishist; Marxist; feminist; anarchist; environmentalist; social democratic. We covered and

reflected the Canadian and international scene, including labour struggles, environmental issues, women's issues, sexuality, gender, human rights and civil liberties.

As is natural for any progressive publication, perhaps especially a Jewish one, we had much discussion and disagreement on various topics. Probably the greatest point of contention among Jews, even on the left, is Israel/Palestine, and this was reflected in *Outlook*. We gave a home to Jewish and Israeli voices of dissent, which are often ignored, marginalised or pilloried by the Jewish establishment. There were other issues of disagreement as well, from specifically Canadian ones such as Quebec, to the ethnic conflicts and military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. One of the things I most enjoyed about working on *Outlook* was this discussion – in the office, among the collectives in Vancouver and in other centres, and on the letters page, even when disagreements were particularly vexed. The debates in our pages were lively, and usually respectful as well.

We tried to interpret the word "progressive" broadly and give expression to various points of view, from centre-left to those further left; left Zionist to anti-Zionist; and so on. However, it seemed important to maintain core values that were different from the Jewish and broader Canadian mainstream – to be unapologetically progressive. One quote worth remembering for Jewish (and other) progressives is an eloquent statement from the Israeli-Jewish anti-occupation activist Michel Warschawski: "To be in opposition to the government, or even to the dominant way of thinking in the society, is not to be in some sort of abnormal or unhealthy state... The left is supposed to articulate a specific set of interests and values, and to fight the opposing interests and values which contradict its own."

We were also proud of upholding a cultural heritage dear to most secular Jews, of Yiddish language and literature. We published works by and about a wide variety of Yiddish writers, men and women, and recounted the rich and dynamic history of the secular Yiddish culture that emerged in Eastern Europe a century and a half ago and has played such a large part in modern Jewish history and culture.

We remembered one of the greatest crimes in recorded history – the Nazi Holocaust or Shoah against the Jews of Europe, paying tribute to those who resisted against impossible odds. We tried to draw universal lessons from this monstrosity, speaking out against racism, chauvinism, and fanaticism of all kinds. On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we supported the rights of both peoples to live in peace and equality while opposing violence on all sides, and opposed the decades long Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the systematic Israeli violation of Palestinian human and national rights.

I first discovered *Outlook* in the mid-1980s on the newsstand of Octopus Books in Vancouver, and

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rediscovered it a few years later at literature tables at events dealing with the first Intifada and the then burgeoning Israeli anti-occupation movement. I liked it partly because its contents reminded me of the concerns of independent Jewish thinkers and writers I admired – Hannah Arendt, Jacobo Timerman, Noam Chomsky, I F Stone. After I started reading and subscribing to the magazine, I got involved bit by bit, first writing, then as a member of the Vancouver Collective, then as Assistant Editor. I trained under Editor Henry Rosenthal and Managing Editor Sylvia Friedman, and learned a lot from both—they were my friends and mentors. I became Editor in 1998 on Hank's passing, and continued to work with Sylvia and many devoted volunteers.

Sylvia began working on *Outlook* in Toronto with long-time editor Joshua Gershman, and continued as managing editor when the magazine moved to Vancouver in 1979. Sylvia was joined by new co-editors Henry Rosenthal and Ben Chud (who died in 1986), and this team enabled *Outlook* to continue for many more years. Sadly, Sylvia died in December 2016, mourned by family, friends, co-workers and members of the various overlapping communities she contributed so much to – UJPO, the Peretz Centre for Secular Jewish Culture, the Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir (founded by her husband Searle Friedman) and *Outlook*.

I'm grateful for everything Hank and Sylvia taught me, and for the work of all who contributed to *Outlook* in so many ways—as Associate Editors, writers, collective members, layout designers, donors and volunteers, as well as our beloved readers. One of our special features in our last fifteen years or so was the selections and translations of Yiddish poetry, thanks to our Yiddishists Al Stein, Faith Jones and Albert Rosenblatt. I appreciated the diverse contributions of many outstanding writers, from Bennett Muraskin's long-running column profiling "Jewish

Humanists Remembered," to the articles and book and film reviews by Martha and Marty Roth. Martha was also *Outlook's* Vancouver Associate Editor, and in the magazine's last few years she was actively involved in editing the magazine.

The challenges we face in today's world are great – reaffirming a progressive, prophetic Jewish vision when the community is dominated by its most conservative forces, and its loudest voices are apologists for Israeli policies; working for a just peace in Israel and Palestine; resisting increasing social and economic inequalities throughout the world caused by decades of neoliberal engineering, and the plague of discrimination and violence against women, LGBT people, aboriginal people, refugees, migrants and people of colour; fighting the xenophobic right-wing populism spearheaded by Trump in the US but emerging elsewhere; overcoming longstanding religious and ethnic conflicts and religious fundamentalism; wrestling with climate change, by far the greatest crisis in today's world, stemming from the dominance of our civilization by the use of fossil fuels and the oil lobby which profits from it.

In the face of these horrors, there are signs of hope: ongoing grassroots resistance from people of various backgrounds, including growing dissident movements among Jewish communities in many countries; the rise of socialist or social democratic candidates in the US and the UK, who have challenged the austerity agenda prevalent throughout the West. Over the years, *Outlook* strove to support these struggles, and to give a voice to their many diverse thinkers and activists. Many of our readers and supporters have expressed the hope that the magazine may be revived in some form, perhaps as an online publication. Whatever comes of this, we hope our work and mission will be continued in some way, perhaps by some of the same individuals, along with many others, to build a *besere, shenere velt* – a better, more beautiful world.

Carl Rosenberg edited *Outlook* from 1998 to 2016. He is a member of the United Jewish People's Order and Independent Jewish Voices Canada.

Some of the material in this article appeared in a different form in the Spring 2016 issue of *Outlook*, in *Outlook's* 50th Anniversary issue (Nov/Dec 2013), and the Summer 2016 issue of *UJPO News*, the newsletter of the United Jewish People's Order.

Years, Years

by Anne Safran Bially

1901, Siedlce (Shedlets), Poland – 1993, Washington, DC

Years, years, precious years!
So much joy and so much pain!
Where have you disappeared?
Have I lived my life in vain?

Oh, my days of love and strife,
Days of heartbreak and elation,
Are they not still alive?
Have they not saved me from desperation?

So many friends, loyal and true.
And then—betrayals....
Broken promises,
Besmirched ideals....

In the dreary sleepless nights
When the wounds of betrayal bleed,
Flares up my faith and hope for mankind,
Turning all that's bitter into sweet.

Years, years, precious years!
Years of love and of strife—
No, I have not lost you,
In my heart you are still alive!

30th July 1989. Translated from Yiddish by the author.
Published in *Outlook*, May/June 2004

WARSAW

This year is the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It is also 75 years since the Bundist Szmul Zygielbojm took his life in London just after the Uprising was extinguished. Both events were commemorated in Warsaw against a backdrop of growing antisemitism and bigotry fostered by Poland's populist right wing government. **DAVID ROSENBERG** reports

My comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto perished with their weapons in their hands in their last heroic battle. It was not my destiny to die as they did, together with them. But I belong to them and in their mass graves ... as I was unable to do anything during my life, perhaps by my death I shall help to break down the indifference of those who have the possibility now, at the last moment, to save those Polish Jews still alive, from certain annihilation.

This heart-wrenching extract is from one of a handful of suicide letters dated 11th May 1943 that were left on a table in his flat in Paddington, London, by Szmul "Artur" Zygielbojm, a Polish Jewish trade union leader, socialist and anti-fascist activist. His suicide letters were addressed to world

leaders, the exiled Polish Government and close political associates. He also addressed one to his landlady, apologising for the shock and distress he would cause her.

Born in Borowica, Poland, in 1895, Zygielbojm was working in a factory by the age of 10. He lived and worked in Kraznystaw, Warsaw, Chelm and Lodz before returning to Warsaw in 1939 to help organise workers' battalions to defend the city from the Nazi invaders. The Germans' quickly seized Warsaw and forced the

Jewish community to create a Judenrat (Jewish Council) to implement Nazi orders. Zygielbojm was a reluctant member of this Council. He refused to accept Nazi instructions for the Council to create a ghetto for the Jews but after failing to persuade his fellow members to defy this edict, he resigned and spoke from the balcony to a huge, anxious crowd that had gathered outside their building. He implored them: "Stay in your apartments, don't leave them, don't go, wait until they throw you out. Nobody should go to the ghetto voluntarily."

After his incitement to popular defiance, the Nazis invited him to their headquarters for an "interview". He did not attend. Zygielbojm's Bundist comrades hid him, assigned him a formidable mission, and then in early 1940 organised his daring escape from Warsaw under

the noses of the Nazis. His mission was to tell the world, and especially those with power to intervene, what was happening under Nazi occupation, and lobby them to organise exceptional action to halt it.

Using disguise and false papers, including a visa for Holland, Zygielbojm travelled by train to Krakow, then through Nazi Germany. In a poorly lit railway station at Krakow, he recalled in his diary, "I pulled the Jewish band off my arm with a strong resolution never to wear it again. I squeezed the band in my pocket. I called the porter with a calm and firm voice and told him to take my suitcase: 'To Berlin, second class'."

From Berlin he travelled among German soldiers towards the Dutch border. His visa was not accepted and he was turned back to Germany, but through contact with a Bund activist he was provided with documents to enter Belgium. He was beaten by Germans at the German-Belgian border but a Belgian socialist intervened and ensured he had valid documents to enter Belgium. His journey had taken several weeks. He headed for Brussels. There, at a meeting of the Socialist International in early February 1940, he gave the first eye-witness account in Western Europe of the terrible treatment of the Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland. One newspaper wrote: "For the European people a new world appeared of which they did not know before. Zygielbojm revealed to the world for the first time, the reality of this war." When the Nazis occupied Belgium, he fled to France; and as they entered France, he fled to the USA via Lisbon, all the while seeking to fulfil the mission his comrades in Warsaw had given him.

HORRIFIC NEWS FROM THE RESISTANCE

From 29th March 1942 until he took his own life in May 1943, aged 48, Zygielbojm lived in London, serving on the Polish Parliament-in-exile. A month before he arrived in Britain he had written to the National Council of this exiled parliament, demanding that they give a seat to the Bund. The existing Jewish representative was Ignacy Schwartzbard, a bourgeois Zionist whom Zygielbojm held in very low esteem. On a questionnaire demanded by Britain's immigration authorities on entry, Zygielbojm recorded his occupation as "glovemaker and journalist", emphasising his identity as a worker.

