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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

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NEVER AGAIN IS NOW!



YOUNG JEWS VERSUS TRUMP'S DETENTION CENTRES

Conversos in England ■ Icke's conspiracies ■ Corbyn on Walter Wolfgang

WARSAW 2019: Reflections on a study and solidarity tour

EDITORIAL

In January 2017, as Donald Trump was inaugurated as President, Jewish Socialists in Britain joined the vibrant street demonstrations which expressed outrage that a person with such odious racist, sexist, homophobic views, so closely entwined with white supremacists and antisemites, could hold such a position of power. The Jewish public in America voted overwhelmingly to reject him, though several strongly Zionist Jewish organisations there welcomed his election.

The President of the Board of Deputies, Jonathan Arkush, at that time was ridiculed for sending Trump fawning congratulations "on behalf of" Britain's Jews. He was slapped down by his right-of-centre colleagues as well as left-leaning critics. Several radical Jewish groups took part in anti-Trump protests in Britain in the summers of 2018 and 2019, but our efforts cannot compare with the courageous direct action that large numbers of radical young Jews in America have engaged in over recent weeks – action motivated by the horrors perpetrated on asylum seekers and migrants, especially children, in ICE detention centres.

As reported in our News section (opposite page) young Jews have put their bodies on the line, protesting outside ICE centres, blocking city centre traffic, disrupting 4th July parades, and staging sit-down protests. They have faithfully revived a culture of civil disobedience from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in which Jews played a prominent role supporting black-led protests. Controversially – for the Jewish establishment and friends – the young Jews protesting in 2019 have organised around the slogan "Never Again is Now", making direct reference to the brutal, inhuman treatment of Jews during the Holocaust.

In the columns of Jewish Socialist and in the JSG's campaigning work we have challenged those who make glib Holocaust analogies, or exploit that horrific experience for cheap political points. We condemned right-wing Labour MP Margaret Hodge, who called Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn a "fucking racist and antisemite": when Hodge received a letter stating that a complaint had been lodged about her, she said it reminded her of how her father in Nazi Germany must have felt waiting for the knock on the door, comparing her own party colleagues to Nazi functionaries. Shameful and Shameless.

More recently, the Tory leadership contender, Jeremy Hunt, recalled a visit to Auschwitz, in an interview for

Jewish News, but only, it seems, to make a cheap, vile slur against Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. He appeared to learn little else from the visit, certainly nothing about German Conservatives helping Hitler to power or how profit-making enterprises enabled the industrial murder of Jews and Roma. Morally, it is extremely hard to distinguish between those who cheapen and abuse Holocaust memory, and those who openly deny the Holocaust.

But while we have railed against abuses of Holocaust memory, we have also insisted on locating the actual Holocaust of 1941-45 in history, not as a mystical and inexplicable event outside of it. We know that the processes that led to the Holocaust were put in place, stage by stage, from 1933 onwards. And this is what has been referenced by those young Jews taking action in America today, several of whom are grandchildren of survivors. The young radical New York senator, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, is justified in sharing their language.

If there are definite signs of hope in a section of American Jewish youth, we are equally uplifted by the vigour of the renewed campaign by 74-year-old Bernie Sanders to stand against Trump. Sanders is an absolute inspiration and we wish him well.

On a less optimistic note, Trump supporters in Britain are making inroads among a section of ultra-Zionist and rabidly anti-left Jews. Even the consistently anti-left *Jewish Chronicle* and equally reactionary Board of Deputies condemned a blatantly Islamophobic film shown to an audience of 100, mainly Jews, in a hotel owned by a Jew in the heart of the North West London community. It was introduced by Alt-Right loudmouth Katie Hopkins. Members of the audience proudly acknowledged their own xenophobia and Islamophobia at the event. We have no doubt that the constant demonisation of the left, of non- and anti-Zionist Jews by the mainstream establishment has provided oxygen for those further to the right.

But we end with another glimmer of hope – in difficult circumstances. This is the rebirth of Jewish communities in Poland and the growing confidence of the radicals of all generations among them, which Editorial Committee members of *Jewish Socialist* witnessed at first hand during a "Study and Solidarity" visit made with other JSG members in April this year. It was a wonderful, inspiring five days. Read all about it on pages 13-19.

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

Cover image: Young Jewish protesters outside an ICE Detention Centre.

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Young American Jews say Never Again to anyone!

In early July, young, progressive, American Jews led the way in their communities with militant direct actions and demonstrations against the inhuman detention of immigrants at ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) centres. They were demanding that Congress shuts down the agency that supports these centres.

Serena Alderstein, a young activist with the immigrant advocacy organisation Movimiento Cosecha, set the ball rolling with a Facebook post on 24th June encouraging other young Jews to protest at the ICE centres under the slogan "Never Again" – a direct and controversial reference to the experience of Jews under Nazism.

Not all the ICE centres are located on the Mexican border. Their first action targeted an ICE detention centre in Elizabeth, New Jersey, blocking the entrance to the facility. Police struggled with 200 protesters and arrested 36 of them. Tae Phoenix, a singer-songwriter who was one of those arrested, related her decision to protest to an early conversation about the Holocaust with her father, when she was a child: "... he explained to me that millions of people had been murdered because of their religion, where they came from, who they loved, or because they were disabled. He said 'It might have been because they didn't know or it might have been because they truly didn't care or they agreed with the Nazis. But I think for most people it was that

things got worse over such a long period of time that they got used to it. It felt normal to them, and then it was too late.'" She added: "We came together ... to protest and put our bodies on the line because we see the same pattern my father described unfolding today."

Julia Davidovicz, a 26-year-old nursery teacher, was part of the New Jersey action too, against what she describes as "the dehumanising treatment of immigrants sanctioned by the US government." She says: "I was especially moved to organise with Never Again Action because we are making a strong statement that the Jewish community stand with vulnerable populations, not with politicians who try to weaponise our trauma to distract from the crisis they have created. I was moved to see Jews of all generations and affiliations stand together as one to say Never Again means never again for anyone. Never Again Action has created a framework for marginalised groups to stand in solidarity with immigrants. We are the moral leaders of the Jewish community, and we won't stop fighting until every camp is closed and every immigrant is safe and free."

Two days after the New Jersey protest, 1,000 activists in Boston shut down traffic as they marched from the New England Holocaust Memorial to Suffolk County House of Correction, which houses ICE detainees. Eighteen people were arrested. That same day another 18 protesters were

arrested in Rhode Island, when they gathered at a detention facility in Central Falls. Those arrested included 29-year-old Aaron Regunberg, a former Democratic Party local state representative, and grandson of a Holocaust survivor.

In Philadelphia, a further 33 activists were arrested when around 300 protesters from Never Again combined with other migrant support bodies to block the path of the traditional 4th July march and parade. They gathered initially outside the ICE facility located near the corner of Eighth and Cherry Streets before marching to Sixth and Market Streets, where they sat in the street to block the parade route until forcibly removed by police.

On 8th July, hundreds of protesters shut down the Chicago Federal Building where Senators Durbin and Duckworth have their offices. In June these senators voted to give ICE an extra \$4.6 billion. Never Again Action say they will not be bystanders while these senators "fund ICE raids and concentration camps."

Bob Fishel who was arrested in the New Jersey action, says he is "so proud of Jews across the country coming together day after day in city after city to say 'We will not be silent while humans are put into camps in our country, we know what happens when a populace stays silent or tries to hand-wave in the face of atrocities.'"

As we go to press, further protests are planned.

Donald ducks London protesters

The Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) banner was proudly held on the mass protest against Donald Trump's visit to London at the beginning of June. He carefully avoided the protests while telling his American public the lie that thousands were positively greeting him on London's streets! In advance of the protests, on 3rd June 2019, the JSG released this statement:

"The Jewish Socialists' Group condemns the invitation to US President Donald Trump and will be proud to join the Jewish Bloc on the mass demonstration organised by Together Against Trump on Tuesday 4th June in Trafalgar Square.