During those 13 months he spent in London, he bombarded political leaders, diplomats and the

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press with first-hand information from the ghettos collected through messages passed on by underground resistance operatives.

At the beginning of September, 1942, Zygielbojm was able to provide horrific details of the first use of poison gas by the Nazis in carrying out mass murder. At a large meeting organised by the Labour Party in Caxton Hall, Westminster. He said:

"I have in my hand an excerpt from a letter that a Jewish woman in one ghetto wrote to her sister in another ghetto in Poland. The letter is a shocking call to the world. The woman writes: 'My hand shakes. I cannot write, our minutes are numbered; only God knows if we will see each other again. I write and I cry; my children lament. They want so much to live... We all say goodbye to you...'"

Zygielbojm implored his audience:

"Try to imagine the people who see their nearest being dragged away to their death every day and each one knows that their turn must come. Imagine the thousands of Jewish mothers, the mothers who look at their children and know that their death is inevitable ... Imagine the great crime of methodically massacring an entire people. Each of us who understands the cruelty of the crime must be shocked by the feeling of shame that we find ourselves among the living ... if means are not found to stop the greatest crime in human history. The conscience of every person must be shaken; the serenity of those who ignore the facts must be exploded ... each of us who does not do everything possible to stop the mass slaughter will take upon themselves moral co-responsibility for the dead. In the name of the hopeless innocent people sentenced to death in the ghettos of Poland, whose hands stretched out to the world unseen, I call on all people, to all nations whose conscience is still weak, to ... force the Nazi murderers to stop the systematic massacre of a people!"

But they did not intervene. The ghetto inhabitants, once numbering more than 460,000, were reduced by starvation, disease, random shootings, and mostly by mass deportation to the death camp at Treblinka, so that by spring 1943 barely 30,000 remained alive.

The Warsaw Ghetto revolt – an astonishing guerrilla campaign waged by approximately 220 fighters aged between 13 and 40, using smuggled and improvised weapons – began on 19th April 1943. This revolt coincided with the Bermuda Conference, from 19th – 30th April, at which British and American politicians and diplomats failed to agree any plans to rescue Jews or offer sanctuary to refugees, despite their desperate circumstances. Zygielbojm received this news as a bitter blow.

The Uprising was barely reported in Britain's mainstream media; the first significant reports did not emerge here until 7th May, by which time the

Timeline of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

1939

September

Nazis occupied Poland. The Jewish population of Warsaw was 300,000.

October

After a month of relentless bombing, Warsaw capitulated.

1940

March

Easter pogroms by Poles, instigated by the Nazis. Bund militia fought back in Warsaw's first Jewish act of resistance.

November

Germans established Warsaw Ghetto. All Jews in the city were moved in. Poles had to move out. Jewish houses outside the Ghetto area were handed over, with their contents, to Poles. On 15th November the Ghetto was sealed.

1941

Schools, libraries, mutual aid societies, theatre performances, newspapers and periodicals established clandestinely.

February

First executions of people gaoled for trying to escape from the Ghetto.

Summer

Russo-German War started, heralding mass killings in former Pale of Settlement.

1942

Early in the year, Bund, with knowledge of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), set up first fighting organisation.

April

A wave of mass executions marked the Nazi decision to liquidate the Ghetto.

June

First news of mass killings of Jews and Roma in gas vans in Chelmno.

July

Germans ordered Judenrat (Jewish Council) to organise deportation of "unproductive" Jews to the East. Only one member questioned the order. Jewish police, started to deport a quota of 6,000 people a day to Treblinka. Bund Council urged people to resist and not volunteer for deportation. President of the Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide.

A Bundist, with help from a socialist railway worker, followed the train and brought back news that Treblinka was a death camp.

October

Bund joins other organisations to form the Jewish Fighting Organisation (ZOB).

December

ZOB received its first weapons, 10 pistols, from the Polish Home Army.

1943

January

Second liquidation of Ghetto started. First armed resistance. Sixty people refused to enter train truck and were all shot. More weapons were delivered by the Home Army.

March

First act of resistance by Polish fighters.

19th April

Final liquidation of Ghetto. Remaining population followed ZOB orders to hide. Battle groups from Hashomer Hatsa'ir, Bund, Dror and PPR (Polish Communist Party) shot German soldiers from all directions, driving them back.

8th May

After nearly three weeks of fighting, most of the remaining fighters, including their commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, committed suicide in the surrounded bunker at Mila 18.

10th May

The few surviving ZOB fighters left alive escaped through the sewers.

1944

Those who managed to reach the "Aryan" side continued to resist as Partisans; a small group took part in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising by the Polish underground resistance under the leadership of the Polish Home Army.



Szmul Zygielbojm with his young son, Yosl.



Arbeter Fragn (Workers' Questions), a Yiddish trade union journal edited by Szmul Zygielbojm

rebels had almost been defeated. On 10th May, Zygeilbojm received confirmation that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising had been finally extinguished, and he devised one final act of protest. In his Paddington flat during the night of 11th May, he wrote his suicide letters and ingested poison. He was pronounced dead the next day at nearby St Mary's Hospital. At the time of his suicide Zygielbojm believed that his immediate family in Poland

– his wife Manya, his children Yosl (Joseph), Rivke and Artek – had almost certainly been exterminated. He and Yosl had been separated in 1939 while trying to get from Lodz to Warsaw under a hail of bullets from the planes of Nazi invaders. For a time up to 1941 he had exchanged letters with his wife Manya who was with one son, Artek. He received news that they had survived the Nazis destruction of the Bund's Medem Sanatorium, a remarkable institution funded by trade unions for children with respiratory problems where Manya worked and Artek was staying. They had gone into hiding and later reached the Warsaw ghetto. After that he had no news. In fact, Yosl was still alive. He had somehow got to Russia, where he fought as a Red Army partisan. He returned to a devastated Poland after the war and settled later in America with his wife Adela, a slave-labour camp survivor.

In Szmul Zygielbojm's suicide letters he wrote of his desire:

that the surviving remnants of the several millions of Polish Jews could live to see, with the Polish population, the liberation that it could know in Poland, in a world of freedom and in the justice of socialism. I believe that such a Poland will arise and that such a world will come.

Three million of Poland's pre-war population of 3.3 million Jews were murdered, mostly by the Nazis, but also with help from local accomplices, some out of fear that Nazis would mete out retribution to them if they didn't collaborate, others because, like the Nazis, they saw Jews as enemies to be disposed of. Any recognition of the role played by Polish collaborators, however, has been compromised by a new law forbidding the publication and dissemination of this aspect of wartime Poland. The law was passed in February

2018 by Poland's strongly nationalist and increasingly authoritarian government led by the Law and Justice Party, initially in coalition but with an overall majority since 2015.

JEWISH LIFE AND THE RISING RIGHT

Today Jewish life is reviving in 15 Polish cities. Official figures record around 12,000 Jews but with the numbers of people discovering and embracing their part-Jewish backgrounds, real figures are at least double this number, possibly more. Over the last year, however, minority communities are increasingly feeling that an already negative atmosphere is becoming more threatening, and that includes a more open, renewed antisemitism.

Barry Smerin is a London-born Jew who has lived in Poland for the past 15 years and gives talks in schools on aspects of Polish Jewish history. He describes an increasingly authoritarian right wing government, which combines anti-elitist populism with social welfare initiatives that have strengthened its working class base, and which promotes itself as a defender of Christian principles against an alleged threat of Islamisation from an almost non-existent immigrant and refugee population. Smerin, who lives in Krakow, is very positive about the gradual revival of Jewish life in Poland, but sensitive to the changes in atmosphere and what he sees as a more fluid relationship between the conventional conservative right wing and more openly fascist organisations. He talks of more harassment and abuse of Jews at street level and also a significant increase of antisemitic sentiment in social media. With regard to the telling of history, he describes the current Polish government as trying to "have their cake and eat it." He says, "They try to avoid open, blatant actions of antisemitism, and play down the official actions of the Polish government in the late 1930s," but they are nevertheless attempting "to boost the image of the pre-war Polish nationalist organisations."

The new bill will undoubtedly have a chilling effect on what is written about the Holocaust years. As it was passing through Parliament, the Polish Prime Minister laid a wreath in memory of the Holy Cross Mountains Brigade, which collaborated with the Nazis against communists during the war.

Magdalena Koslowska is a non-Jewish academic who has recently published a book on the Bund's Youth movement in inter-war Poland. She says: "Xenophobes feel way more confident now in expressing their views. Polish Holocaust and Jewish studies scholars are targets of hate speech. The Auschwitz Museum director, the Polin Jewish Museum director, and people working in other institutions, are accused by the far right of presenting views that are not 'Polish enough' and being a so-called 'Fifth column'. Communities feel shaken, but on the other hand life goes on."

Ryszard Stemplowski was the Polish ambassador in London during the campaign mounted by Bundist survivors and younger Jewish Socialists' Group members in the early 1990s to establish a plaque in London for Zyiellbojm. He participated at the plaque unveiling and celebration of Zygielbojm's life that followed. He recalls the day as "an occasion where sadness and horror at the past

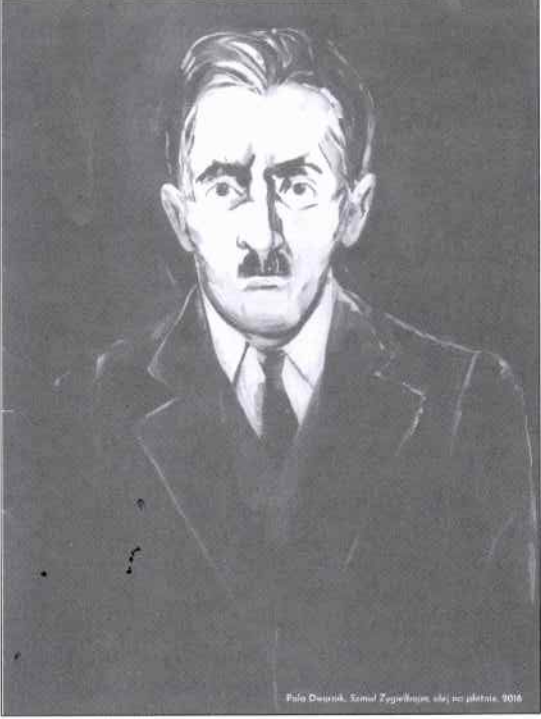
mixed with awe at Zygielbojm's courage." Zygielbojm, he said, "offered the most powerful message to the living about public responsibility in times of inhumane exposure to evil."

Stemplowski later eschewed the diplomatic life to return to academic research in Warsaw. He deplores the current Polish government's "nationalistic policies" but admits, "All my close acquaintances and friends have been taken by surprise. I, too have been caught off guard and unprepared for such a sheer chauvinistic explosion of stupidity, but I am sure it will pass into oblivion, together with the infamous politicians, if only we stand firmly against them and exercise our democratic rights."

The Left is weak in Poland and has no representation at all in the parliament. A coalition of mildly centre-left parties narrowly failed to meet the threshold of 8% for parliamentary representation – although a young "new left" grouping called Razem (Together) hopes to make some impact in the next local and parliamentary elections, and there is strong opposition to government policies by a range of liberal civil rights groups. They have been concerned especially with government interference with the judicial system, purging of the civil service and military, and also attempts to make restrictions on abortion, already draconian, even more so. Some 60,000 people took part in an ultra-nationalist march last November, celebrating Polish Independence Day, and openly fascist groups played a key mobilising role, but similar numbers took part in a women-led march a few weeks later challenging the government's anti-abortion policy. Razem activists were prominent in that.

Zygielbojm has a memorial stone within the "Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Suffering" in Warsaw. This route leads from the towering Monument to the Ghetto's heroes, unveiled in 1948 in the square bordered by Anielewicz Street and Zamenhof Street, where the Polin Jewish Museum has recently been built, to the impressive Umschlagplatz memorial, which marks the site where Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka. In the mid-1990s a further street memorial for Zygielbojm, in front of a window etching recalling his suicide note, was unveiled and the road junction nearby named Zygielbojm Square. Within the last couple of years, Polish radio and television have broadcast documentaries about his life. This year, to mark the 75th anniversary of his death, in the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), a prestigious venue visited by academics and intellectuals, tourists and many school groups, a non-Jewish Pole, Zuzana Goldfinger, has curated a poignant temporary exhibition about Zygielbojm entitled *I Can Neither Be Silent Nor Live*. Through rare photos and a well-researched text, it conveys his political philosophy, family connections and the extraordinary events of his dramatically shortened life.

The JHI was one of 23 Jewish organisations and institutions which issued a strongly worded statement in February this year, expressing: "...our outrage over the growing wave of intolerance, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism in Poland. Increasingly, hate speech has escaped the confines of the Internet to infiltrate the



A poignant painting of Szmul Zygielbojm, reflecting the fire with which the Nazis finally destroyed the Ghetto, made for a recent exhibition at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

public sphere. It has found its way into newspapers and television broadcasts, including those belonging to public media outlets. We are no longer surprised when members of local councils, parliament, and other state officials contribute anti-Semitic speech to public discourse. The number of threats and insults directed toward Poland's Jewish community is rising."

The statement added: "We know that Jews are not the only victims of Poland's current hateful climate. We stand in solidarity with all people in Poland who experience hostility and discrimination, including Roma, Muslims, refugees, people of color, Ukrainians, and members of other national, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. As we witness and experience hatred, we feel anger toward and shame in our country."

There has been a long tradition in Warsaw, stretching back to the Stalinist era, of holding dissident, alternative ceremonies to mark the anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising to those of officialdom. Given the controversial political initiatives of the current Polish government with regard to the Holocaust years, it is not surprising that this year's alternative commemoration attracted a particularly large number of participants. The moving forces behind the alternative ceremony were a leftish group called Open Republic, which works to challenge antisemitism and xenophobia, supported also by Anti-Fascist Warsaw, the Student Antifascist Committee, and Red and Red-black History Campaign

This year the assembly point chosen for the alternative ceremony was by Zygielbojm's memorial, and included renditions of Bundist songs in Yiddish by a choir from the Jacek Kuron Multicultural and Humanist Secondary School – songs that expressed and proclaimed the values and hopes that Zygielbojm embodied for every second of his life.

OCCUPYING

JULIA BARD looks at some of the painful politics surrounding memorialisation of the Holocaust

When I was in Warsaw recently, I watched a group of tourists gather on the plinth of Nathan Rapoport's famous monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes and sing the *Hatikvah*, the Israeli national anthem. This was followed by the melancholy sound of the *shofar*, the ram's horn, that we usually associate with the most solemn of Jewish festivals but which has more recently been used on Israel's independence day. These tourists were Jewish Americans, not Israelis, but they read a nationalist meaning into a memorial dedicated to the defence of a huge, vibrant, diaspora Jewish community. This meaning would have seemed baffling to the Ghetto Fighters who used every possible method of resistance against a powerful army determined to obliterate life in Europe. But ever since 1943 that history has been fought over, instrumentalised and reinterpreted by different interest groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, Polish and Soviet, Zionist, anti-Zionist and diasporist, nationalist and internationalist, religious and secular. Those changing and contested meanings are manifested in new monuments and changes to sites of memory, from ghetto streets to death camps, as well as in the behaviour of visitors to them.

There are many difficult questions being asked about how or why we memorialise the events and the victims, and indeed the bystanders and perpetrators, of the Nazi genocide. There is a large literature on "Dark tourism" – travelling to places associated with horror and death – and those who are responsible for those sites are changing their approach to the tourists they need to maintain them, and are, indeed, grappling with painful decisions about whether they should or should not be maintained at all.

This article is not addressing those wider philosophical questions. Nor is it looking at the more extreme abuses of Holocaust sites, like the Israeli teenager who was prosecuted for urinating near the ruins of the crematoria at Birkenau earlier this year, or the superficiality of the tourists taking selfies at Auschwitz on day trips to the death camp so they can proclaim their newfound understanding of the Holocaust on social media. Instead, it is looking, mainly through images of memorial sites, at how the Zionist narrative has attempted to colonise or rewrite the history of the Nazis' Final Solution and the memorialisation of the people who suffered and died, but who also resisted and found allies. From the annual March of the Living, when thousands of young people march from Auschwitz to the death camp at Birkenau, wearing and waving Israeli flags, to the moving and beautiful monuments in the Warsaw Ghetto draped with Israeli bunting and



Before: Israeli flags and a blue and white wreath obscure the Yiddish inscription on the Warsaw Heroes monument.



After my intervention: now visitors can read the Yiddish inscription. All three languages, Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew, were the fabric of Warsaw Jewish life before the Nazis. The words say: "The Jewish people – its fighters and martyrs."

ribbons, this seems like an affront to memory of the those Jews and non-Jews who fought to defend their richly diverse, multicultural, multilingual societies from the most extreme form of nationalism.

There's a series of monuments in Warsaw's former Ghetto area, entitled the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle, which follow the path along which the Jews were herded to the Umschlagplatz – the collection point or reloading point – where they were packed into cattle trucks to be deported to Treblinka. Every day, thousands of people were loaded on to the trains and by the time they arrived at the camp, the previous day's

MEMORY



One of the monuments in the Memorial Route, with the inscription in Polish and Hebrew. Out of reach of most tourists who will simply see a Polish and a Jewish language.

consignment had been murdered. The monuments are designed to resemble Jewish grave stones, and each one is inscribed with the name of one of the heroes of the Uprising. They are beautiful and stark. But unlike the Rapoport monument and all the other memorials in the former Ghetto, including the striking structure at the Umschlagplatz itself, the inscriptions are only in Polish and Hebrew. Incomprehensible to most visitors, and, most importantly, they do not tell the story in Yiddish, the language of those who lived and died there, and who had a 1,000-year history in Poland. The advisor to the Polish government on Jewish Affairs, Judaism and Holocaust Commemoration, who specifically helped with the establishment of these memorials was Israel Gutman, head of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel.

Nathan Rapoport's extraordinary monument at the centre of the former Ghetto is a huge socialist realist portrayal of muscular fighters, men, women and children, in ragged clothes, with basic weapons, around the central figure of Mordechai Anielewicz, the commander of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Below the sculpture are inscriptions in Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew, which say: "The Jewish people – its fighters and martyrs." Rapoport survived the war by escaping to the Soviet Union where he was encouraged and supported as an artist. After the war he went to Paris, and was drawn towards Zionism. His sculpture celebrates the heroism of the the Ghetto Fighters, while imbuing that heroism with the Soviet Union's role in the defeat of Nazism, and also represents the stereotype of the Zionist pioneer. A lot has been said and written about this monument but



Above: a section of the original, powerful Rapoport monument in Warsaw



The copy of Rapoport's iconic Warsaw monument at Yad Vashem in Israel, with the woman's modesty protected.

I'll just tell one story. In 1976, Yad Vashem installed an almost exact copy of it with one small difference. In the original sculpture, the single woman has her breast exposed. In the copy, as the Yad Vashem website describes it, "This detail has been covered up by clothing in the more modest version." The sight of a woman's breast, it seems, is too offensive for visitors who have come to learn about the inexpressible horrors of the Nazi genocide.

GRAMSCI, YIDDISH AND

The defence of language and culture is an integral part of our political struggle, argues **LANE SILBERSTEIN**

Far right populism is insurgent internationally. Greece and Germany, and of course the United States and Israel form a part of this wave. This is a deeply disturbing trend for Jews, particularly for those of us involved in political-cultural struggle. This worldwide phenomenon is not reducible to either cultural or economic causes, and with this essay, a mix of personal narrative and Marxist analysis, I mean to broaden the identity politics/class politics binary and introduce the idea that you cannot have one without the other.

When it was announced that fascists had been elected to the German parliament for the first time since the Holocaust, I happened to be watching a documentary about the Greek neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn. Of course, there is a real connection here, not just a coincidental one: as Germany benefits from severe austerity measures imposed on Greece, the far right in Greece capitalised on widespread disaffection to gain power.

I don't want to elide the differences between these two fascist movements: while it is deeply disturbing that the far right is growing where Nazism started, it is the Greek fascists who have clear, personal links to neo-Nazi thought and activity. But for how long can the Alternative for Germany party (AfD) separate itself from its country's past? A prominent leader of AfD, Frauke Petry, actually left the party because of its drift further to the right. The rise of fascism in Germany can't wholly be explained by its economic situation, which is far better than that of Greece.

LIBERAL IDENTITY POLITICS ARE VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION BY FASCISTS AND ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO COUNTER FASCISM.

The far right in both Greece and Germany play on xenophobia, fortifying a nationalist identity which liberals don't dare challenge for fear of losing their own bases of support. "To appeal today to the liberal mentality of the 19th century against fascism," said Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), "means appealing to what brought fascism to power." You can claim to be anti-fascist in the name of proper European identity, but once you criticise the civil society and culture that give rise to fascism, as Horkheimer does, you start speaking a language that liberals don't understand. Liberal identity politics are vulnerable to exploitation by fascists and are not equipped to counter fascism.