"We will do so in solidarity with all who have suffered mistreatment, discrimination and abuse under his administration and from the white supremacists, bigots and antisemites who have been emboldened through his presidency. This includes migrant children, refugees, LGBT communities, environmentalists, women's rights campaigners and ethnic minorities and the victims of murderous attacks on synagogues by neo-Nazis.

"Just three weeks ago Trump welcomed the antisemitic, Islamophobic, authoritarian

leader of Hungary, Viktor Orban, to Washington. Trump praised him for his work to keep his country "safe" and to "support Christian communities", and described him as "highly respected... like me, a bit controversial, but that's okay."

"Orban is controversial not least for his openly antisemitic attacks on George Soros. Meanwhile, Trump has accused Soros of financing demonstrators in the US.

"Trump is a warmonger who supports and encourages Netanyahu's regime in Israel which relegates Palestinians to second-class citizens, and oppresses and humiliates them in the Occupied Territories. We stand with all Palestinians and Israelis who are fighting instead for justice and equality. We stand with Muslim and Jewish communities in America who have supported each other against the rise in racist attacks that have



occurred since he became President.

"In Britain he is seeking to make common cause with fellow racist, far-right, free marketeers, Boris Johnson of the Conservative Party and Nigel Farage of the Brexit Party. Farage shares Trump's and Orban's negative view of George Soros. Both say they are fighting the 'globalists'.

"We call on those who claim to lead Britain's Jewish community to show their solidarity with other minorities and speak out against Trump, and speak out against those who make common cause with him."

Visible Pride

As LGBT Pride marches took place this summer around the world, some were in a more liberal political atmosphere, others in much more politically hostile environments. Ahead of the Pride march in Warsaw this year, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, leader of the ruling Law and Justice Party, described the LGBT movement as "a threat to our identity, a threat to our nation and its long-term existence". In the run-up to the recent European Elections, Law and Justice emphasised its opposition to gay marriage.

But that didn't stop it being Warsaw's biggest Pride march to date, with an estimated 50,000 participants, including the Mayor of Warsaw, Rafal Trzaskowski, who is associated with the opposition



Platforma Obywatelska party.

For the first time in Warsaw, there was a Jewish bloc on the parade. Around 100 members of the city's Jewish community joined the march holding rainbow flags with a star of David sewn on, and a rainbow-decorated khupa (wedding canopy) was

held by the Jewish contingent. Marcel Szablowski, who took part said: "We - Polish Jews - had our Jewish Bloc! The Jewish revival in Poland is true. I am so happy that we had our Bloc. Unfortunately some far-right semi-fashi boys on the internet started to howl, but I'm so excited by events of last Saturday, this parade was so cool."

The Jewish bloc was initiated by Emil Jezowski, who felt it was important for the Jewish community to stand in solidarity against the "hatred that spilled over non-heteronormative people in Poland in recent months". The bloc also included many friends and sympathisers of the Jewish LGBT community.

WISEWORDS

"A spectre haunts European Zionism, the spectre that all of its victims - Palestinians, Sephardim (as well as critical Ashkenazim, in and outside Israel, stigmatised as 'self-hating' malcontents) - will perceive the linked analogies between their oppressions. To conjure this spectre, the Zionist establishment in Israel has done everything in its power: the fomenting of war and the cult of national security, the simplistic portrayal of Palestinian resistance as terrorism, the fostering of situations that catalyse Sephardi-Palestinian tension; the caricaturing of Sephardim as Arab-haters and religious fanatics, the promotion through the educational system and media, of Arab-hatred and Sephardi self-rejection, the repression or co-option of all

those who might promote a progressive Palestinian-Sephardi alliance. I in no way mean to equate Palestinian and Sephardi suffering - obviously Palestinians are those most egregiously wronged by Zionism - or to compare the long lists of crimes against both. The point is one of affinity and analogy... What is at stake, in any case is not a competition for sympathy, but a search for alternatives."

Ella Habiba Shohat published these words in *Social Text*, 1988. Born in 1959, Shohat defines her self as an Arab Jew of Jewish-Baghdadi background. She is a Professor of Cultural Studies at New York University.