I understand that identity politics, for the most part, begins with something immutable: I cannot change the fact that I am a Jew. However, under capitalism I cannot fully cultivate my Jewish identity. We live under institutions that seek to put us into pre-packaged boxes that uphold the status quo. When the Jewish community claims to care

about fighting assimilation, but doesn't have the ability to discuss whiteness or class issues, and when we raise Jewish children to support imperialist policies in the US and Israel, we reproduce the forces that make us paranoid in the first place. Fascists understand that the bourgeoisie will give them institutional power in exchange for their support. Thus, identity politics and class politics are inextricably linked.

From Birthright to Jdate, Zionists have perfectly understood the necessity of fighting a cultural battle for hegemony over the Jewish community. But the Jewish left is not without its own resources. Yiddish contains a potential for a counter-hegemonic culture – there's a reason the Sheldon Adelsons of our community aren't donating to the Yiddish Book Center. And it is our duty to make these links clear, for our own sake as lovers of Yiddish who wish to preserve the language against the cycles of capitalist crises. There is no point, in my opinion, of studying Yiddish without being political.

YIDDISH IS NOT UNIQUE; IT'S JUST A LANGUAGE. BUT IT'S A LANGUAGE WITHOUT AN ARMY AND A NAVY.

In the absence of robust diaspora cultures, and (often forced) assimilation away from ethnic Jewish identity, Zionism gives diaspora Jews a shallow national identity, one that is acceptable to the liberal, civic nationalist status quo. Capitalism takes Yiddish and Ladino and gives us imperialist Jewish nationalism. I don't wish to fetishise or wax nostalgic about Yiddish. Yiddish is not unique; it's just a language. But it's a language without an army and a navy, and Yiddish culture in its circumstances, which are unique, can give Jews an important insight; the historical forces which spurred its creation and near destruction enable us to become more political and understand the material bases of reality without which we indulge in romance and myth-making.

Even politically conservative Yiddish lovers must admit that fascism dealt a considerable blow against Yiddish. But as leftwing Jews dedicated to liberation, we recognise that fascism is simply capitalism in decline, and the forces which gave rise to fascism in the first place are still on the attack against *mameloshn*: in an era of huge wealth gaps, and decreased funding for the arts and grassroots Jewish initiatives, how can Yiddish possibly compete with the power and privilege given to Hebrew? When Steve Bannon speaks at Zionist events alongside Sheldon Adelson, it should be clear that this cultural project, which seeks to place Israel and Hebrew front and centre in Jewish life, is linked to the political forces that also gave rise to Trump.

BUILDING CULTURAL BARRICADES

If capitalism in its decaying form gives rise to fascism, more mundane, everyday forces of liberalism also attack Yiddish and minority languages. Jews have been granted acceptance into Western democracies, but only through giving up cultural differences. Leftists should make our connection to diaspora languages explicit: we wish to fight against the homogenising forces of nationalism, and we can only do this through a radical economic agenda that protects diaspora cultures. The insistence on "not politicising things", or that culture will not be preserved through politicising, is an act of violence that upholds the seemingly normal domination of everyday life. Luckily, we have Jewish and (non-Jewish) historical traditions to guide us in our struggle.

SOME IDEAS ARE SO POWERFUL ... THAT THEY HAVE THE CHARACTER OF A REAL, MATERIAL FORCE.

If the left cares about Jewish liberation not just from fascism but from the forces that create fascism, we should turn to thinkers who have had first-hand experiences with it. Antonio Gramsci was imprisoned by Mussolini, experiencing conditions that would severely compromise his health and eventually kill him. He is one of the foremost Marxists when it comes to resisting in the political-cultural realm. Gramsci thought in military terms, and noted that when revolutionaries mount a "war of manoeuvre", a frontal assault against the status quo, they could very well breach preliminary defences, but then find themselves up against even sturdier "trenches" in the guise of civil society and its cultural norms. Under capitalism, the particular interests of the bourgeoisie are projected across the entire nation, resulting in even the poor calling themselves capitalists. Some ideas are so powerful, Gramsci notes, that they have the character of a real, material force.

Revolutionaries, therefore, must prepare themselves for a "war of position", shoring up their own cultural forms of resistance, engaging in ideological debates, winning the minds of the masses before mounting an assault. If Yiddish is a diasporic, cultural resistance to nationalism, capitalism makes it very hard to position our resources and organise a liberatory, "national-popular collective will".

A look at history makes the stakes of this cultural struggle clearer. Eric Hobsbawm, noted Jewish Marxist historian, believed that German culture and civil society during the 1918 Revolution was ready for full liberation from the forces of capitalism. Germany's Social Democratic Party (the SPD), one of the biggest socialist

movements in the world at that time, had made tremendous inroads in building its own proletarian culture. As scholar Peter Pulzer writes, many Jews were active with the SPD:

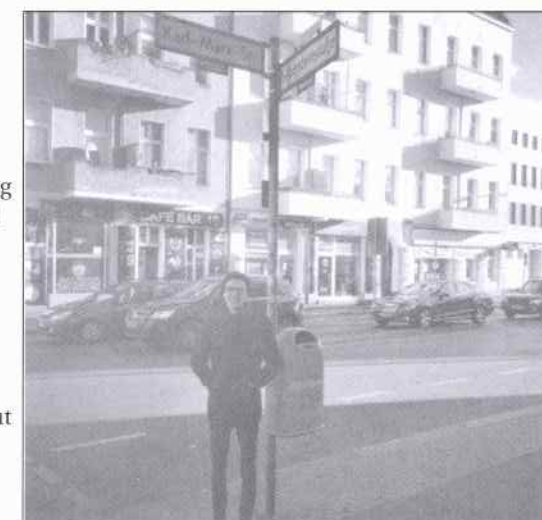
Those [Jews], on the other hand, who saw in a new social order, secular and egalitarian, the solvent of Jewish-Gentile conflicts that liberalism and nationalism had failed to provide, also saw in the SPD the vehicle of their salvation. They joined the party, not because of its day-to-day opposition to prejudice and discrimination, but because of its vision of a future in which the grounds for this prejudice and discrimination would have ceased to exist.

Despite its strong cultural institutions, the SPD failed to confront the military ethos of modern Germany. Indeed, some Social Democrats betrayed the 1918 Revolution, and had the *Freikorps* – predecessors to Nazi stormtroopers – kill the Jewish revolutionary firebrand Rosa Luxemburg. Hitler would gain prominence only five years later.

Here I am, pictured in Berlin, under a street that bears my surname. It's named after Raphael Silberstein, a Jewish socialist and doctor who dedicated his life to treating proletarian and immigrant patients. The streets in Berlin named after Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Walter Benjamin are downtown and more prominent; Silbersteinstrasse is way out east, in an ungentrified neighbourhood still populated mostly by immigrants.

It means so much to me that this obscure socialist, the nephew of Eduard Bernstein, rival of Luxemburg (and more on the right-wing side of the SPD), gives his name to a street in the homeland of the Nazis. What Jewish institutions here in the US are trying to name a street after Rose Schneiderman, the Jewish socialist feminist whose comrades died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, and who helped secure women the right to vote? The crumbling of socialist cultural bulwarks is what allows Chelsea Clinton to write about labour leader Clara Lemlich without noting she was an ardent communist.

A Jewish community that does not respect the diaspora as a place of legitimate struggle, that does not stand in solidarity with others, is in fact a companion to the rise of fascism. The same mindset that demands fealty to Zionist claims of



A JEWISH COMMUNITY THAT DOES NOT RESPECT THE DIASPORA AS A PLACE OF LEGITIMATE STRUGGLE, THAT DOES NOT STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH OTHERS, IS IN FACT A COMPANION TO THE RISE OF FASCISM.

land and borders, alienating us from neighbours, also becomes apparent in our daily lives and institutions, in a false consciousness in the diaspora marked by loyalty to capitalism and US nationalism. We no longer have leaders who can present a vision for a better future, much less the tools to get there. When rabbis are, on average, the highest paid clergy in the US but also the most liberal, and millionaires sit on the boards of Jewish non-profits meant to help the downtrodden, we inhabit what Marx called bourgeois socialism: "only from the point of view of the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for us." (By 1917, there were seven different editions of the Communist Manifesto in Yiddish and one in Ladino.) Those Jews with historical initiative, those organic intellectuals whose mettle was tested in struggle rather than five years of rabbinical school, were Yiddish- and Ladino-speaking socialists. They were dealt a huge blow by the Holocaust, but are still being repressed by capitalism and Zionism, and their attendant hegemonic forces.



The house where the Bund was founded

It was in this spirit that some Jewish comrades and myself from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the largest socialist organisation in the US since World War II, created the Jewish Solidarity Caucus, and wrote a platform calling for defence of diaspora Jewish languages through socialism. We must wage war in both culture and politics; you cannot do one without the other. We have been working closely with the Workmen's Circle, one of the last, continuously operating outposts of historic Jewish leftism in North America. The fate of the Workmen's Circle is the fate of the Jewish left: from a membership of 84,000 operating in dozens of locations, they now have 11,000 and operate in eight cities.

The Workmen's Circle and the Jewish Solidarity Caucus owe their creation and political outlook in part to the Jewish Labour Bund, a mass movement of Jewish workers that once boasted tens of thousands of members across the world. The Bund's 120th anniversary was celebrated on 7th October 2017. On that day in 1897, under illegal circumstances in the historically Jewish city of Vilna, Lithuania – where Jewish presence preceded

christendom in the 15th century – which became the Czarist Pale of Settlement, 13 Jewish radicals met in an attic in a small farmhouse. Some of them were workers, some of them *yeshiva bokhers* and middle class intellectuals – they were entirely men – and formed what came to be known as the Jewish Labour Bund of Russia and Poland (and later Lithuania).

Like the Reform Jews of Western Europe, influenced by the Enlightenment, who set out on a mission to "scientifically" understand Judaism and justify their participation in the emancipated, liberal world, the Bund came about due to their own specific historical context and their oppression as both Jews and workers.

However, their mission was different from the liberals several generations ago in Germany. They sought to understand their world, surely, but they were compelled to radically alter it: to upend normally accepted paradigms, and to chart a radical path forward for true emancipation – not just for Jews, but for all the toiling masses. The tools of Marxist agitation gave them this ability to understand and change their circumstances. And they utilised Yiddish as a resource in the war of position. They understood political-cultural struggle many years before Gramsci put it into theory.

The Bund wrote in 1907 that they have, "created a Yiddish culture ... The first step of the Jewish workers' movement, the transition from propaganda circles to mass agitation, begins by putting the Yiddish language first ... The Jewish masses have not received any cultural legacy from the upper classes [of the Jewish community], neither literature nor art. They have to create this legacy entirely on their own account."

The Bund's commitment to Yiddish predates their official establishment: two years before the Bund was founded, Jewish socialists established *zhargonishe komitetn* ("jargon committees") and



Yiddish is not Hebrew

Yiddish reading circles. And only a year after the Bund was founded, in 1898, they opened their first bookstore, where they sold works that weren't purely ideological. It can be argued that the entire Yiddishist movement is indebted to the Bund, which put national-cultural autonomy into real-life practice. Even some Orthodox Jews, who wouldn't find themselves represented by the Bund, such as the poet Yisroel Shtern, recognised the Bund's contributions to Yiddish culture. (One of the last Bundists in Israel, Yitzhak Luden, passed away in November 2017.)

Today, as in the late 19th century, leftists have to fight simultaneously against liberals who cannot represent our interests as well as against the right. The latter, perhaps more so than liberals, realise the importance of fighting in the sphere of culture: recently, at the Center for Jewish History (CJH), a

supposedly neutral institution, the right engaged in a campaign of delegitimisation against the new executive director, David Myers, who has the gall to criticise Israel. The embarrassment of the Jewish left is now being broadcast in the New York Times: the American Jewish Historical Society, which is also housed at the CJH, cancelled the reading of a play by David Fishback due to right-wing pressure. The Folksbiene, one of only a few remaining Yiddish-language theatre companies, which took its name from the SPD's *Volksbuehne*, stages nationalist plays and pays homage to Zionism. But despite its failures, we can also look back to the SPD to try and understand their cultural institutions, as Adam J Sacks, writing in the new, popular socialist publication Jacobin does in an article entitled "When Social Democracy was Vibrant" (11th June 2017).

If we consider ourselves lovers of Yiddish, we must understand the world historical mechanisms of capitalism and nationalism that have led to the creation of a Jewish state which repressed Yiddish; academics interested in Yiddish must be aware that these are the forces that keep their research niche and Yiddish translations lacking. We cannot hope to preserve Yiddish and Ladino culture by endearing ourselves to a ruling class that has no interest in supporting diaspora languages; a ruling class, moreover, that continues to create crises that put these languages at risk.

As we remember the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Bund, the left cannot allow the Center for Jewish History, its sister organisation YIVO, and other Yiddish and cultural institutions, to ossify Jewish history, making it a "memorial tourist agency" as Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg write in *Revolutionary Yiddishland*. We must refashion for our own purposes what Yiddish professor David Roskies' calls a "usable past" – we must plant the seeds for a liberated Jewish future. We can do this in our cultural practices.

Very few in our community are willing to challenge the idols of nationalism and capitalism. What organ of the liberal Jewish press doesn't treat these ideologies as foregone conclusions? Socialism and internationalism are still seen as debates rather than a positive vision to build towards. Brossat and Klingberg quote Tucholsky, noting that, "any revolutionary energy that does not find the means to inflect and alter the course of history is condemned to be 'realized' in culture," and become "domesticated." The issues and politics that compelled Jews to found the Bund must be considered a living example, rather than another prop in the status quo's cultural hegemony, which is upheld by even well-meaning liberals.

We must be critical of the ways in which capitalism creates "acceptable" Jewish identities, because more nostalgia about the Bund will be unbearable. We must alter even those institutions which claim to act in the Bund's legacy, who practice toothless *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and who cannot comprehend the necessity of a war of position.

In *Jewish Currents*, activist and rabbi Benay Lappe is quoted in a recent edition as saying, "Judaism in 100 years will be unrecognizable to us. But that doesn't scare me." I would put this another way: that Jewish life in 100 years will be *too*

recognisable is precisely what should scare us. Depoliticised Jewishness should scare us. Jewish ritual and identity that conform to US and Zionist nationalism should scare us. When the podcast "Judaism Unbound" looks to Silicon Valley and venture capitalists for inspiration, this should scare us! Concerning Yiddish specifically, Jewish Currents also published an odd piece: in the guise of fighting the Occupation, a writer called on diaspora Jews to give up studying Yiddish in favour of Hebrew in order to better understand Israeli politics and join the fight against right wing Zionism. The irony is clear: the logic of Zionism is so thorough and central in Jewish life, that, in the name of anti-Zionism, this author wants us to give up one of the few cultural-political bulwarks *against* Zionism.

WE WISH TO FIGHT AGAINST THE HOMOGENISING FORCES OF NATIONALISM, AND WE CAN ONLY DO THIS THROUGH A RADICAL ECONOMIC AGENDA THAT PROTECTS DIASPORA CULTURES

Contemporary fascists in Greece, Germany and even here in the US also find themselves confronted by civil society's trenches. Golden Dawn's politicians are often arrested, AfD can't form a coalition in the Bundestag, and Trump's immigration bans are shot down. As Marxists we know that the economic crises under liberal capitalism organically create these fascist movements. Capitalism is at war with itself. These crises might give the left opportunities to rally our own forces, but we're starting from an historical low point. We also know that public opinion, despite nostalgia for political struggle that preceded us, is rarely on our side; most of the country did not actually agree with the civil rights protests, for example.

But the self-identified Jewish Resistance is on the move. Many Jews in DSA are close to groups like IfNotNow, a movement seeking to end Jewish American support for the Occupation of Palestine, and Jewish Voice for Peace, which is highlighting the connections between US and Israeli police. These movements of young, energetic Jews must seize the moment to begin laying the groundwork for a liberated Jewish culture; to use the words of a 15-year-old yiddish-speaking communist as a metaphor, "Tates, mames, kinderlekh, boyen barikadn." [Fathers, mothers, children, build barricades.] A Marxist analysis can show us that the support for occupation grows out of the undemocratic nature of Jewish institutions which are holding on to bourgeois respectability and nationalism. What Gramsci teaches us is that where Jews support the Occupation of Palestinian land, they will also wage a cultural war against diaspora languages. We must build our cultural barricades.

Find out more

You can read the platform of the Jewish Solidarity Caucus, here: <https://medium.com/jewish-socialism/dsa-jewish-solidarity-caucus-a26f94f9212a>

Lane Silberstein is a member of NYC DSA, and has written for Jacobin. He wishes to thank Samuel Greenberg for his editing.

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MISSING LINKS

ANTISEMITISM AND THE LEFT: ON THE RETURN OF THE JEWISH QUESTION

by Robert Fine and Philip Spencer
Oxford University Press, 2017

So much has been written recently about antisemitism and the left, which is lacking rigour, that I was looking forward to reading this work. If ignorance and tolerance of antisemitism have affected thinking and practice within the left, most of whose members pride themselves on their antiracism, as the authors claim, perhaps they can offer an explanation.

Fine and Spencer begin by stating that the "Jewish question", as traditionally posed, concerns the harm Jews supposedly inflict on humanity. This "harm" can be economic, such as usury, political, such as betrayal and conspiracy, and social, such as exclusivity. They go on, firstly, to ask the reasons for this, for example, the presence of restrictive conditions historically, and Jews' "tribal assumptions". Secondly they outline proposed "solutions" – benevolent ones like improving their social, political conditions or moral conditions and malign ones like denial of rights, expulsion and ultimately eradication.

The authors contrast what they call two faces of universalism. The first is emancipatory, and sees a traditionally repressed "other" as "a human being like ourselves". The second is restrictive, and requires some sort of test to be passed or something to be renounced before qualifying as a member of the universal whole. Jewish experiences have been equivocal: on the one hand, universalism has acted as a stimulus to Jewish emancipation; on the other there is a tradition of regarding the Jews as an example, even the prime example, of a group whose peculiarities must be overcome for it to merit admission to universal society.

Most of the work illustrates how this opposition has played out ever since the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Fichte opposed Jewish emancipation on the grounds that the Jews acted as a "state grounded in the hatred of the entire human race ... spreading through Europe and terribly oppressing its citizens". Moses Mendelssohn rejected the idea that the Jews needed "improvement" or that there was anything in Jewish law that was not compatible with universalism, and called on Jews to remain "stiff necked" in the face of demands for them to abandon "harmful" laws and customs.

The classic critique of the Jewish question was that of Karl Marx in his notorious early essays. Fine and Spencer point out that these were written as part of a debate with Bruno Bauer and that some of the undoubtedly antisemitic phrases traditionally ascribed to Marx echo rhetorically what Bauer was saying, only for Marx to add his own rejoinder. For example where Bauer says that "Money is the jealous God of the Jews", Marx retorts that the God of the Jews has become the God of the World; in other words, instead of criticising Jews, Bauer should really be criticising capitalism. The distinctive contribution of Marx, say the authors, was to dissociate the right to rights of all human beings from any particular communal worth, to justify the right of Jews to emancipation without any form of the "Jewish

question" as posed above. Nonetheless, an influential critique of capitalism has continued to explain antisemitism in terms of the harm inflicted by Jews on society. August Bebel's remark that antisemitism was the socialism of fools was a reaction to this.

The growth of nationalism in the 19th century, and the tendency of the socialist movement within the multicultural Austrian and the Russian empires to organise in national groups, with the assumption that Jewish people would assimilate into those groups in the areas where they lived, posed a particular challenge to Jews. The authors sketch out the views of Lenin and Stalin in distinguishing between the "nationalism of the oppressors" and the "nationalism of the oppressed", and that, given the assumption that without both a territory and a language, the Jews were defined as "rootless cosmopolitans". However, they do not devote one word to the Jewish workers' movement in the Russian empire, the Bund, which argued forcibly that it was possible to be Jewish and socialist, and that there were solutions, such as national cultural autonomy and *doykayt* ("here-ness") which were applicable to groups living within wider collectivities.

Members of the Frankfurt School of philosophers and social theorists, they say, were slow to come to terms with the specificity of antisemitism. Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* tried to understand how the different elements that lead to antisemitism were combined and recombined, and how older elements (such as religious forms) could still be present in newer "scientific" antisemitism (such as in Nazi Germany). The Nazis made the Jews into the ultimate victims of their paranoia and sought to justify this by propaganda about supposed Jewish malignant traits.