IfNotNow is a Jewish organisation that was created in 2014 to transform the positions and outlook of the American Jewish public on the Israeli occupation from support into a call for freedom and dignity for all. It aims to change the positions of individuals and institutions.

During the violence of Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014, young Jews came together under the banner of IfNotNow to demonstrate their resistance. They organised Mourner's Kaddish actions in nearly a dozen cities across the country and lamented the loss of both Israeli and Palestinian life.

They mobilised around three demands: Stop the War on Gaza, End the Occupation, and Freedom and Dignity for All.

IfNotNow defines the Occupation as the military rule over Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. It also acknowledges that the discrimination and displacement inside Israel's 1948 borders are connected to its rule in those Occupied Territories, and opposes those systems that deprive Palestinians of civil, political, and economic rights.

The movement focuses on what unites rather than what divides. It does not take a unified

stance on BDS, Zionism or the question of statehood, but works together through non-violent means to end American Jewish support for the occupation.

Its statement of principles affirms: We believe that we will win. We know that we will succeed as long as we have the courage and energy to try. We are not discouraged by our opponents' strength or condemnation. Rather, we see these as a sign that we are on the right track. We are building a flourishing, joyous, liberated Jewish community that stands for freedom and dignity for all. If not now, when?

www.ifnotnowmovement.org

Ivor Dembina at Edinburgh Festival

Jewish socialist activist and stand-up comedian Ivor Dembina will be performing two shows on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe this summer. Each show lasts for one hour and will run from 1st - 25th August (except on Tuesdays).

At lunchtimes (1:15pm), he'll be presenting Old Jewish Jokes at Laughing Horse @ Finnegan's Wake (Venue 101) at 9b Victoria Street EH1 2HE. In the evenings (6:45pm), he'll perform his "glorious mixture of new, old and very old material" in a show called The Joy of Jokes, at Laughing Horse @ The Place (Venue 532) at 34 York Place EH1 3HU.

Both shows are part of the Free Festival. Just come along 15 minutes before the show. There are no advance tickets and admission is on a first come first

served basis. There is no admission charge but there will be a collection for voluntary donations from the audience at the end of each performance.

www.oldjewishjokes.co.uk www.thejoyofjokes.com www.edfringe.com

Also on at the Edinburgh fringe is Laughing for Palestine, which will raise money for the UK support campaign for the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), whose motto is "Resisting Apartheid. Building a Shared Democracy". This show, compered by Daphna Baram, features the comedians Seann Walsh, Maria Shehata, Gavin Webster, Sameena Zehra and Gary Sansome, and takes place at The Stand's New Town Theatre on 12th August at 1:30pm.

Israeli prisons update

On the 2019 anniversary of the Palestinian Prisoner's Day (17th April), ADDAMEER Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association

(<http://www.addameer.org>) confirmed that the number of Palestinian male and female prisoners in the prisons of the Occupation was 5,450 including 497 administrative detainees, seven members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (parliament), and 205 youth prisoners (including 32 under 16 years of age).

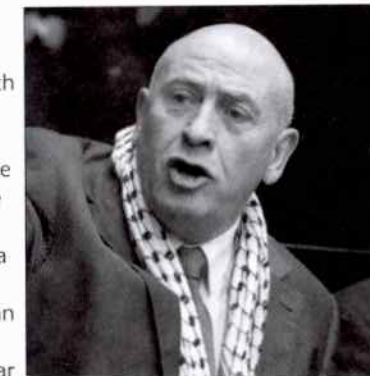
Occupation forces have arrested approximately 10,000 Palestinian children since the year 2000 and, according to a UNICEF report on children in Israeli military detention, children as young as 12 are routinely taken from their homes at gunpoint in night-time raids by soldiers, blindfolded, bound and shackled, interrogated without a lawyer or relative being present and with no audio-visual recording; put into solitary confinement; and forced to sign confessions (often in Hebrew - a language they do not understand).