Hannah Arendt investigated how and why old prejudices were reworked and re-presented in modern antisemitism. She also considered that the Enlightenment provided the theoretical basis for modern antisemitism on the grounds that it enabled the Jew to be described as the "other" as opposed to the universal, although she did, in some of her writings, point to "an excessively 'intimate relationship' between antisemitic phantasies and the realities of Jewish life" (the authors say she was thinking of the involvement of some Jews in shady financial dealings). In her writings on the Holocaust, and in particular on the Eichmann trial, Arendt sought to look at Jewish responses to antisemitism. She says it matters whether the Holocaust is seen, on the one hand, as the ultimate in a long series of historical persecutions of the Jews, or, on the other hand, as a crime against humanity as such. She charged that the prosecution in the Eichmann trial failed to understand that it was humanity, not just the Jewish people, which was "grievously hurt and endangered". There were three responses of Jews to the rise of antisemitism: assimilationism; Zionism; and cosmopolitanism. Assimilationists, who thought they only had to lose their "Jewish" traits, had never really got to grips with the modernity of antisemitism, which they saw as an old prejudice that would die out with education. Zionism was a

IN THE ARGUMENT

response to the failure of assimilationists to face up to the attacks mounted by antisemites, but she was critical of Zionists for treating antisemitism as a "generalised fixation" which could not be changed. In an essay written in 1943, she said that Zionism, which derived from the era of exclusionary nationalisms, was in danger of becoming the same sort of exclusionary movement. What Arendt argued for, say Fine and Spencer, was a cosmopolitan vision in defence of universalism and as a critique of Jewish chauvinism. But at the same time she was critical of an abstract cosmopolitanism that existed only in the realm of ideas. "Our 'cosmopolitan existence', she wrote ... does not lie in dissociating ourselves from our particular identities and background but in nurturing the capacity to share a common world with others, to place oneself in the shoes of others, to see the world from the viewpoint of others."

The Jewish question changed after the Holocaust. This can be seen in the writings of the leading representative of critical theory, Jürgen Habermas, who has sought to face up to the legacy of genocidal antisemitism by looking at how it has been linked with the rise of nationalism and whether post- and supra-national formations, such as a pluralistic, multicultural political institutions and communities and an international human rights framework, accompanied by a constitutional patriotism are appropriate contemporary responses. However, particularly from a German perspective, there can be a confusion between what *ought* to happen and what *does* happen. Fine and Spencer say that those influenced by this current of thought may therefore see antisemitism as a problem of the past, although Habermas himself places an ongoing demand on Germans and other Europeans to continue to tell the story of the Holocaust first and foremost for the sake of the victims but also as a means of "reassuring ourselves of our own political identity".

At this point, Fine and Spencer could have drawn a conclusion that is very relevant to current debates: that the Left needs to adopt the line of Marx and Arendt, that Jews should have no more and no fewer rights than any other people, and should not have to choose between assimilating and preserving their Jewish identity, however they wish to describe it. To treat Jews differently from any other group is antisemitic and should be criticised as such. Equally, nations should be subject to the same human rights framework as sketched out by Habermas and his followers. When a state is responsible for violating human rights, it should be criticised, Israel no more and no less than others. When it violates of human rights, such as by shooting unarmed demonstrators, it should be criticised without any suspicion that this criticism is antisemitic. Of course, if the criticism is linked with a specifically antisemitic proposition (say Israel shoots demonstrators because of some Jewish sense of exclusivity) it is antisemitic and should be condemned.

However, the authors end their work by giving some contemporary examples of what they call a distorted universalism. For example, they criticise the late Tony Judt who wrote that the Holocaust was

"radical evil" and that "today, when Israel is exposed to international criticism for its misdemeanour of Palestinians and its occupation of territory conquered in 1967, its defenders prefer to emphasise the memory of the Holocaust. Robust criticism of Israel doesn't just arouse antisemitism. It is antisemitism." They then quote in the same breath French author Alain Badiou as condemning a "powerful and reactionary current in contemporary political life which speaks in the name of 'the Jews' and sees 'antisemitism everywhere'." This "has constructed a 'victim ideology' around the sign of 'the Jew'." Instead Badiou places himself as part of the tradition of "universalism which he traces back to St Paul, and goes on to say, "Badiou draws a parallel between the fact that 'Hitler once took power in the name of a politics whose categories included the term 'Jew' and the fact that Israel has taken power in the name of a politics whose categories also include the term 'Jew'." I find these formulations to be in a troublesome grey area, although Badiou himself would deny that he is an antisemite. In any case, Badiou should not be cited in the same breath as prominent Jewish academics such as Tony Judt or Judith Butler who have been critical of Zionism and its effects but who are certainly not antisemitic. But Fine and Spencer do not make that distinction.

In the final chapter the authors develop this argument, picking up three strands of what they see as contemporary left discourse on Israel: accusing it firstly of genocide; secondly of apartheid; and thirdly as a threat to world peace. Together, they say, by representing Israel as the worst form of state, the Jewish nation as the worst form of nationalism and Jews who identify with Israel or refuse to condemn it as the worst accomplices, these have led to the return of the Jewish question. Their conclusion is that the "new antisemitism" echoes the old by focusing on the "exclusion of the Jewish nation from world society". This constitutes the "return of the Jewish question".

This requires unpicking. If Israel is held to the same standard, no more and no less, as other countries, it is hard to see why this would be antisemitic. Contemporary Israeli practice in its dealings with the Palestinians can be criticised without one being accused of antisemitism. Secondly, stating that Israel is the "Jewish nation", in other words the nation state of the Jewish people, is a contention which the authors introduce without any recognition that this is a hotly contested argument and that many Jews do not see Israel as the centre of Jewish life nor themselves as members of a group with Israel at its centre, although they would not deny its importance, positively or negatively, in Jewish life. Many readers of *Jewish Socialist* would argue that the fact that Israel pretends to speak on behalf of Jews in other countries poses a challenge to Jews in the diaspora. However Fine and Spencer do not consider these arguments.

There is a need for real theoretical rigour in distinguishing what is or is not antisemitic. This book offers a promising theoretical framework. But the authors fail to follow that through.

Michael Heiser



Hannah Arendt, controversial chronicler of modern antisemitism

THE PUSH AND PULL OF TRADITION

THE WOMEN'S BALCONY

Dir: Emil Ben-Shimon, 2017

MENASHE

Dir: Joshua Z Weinstein, 2017

Two films at the 2017 Jewish film festival in London had very different approaches to ultra-Orthodox Jews.

The Women's Balcony is a 2016 Israeli comedy set in Jerusalem. A small traditional Sephardi community suffers an accident when the upper balcony, used by the women in the congregation, collapses on to the men below, seriously injuring the rabbi's wife and causing the rabbi to go into a coma. The congregation needs to raise the money to restore the ruined synagogue but they find it hard going as they are a poor community. By chance, a certain Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Rabbi, David, comes across the synagogue and offers his support, ostensibly to raise the money. But he has different ideas and not only imposes a different and more rigorous religious practice but also gets the synagogue restored without a women's balcony – the women have to make do with a small hut nearby. The men of the congregation appear to be willing to go along with this. However, the women put paid to his scheme by picketing Rabbi David's *yeshiva* (seminary) and temporarily leaving their homes, so their husbands have to fend for themselves.

The screenwriter, Shlomit Nehama, grew up in the Bukharin quarter of Jerusalem, which she remembers as more tolerant than it is now, as it has become totally *Haredi*. She has said that her goal was "to tell the story of the moderate people who are forced to deal with growing religious extremism". The film's box office success in Israel shows that it struck a chord.

One interesting point is that the Haredi characters speak Yiddish amongst themselves, and this acts as a way of differentiating them from the non-orthodox characters. In the logic of the film, the use of Yiddish in this way serves as a device to alienate one community from the other.

This distinguishes it from the 2017 film, *Menashe*, which is set in the New York Hassidic community and is almost wholly in Yiddish. The main character is the eponymous Menashe Lustig, and the film concerns his struggles to bring up his young son in the community when he is widowed. According to rabbinical decree, the young boy

cannot live with his father, a lowly supermarket cashier, but must instead live with his richer uncle, who does not get on with Menashe. The film follows Menashe's efforts to chart his own path with the boy, fraught with tragicomic incidents, mostly resulting from Menashe's *shlemiel*-like nature. Initially he does not wish to take another wife, but by the end of the film, it seems that he has changed his mind and bowed to the reality of wishing to stay in the community.

Menashe Lustig, the main actor, was known for his Yiddish YouTube videos, where he speaks on the phone in a fast Hassidic Yiddish. The other main actor, the boy, is played by Ruben Niborski, whose Yiddish accent is more like that used by secular standard Yiddish speakers.

Joshua Z Weinstein, the film's director, is a secular Jew who has previously made ethnographic documentaries, and this informs the approach to this film. In an interview by Severine Danflous in 2017, Weinstein says that his film portrays "the negative as well as the positive aspects of the characters and of Hassidism". The former must include bowing to the will of the Rabbi and the refusal to shake a woman's hand. I would have liked a slightly more critical directorial approach and perhaps a bit more rebellion from the principal character. However, as Menashe Lustig has made clear in interviews, he wishes to stay within the Hassidic community, so an ending that portrayed him as leaving it, would presumably be not feasible in his case.