Better news though, is that Basel Ghattas (right), a former member of the Knesset for the Palestinian Balad Party, was released from prison in May after serving two years for smuggling cellphones to Palestinian political prisoners in Israel. He said: "The conditions that Palestinian prisoners face are part of Israel's oppressive regime, a central tool the occupation uses to reinforce itself. Their inability to

communicate with family is the real prison. There are prisoners from the West Bank whose family can't visit them months at a time, even years. This is no less than a crime."

In May this year Israeli conscientious objector Roman Levin was sentenced to 30 days in military prison for his refusal to continue serving in the military. Levin, 19, from the city of Bat Yam just south of Tel Aviv, immigrated to Israel with a few members of his family from Ukraine when he was three years old. "I refuse to continue my military service," Levinsaid. "My refusal is an act of protest against an occupation that has lasted more than 50 years and of solidarity with the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza."

This is the fourth time Levin has been sentenced for refusing to serve in the army. He was previously jailed twice after a year and a half of service in the IDF as a truck driver. He is being supported by a grassroots network called Mesarvot - Refusing to Serve the Occupation.



CHANGE
THE
WORLD



Berlin Museum and BDS

The preferred relationship between Israeli and diaspora institutions, from the Zionists' point of view, was made clear in June this year when Professor Peter Schäfer, Director of Berlin's Jewish Museum was pressurised to step down a year before he was due to retire, after he Jerusalem Post first reported that this institution had endorsed the Palestinian-inspired BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) campaign against Israel on the Museum's Twitter feed. That initial report was the catalyst for a storm of denunciations by anti-BDS campaigners.

The tweet had actually shared an article from Die Tageszeitung discussing a letter signed by 240 Jewish and Israeli scholars condemning the parliamentary proposal that the Bundestag passed in May which linked BDS explicitly with antisemitism. The letter argued that this was counter-productive and actually undermined the fight against antisemitism.

A further tweet from the Museum claimed that the aim was merely to share the arguments raised by the scholars, not to take a position on BDS itself. But amid the widening protests Schäfer resigned "to prevent further damage to the museum".

After his resignation, Schäfer received strong support in a letter signed by 50 Talmud scholars in America and Israel which stated: "We are scholars of the Talmud and Ancient Judaism who hold diverse and even opposing opinions regarding the BDS movement. But we are united in our profound admiration for Prof Schäfer as a scholar, academic leader, and public intellectual."

A further letter signed by 332 Jewish scholars from Israel, Europe, Asia, South America, and the United States in just two days, denounced "false accusations" against Prof Schäfer, adding, "We are appalled that the reputation of a scholar devoted to Judaism would be smeared in public."

Soul searching and inspiration

Windrush Day activist and cultural historian, Patrick Vernon, who was a guest speaker at this year's Jewish Socialists' Group AGM, has launched an imaginative campaign calling on the government to retrieve the anchor of the Empire Windrush as a national memorial. The Empire Windrush brought 492 passengers – mainly Jamaicans but also a small number of Polish refugees – to Britain in 1948, a seminal moment in enhancing Britain's multicultural society. But the ship began life in 1930 as a German ship, called the Monte Rosa. It was commandeered during the Second World War to transport German troops and support bombing raids. It played a role in the Holocaust when it transported

46 captured Norwegian Jews to Denmark. From there they were transported by train eventually to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The ship was taken by British forces in May 1945, renamed the Empire Windrush and it became a passenger ship.

In March 1954, the Windrush sank in the Mediterranean near the coast of Algeria, killing its four crew members. It lies 2,600 metres below sea level. Vernon says: "I believe the Empire Windrush, given its relationship with fascism, the Holocaust and migration, is as iconic a vessel as the Titanic or the Cutty Sark... I believe the Empire Windrush could be a source of soul-searching and inspiration for generations of



black, brown and white people in Britain ... the ship's anchor would symbolise migration, racial equality and shared history of belonging and citizenship".

Petition: Recover the Anchor of HMT Empire Windrush ship as a national monument.
<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/262389>

Trouble with your circulation?