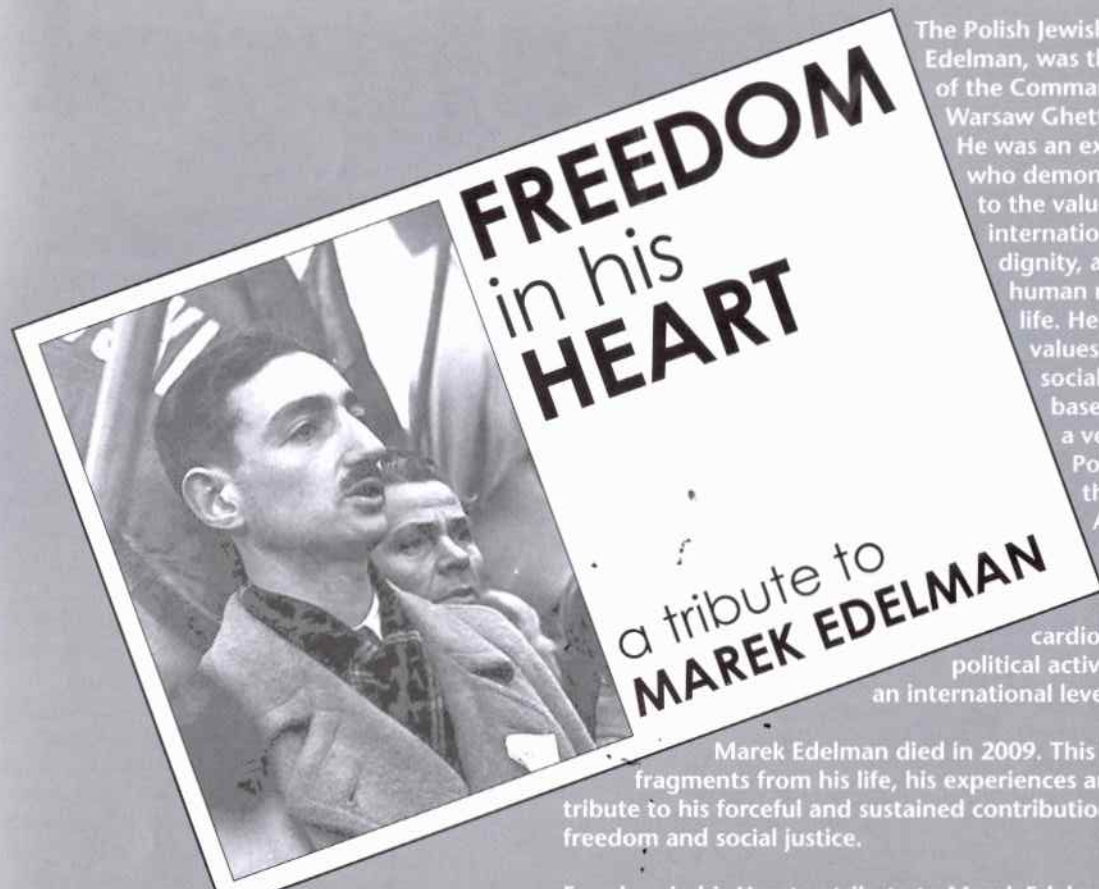
Menashe was trailed as the first Yiddish feature film since the 1930s. Comparing it with films made in Poland and the USA in that period, such as *Yidl mitn Fidl*, is a reminder that the latter contained a whole world of Yiddish speakers, both religious and secular. Now filmmakers seem to be attracted to the ultra-orthodox community, but I would like to see contemporary films made in Yiddish, dealing with secular Yiddish speakers, too.

There was much more Yiddish in *Menashe* than in *The Women's Balcony* but ultimately the latter film, for all its laughs, packed more of a polemical punch.

Michael Heiser



The Women's Balcony



The Polish Jewish socialist, Marek Edelman, was the last surviving member of the Command Group that led the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943. He was an extraordinary individual who demonstrated his commitment to the values of freedom, socialism, internationalism and human dignity, and campaigned for human rights, throughout his life. He grew up with these values in the Bund – a Jewish socialist and trade union-based movement that played a very significant role in Poland especially towards the end of the 1930s. After the war Edelman stayed in Poland. He continued to fight for the lives of others as a cardiologist and renewed his political activism at both a local and an international level.

Marek Edelman died in 2009. This booklet presents fragments from his life, his experiences and his writings, and pays tribute to his forceful and sustained contribution to struggles for freedom and social justice.

Freedom in his Heart: a tribute to Marek Edelman is available from Jewish Socialist Publications, JS, BM3725 London WC1N 3XX for £3 plus 50p p&tp

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What we stand for

JEWISH VOLUNTEERS, THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by Gerben Zaagsma
Bloomsbury, £85

Twenty years ago I was looking through "Memorials of the Spanish Civil War", an official publication of the International Brigade Association. At the back of the book was a Roll of Honour of those who died in Spain. The list started, M Aaronberg, Sheffield, [killed] February 1937, Jarama; N Abramson, London, April 1938; Gandesa... And on it went: Dave Buffman, Leeds; Ralph Cantorovitch, Manchester; M Davidovitch, London; Sydney Edelman, London... On and on went the list, and every page included several people with identifiable Jewish names. Of course many, possibly most, Jews don't have clearly identifiable names, so hidden on the list, I guessed, would be many others, giving a Jewish presence out of all proportion to their numbers in Britain. What was this all about?

Gradually I pieced together the story, which included finding out about the Jewish Robert Goodman on our own Nottingham memorial, and getting to know one of the local Jews who survived, Lionel Jacobs, originally a Londoner. The first and last internationals to die in Spain were Jewish. There were many Jews from Palestine who fought; there was even a Yiddish-speaking brigade. Why was this not written about in any of the thousands of books about the Civil War? And then I ran up against Bill Alexander, the Communist International Brigade (IB) veteran who was the secretary of the Association, a former commander of the British Battalion. Bill said there were no Jews or non-Jews in the International Brigade, only anti-fascists. He would not help me find out more, and few of the fast-diminishing group of survivors were keen to do anything Bill opposed! At the same time, as Zaagsma remarks "...many mainstream Jewish publications felt little political affinity with the Spanish Republic's Popular Front government," perhaps feeling that these leftist premature anti-fascists were a *shande far di goyim* (an embarrassment, to be hidden from the gentile world).

So there I left it, adding information when I came across it. One talk to the Leeds Jewish History group brought out many relatives and friends of those who had fought, whose names were not Jewish, and former tailoring workers remembered the collections in the Burton factories for "Milk for Spain". There's not much written on Jews in the Aid to Spain campaign either. In Glasgow, at Limmud (an annual Jewish learning/cultural event), someone mentioned the lone Glaswegian man who volunteered for the wrong side. The person was hushed by those attending the meeting. It was still a source of shame. After Bill Alexander's death, more information

emerged. The most extensive research was done by Martin Sugarman, complete with what is likely to be the nearest to a list of the Jews who fought in Spain (accessible at <https://www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/spanjews.pdf>). Sugarman himself is not a Marxist, far from it, and holds that all the 150 or so Jews who volunteered from Palestine were by definition "Zionists", a position their continuing organisation rejected completely. Indeed, as Zaagsma notes, those Palestinian Jews who left for Spain were considered by Zionists to have deserted the Jewish cause at a time of Jewish-Arab unrest in Palestine. Credit to Sugarman for his detective work though.

But who is a Jew? Some of those who fought rejected their Jewishness; most were secular, but there were people with a strongly religious background and there were even some Zionists, one of whom was the American Rabbi-Hyman Katz. Others were Jews on the run, Jews who did not want it known they were Jews and, probably, some were labelled Jewish who never were. A Catalan book I saw listed a Nottingham Communist miner, Frank Ellis, as Jewish. Maybe – there are many Jewish Ellises, including some who did go to Spain – but he never mentioned being Jewish to me or to anyone else I've asked!

But now, for the first time, too little, too late, is a book in English on Jews in the Spanish Civil War. Yes, it is £85. That is not a typo. The "intention [of the book] is to focus on the question of how a particular set of Jewish military experiences, both actual and remembered, became an expression of processes of emancipation and validation that were so integral to the project of Jewish modernity." This immediately makes clear, if the price alone does not tell you, that the book is aimed at the academic library market.

Zaagsma gives his estimate of the number of International Brigade members as between 35,000 and 40,000, their numbers starting to decline from spring 1937 due to high casualties and the build-up of the formal Republican army. How many were Jewish is still debated, but perhaps 6 - 7,000. The percentage, per country, was roughly in proportion to those Jews who were in the Communist Party. The author suggests that of the international volunteers, around 30% of the Americans, between 7% and 10% of the British, and 40% of the Poles were Jews.

Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War, however, concentrates on the Polish Jewish Naftali Botwin Company. Zaagsma is able to read Yiddish and draws on the daily papers of the Jewish left. He carefully notes that their readership was transnational, thus "both [Paris-based] *Naye Prese* and *Parizer Haynt* were also sold in Belgium" to Jews from Poland who had fled west

Jewish

Brigadistas

to avoid repression. In Spain, Yiddish seems to have been extensively used as a lingua franca among Jewish fighters, and *Frayhayts Kemfer* was "the first Yiddish front newspaper published by Jewish soldiers who fight, gun in hand, against racism and anti-Semitism for the defence of culture in general and Jewish culture in particular." Zaagsma reports on the difficulty in producing a Yiddish paper on the front line, as there were no Yiddish printing presses in Spain. At first it looked as if the paper would have to be produced in the archaic Rashi script when the only Hebrew type to be found was in a Barcelona museum.

The Botwin Company was created after campaigns by Communist Jews to have a specifically Jewish company, and followed a change of policy to have language-based units. It was formed on 12th December 1937, partly for propagandist reasons and partly to solidify "the struggle against fascism, anti-Semitism and racist theory". None of these were absent from Spain, and elements of the latter also appeared in the ranks of some anti-fascist fighters. Naftali Botwin, for whom the company was named, had been executed in 1925 in Lvov for killing a police agent.

The Company had a major propaganda role in the war, but its military life was a disaster. In its first action, only 20 out of 120 soldiers survived. Internationals were often used as shock troops and had higher rates of casualties. Again and again the ranks were filled and commanders replaced as people were killed or wounded. Not all were Jews; some were Poles, some were Spanish, and two were Arabs. The last battle, near Ebro, before the demobilisation of the International Brigades "resulted in the near-total destruction of the company. According to Emmanuel Mink [its wounded commander], all who had not been wounded in battle were executed after being surrounded by the enemy." The precise number of Jews who fought with the company is not known, but appears to have been around 160 - 170.

Six issues of the Yiddish magazine Botwin were produced, whose readership included Jewish volunteers throughout Spain. The contents were largely military and political, but Zaagsma describes an article about a concert by a *khazan* (cantor) for Jewish and Spanish soldiers, where the latter wondered about the similarity between the liturgical melodies and their own musical heritage. "Jewish Botwinists explained to them the Sephardic origins, and thus the 'Spanish' roots of the music the *khazan* had sung."

Zaagsma goes on to analyse the Yiddish press of Paris and its coverage of Spain, including aid projects involving the Communists and also the Bundist youth organisation, Tsukunft. The Botwin example was used to inspire. It still does. It's hard not to look at the Company's banner, which says: "*Far ayer und undzer frayheit*" (For your and our freedom) without thinking, yes, that is what it is all about.

Many of the Jewish volunteers in Spain were

unable to go home after the Civil War. Some were interned in refugee camps in France. Some ended up in the Resistance. Some were arrested, shipped off to concentration camps and murdered. Zaagsma moves forward in time to discuss how "Spain" continued to be treated in the Yiddish press. In Poland, a number of Jewish Brigadiers had to leave during the antisemitic

purges of the Gomulka era in the late 1960s, and there was an international campaign to try to reinstate their cancelled Polish pension rights, involving the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in America. A number of these Polish veterans were now in Israel, and tensions between survivor groups appeared over the 1972 Tel Aviv Conference of Jewish Fighters as some veterans internationally were loathe to publicly criticise a "socialist" country over the pension issue.

As time went on there was more discussion of the role of Jews in the Civil War. The American journal *Jewish Currents* and the veteran Albert Prago were to the fore here, though not without opposition to this particularism. In 1988 a plaque commemorating the Jewish volunteers was opened at the Fuencarral cemetery in Madrid, where a number of the fallen are buried. The plaque echoes the Botwin slogan, commemorating those who fell in Spain "in defence of your and our freedom". A further memorial was built at the Montjuïc cemetery in Barcelona, where more Jewish fighters are buried, close to that of Lluís Companys, the Catalan leader murdered by Franco. The earliest memorial, however, was in Beit Shemesh in Israel, dedicated by Chaim Herzog, at last officially recognising that the Palestinian Jews who fought in Spain were doing the right thing as Jews and for Jews.

Gerben Zaagsma does a service in recording this important part of Jewish antifascist history. Despite my earlier comment on his book, he leaves exclusive academic language behind and the book speeds up. Unfortunately there are only a handful of references to Britain and volunteers from the UK. It would have been wonderful to have had a book about British Jewish volunteers: those who appear on our memorials; those who fought and survived; those who raised funds; those who took in Spanish and Basque refugees. And to have had it while some of them were still around.

Ross Bradshaw



MANY OF THE JEWISH VOLUNTEERS IN SPAIN WERE UNABLE TO GO HOME AFTER THE CIVIL WAR. SOME WERE INTERNED IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN FRANCE. SOME ENDED UP IN THE RESISTANCE. SOME WERE ARRESTED, SHIPPED OFF TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS AND MURDERED.

COMMISSARS ON THE FRONT LINE

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by
Sigmund Stein
Out of print

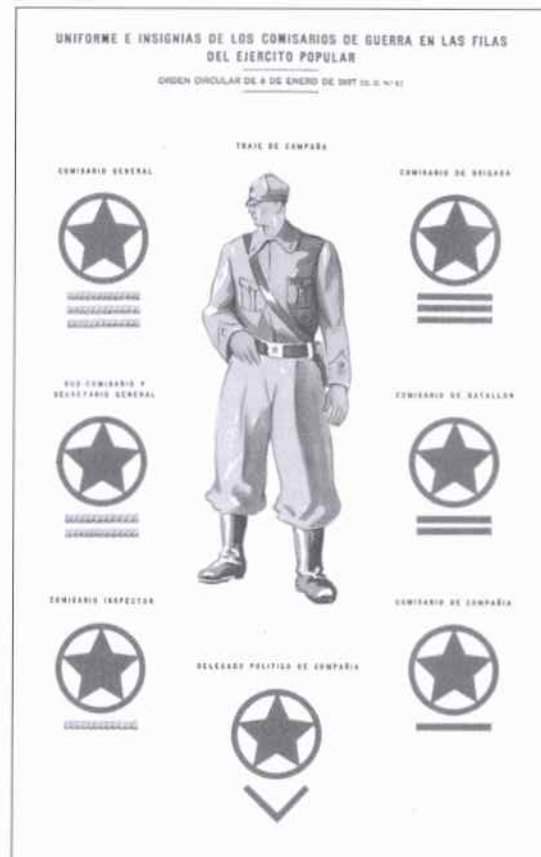
Reading Gerben Zaagsma's book on the Jewish volunteers in the International Brigade reminded me that I had read one of the sources he quotes, Sigmund Stein's *Der birger-krig in Shpanie* (The Spanish Civil War) some 20 years ago, when I picked it up in a secondhand book shop in Paris.

Stein was in his late 30s when he went to Spain in 1937 as an International Brigades (IB) volunteer. He came from Eastern Galicia (now Ukraine but then part of Poland) and had been a member of the Bund before joining the Polish Communist Party. Most recently he had been based in Prague working for the Soviet organisation known as *Gezerd* in Yiddish, which aimed at settling Jews on the land, specifically in Birobidzhan. When he heard about the Moscow Trials, he felt unable to continue with this work; instead he managed to get to Spain as a volunteer.

But he was not able to escape that world in Spain because he was not allowed to go straight to the front line but was employed at the central propaganda headquarters in Albacete. Tasks he carried out there included censoring critical letters home from IB volunteers. He describes some vivid conversations, like one with a doctor who told him that medical supplies collected for Spain found their way to the USSR instead. Most movingly, he talks about a friend of his, Leszek Pasacki from Vilna, who helped organise Yiddish poetry readings for IB personnel, and who, in spite of a leg injury, was sent back to the front line when the political commissars got to know that he was friends with a suspected Trotskyist in Vilna. He died a "hero's death", though Stein says it was probably from a bullet fired from behind. Stein paints a particularly brutal picture of André Marty, the chief Political Commissar of the International Brigades, who would take soldiers out of the front line and shoot them for insubordination; he became known as the Butcher of Albacete.

Stein was in Albacete when Viktor Alter, one of the leaders of the Bund in Poland, stayed there as part of a visiting delegation. Stein's colleagues were contemptuous of Alter, seeing him as a "useful idiot". But Stein himself sought out Alter in the lobby of his hotel, intending to tell him what was going on behind the propaganda mask. He tried to establish a connection with Alter by reminding him of Bundist conferences they had both attended. But when Stein said that he had left the Bund for the Communist Party, he realised that Alter would not believe him if he told him the less than rosy truth; instead he would see Stein as an agent provocateur. Stein left the hotel frustrated.

Stein attempted to get to the front line but fell ill (due to the effects of a hunger strike in a Polish prison) and found himself in hospital in Murcia. Again he witnessed the activities of the political commissars, who made themselves unpopular by pulling sick patients out of bed and submitting them to political interrogations, declaring those



who were still ill fit for the front line, and confiscating goods meant for patients. An Argentinian Jewish doctor protested and the commissars indicated that if he stuck his neck out too far he would get his head chopped off, with muttered comments about him encouraging antisemitism. Stein left Murcia shortly afterwards and the doctor survived to return to Argentina. From Murcia, Stein was sent to recuperate in a hospital near Paris run by the International Brigades. But he couldn't bring himself to join in the propaganda activity, and when he recovered he returned to Spain.

He found Albacete had changed. The International Brigades were becoming more like an army, with officers insisting that the ranks salute them and with all the previous political commissars having been sent to the front line. (One newly promoted major shouted out to him that it was the "end of the rabbinate".)

This time Stein did get to see the front line. He joined the newly formed Botwin company, named after a Polish Jewish communist who had been executed by a Polish firing squad after himself having shot a police infiltrator. After a few weeks' training they were sent to the front line in February 1938 with only 10 rusty rifles between them. A political commissar explained to them that they had to fear enemies from the other side, but also Trotskyists and provocateurs on their own side. In the event the former proved to be the greater

danger, as they soon came under machine-gun fire. Of the 120 men in the company, only 18 survived, Stein among them. He dug into trenches in a hillside but his old illness returned and he found himself evacuated from Spain for the second time. He thus avoided the fate of many who fought in Spain, which was to be interned in camps in France after the end of the war. Nevertheless the book ends with him arriving alone in Paris, while others are being met by relatives and friends.

There have been some suggestions that Stein's account was unreliable on the grounds that it was published at the height of the Cold War, and he was helped by Bundists and those seen as ideological anti-communists. However, to me his account has the ring of truth. One might wonder how he managed to stay undetected, but he was obviously able to judge what to say to whom and what questions to ask.

An everyday story of occupied folk

American writer Ben Ehrenreich lived in the West Bank for three years, staying with Palestinian families in its largest cities and its smallest villages. The result is a book that is mostly about struggle. His Palestinian hosts battle with the Israeli occupation and the settlers, facing injustice after injustice: homes bulldozed, family members shot, injured and murdered.

The book describes life in two villages – Nabi Saleh and Umm-al-Kheir – and in Hebron. He depicts the everyday lives of the inhabitants in such an intimate way that you feel you are reading a gripping novel rather than trying to swallow the most unpalatable truths.

The residents of the Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh regularly protest against the takeover of a spring (the one of the title) by the settlers of Halamish, also known as Neve Tzuf. The spring was declared an "antiquities site" by the Civil Administration, although it is located on private land belonging to inhabitants of Nabi Saleh. Residents also assert that they are being prevented from working the fields around the spring.

The village is inhabited by the extended Tamimi family, already well known for their regular Friday walks to the spring – if the army allows them. If you didn't know the name before, you will now, as Ahd Tamimi is a daughter of the family, and has been a protester in her own right for most of her life.

Umm al Kheir was founded by Bedouin refugees from the Negev who were displaced during the 1948 war. The village is adjacent to the illegal Israeli settlement of Karmel, established in the early 1980s, which the state hopes to expand further. At the same time the intention is to relocate all Bedouin to run-down townships. But the villagers are refusing to leave: while their homes are bulldozed around them, they repeatedly rebuild them.

Most disturbing is "planet Hebron", where the

Stein's book was published in Yiddish in 1961, having been serialised in the New York *Forverts* in the late 1950s. A French translation came out in 2012, and Catalan and Polish versions are also now available. It has not so far been translated into English.

The International Brigades are now seen as the first who took up arms against fascism. But at the same time Stein's account puts the International Brigades into historical context by showing that what was going on in Moscow and in the communist movement strongly influenced the life of the Brigades. The French version of the book is subtitled "The end of a myth". Perhaps 80 years later, whilst not detracting from the heroism and the commitment of many in the International Brigades, it is indeed time to separate the myth from the reality.

Michael Heiser



THE WAY TO THE SPRING: LIFE AND DEATH IN PALESTINE

by Ben
Ehrenreich
Penguin, 2016

list of abuses considered normal includes soldiers firing tear gas at schoolchildren to mark the beginning and end of each school day.

Resistance takes many forms and Ehrenreich depicts them all, and the effects on the resisters. He describes the families repeatedly punished and deprived of their loved ones who are imprisoned or killed.

The reportage motors forward, propelled by the author's wonder at the outrageous curiosities of the occupation. In Umm al-Kheir the Israeli Army dispatches a platoon to confiscate a portable toilet and demolish a bread oven. In Hebron a settler scales a wall and snares himself in barbed wire to request that his Palestinian neighbour remove a Palestinian flag. "The citizens of each city are trained from infancy to unsee the other city and its residents," Ehrenreich writes, citing a work of science fiction.

These haunting, poignant and memorable stories add up to a weighty contribution to the Palestinian side of the scales of history.

Judith Cravitz