On 30th June the right-wing weekly, *Jewish Chronicle* (JC), announced it had secured longterm funding from "approximately 20 community-minded individuals, families and charitable trusts" via its own "parent entity", the Kessler Foundation, which is itself a charity. Given the JC's usual fare of 30% of the paper attacking the Labour Party, 30% defending Israel and 40% trivia, it's hard to see where charity comes into it.

However, it's a well known fact that every member of the Jewish Socialists' Group reads the *Jewish Chronicle*, down to the social and personal ads. But looking at the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) figures of the JC, it might well be that it is only the JSG that has been keeping the newspaper afloat recently.

The JC's figures for 2018 show an average distribution of 20,141 in its print circulation, but of these 7,298 are free copies – that is, over a third. Free does not mean unread – the free Jewish News

distributes 22,701. But if you go back to 2013, the JC was distributing 21,370 copies. Given the way that print sales have declined, that is not a substantial drop to 2018, but in 2013 only 9% were free copies, indicating that paid sales of the JC have dropped very substantially. I

In a Guardian article in 2010, Stephen Pollard, the editor of the JC was "hugely proud" to report ABC audited sales of 31,556 (with no mention of free copies), and a posting from 2014 in British Religion in Numbers quoted the JC's website from prior to 2010 giving a sales figure of 35,000. This indicates that under the editorship of Stephen Pollard the paid-for circulation of the JC has collapsed.

Statistical research by Norman Nosedive|JC Editor, Right:



Above right: Stephen JC Editor, Stephen Pollard

DIARY OF A LEFTY JEW OR NO OFFENCE

MONDAY

Results of health check. Doctor is not happy about my blood pressure. Asks if I am experiencing any stressful situations in my life. Yes, I say. I seem to be arguing non-stop. She hands me a leaflet on couples counselling. No, it's not that. I find myself constantly in conflict with others. She looks blankly at me. Politics. Ohhh. She is at a loss about what to say. As she leans back, I look past her to see other leaflets on domestic violence, depression and PTSD. Clearly your "politics" (she says the quotation marks) lead you into stressful situations. You don't have to argue. Just say you agree, even if you don't. She hands me a prescription for pills. To be taken only in moments of stress.

Arrive home and see my answering machine flashing. Only one person calls me on my landline. "I saw some gardening gloves and bought them for you. I'll keep an eye out for some secateurs. Oh... by the way," (said as if it had just casually dropped into her head) "I see your glorious leader is praising Jew-haters again. That foreword in that historian's book. Can't help himself can he? What did the doctor say?" I look into the chemist's bag. The pills are green. Once a day and again only in moments of stress. I take one.

TUESDAY

Facebook deactivated for a month. That was easy. I open a union branch agenda email. There is a motion from Richard Rigid. "This branch gives its unconditional support to Will Peterson, member of the NEC who has been unjustly suspended for remarks taken out of context."

Can't help logging on to YouTube to see the footage again. Peterson standing in the aftermath of a meeting with chairs scraping and people pushing past. ... "course it's a witch-hunt... none of it's true. It's just not possible because we're antiracist... You're not recording this are you?" Mumbled no. Something else I can't hear. "Good because the Israelis have people on their payroll and the media is full of them." Mumble mumble. something "Dan Duggan...?"

"Dan Duggan! I've stood on picket lines with Dan. I've stood shoulder-to-shoulder with him against the fascists. Dan's sister-in-law is Jewish for Christ's sake" Strange moaning sound. No wait. That's not the video.

At the branch meeting. Richard approaches me and asks me to second his motion. I inhale and exhale slowly and agree. He hands me a leaflet for his group Jews Adverse to Zionism (Jay-Z). I take a green pill.

Richard speaks with passion for his motion. "This is the thin end of the wedge. If we don't defend Will and Dan, they'll be coming for Corbyn next." Most of the people in the room are not Labour Party members; they are there for an advice session on Universal Credit.

WEDNESDAY

Labour Party GC. Our MP Bella Bestblare gives her speech. "What are they like... the House of Commons... Lots of old fossils. Bit like Hogwarts," (affectionate laughter) "but with more poison and snakes. I'm young vibrant and university educated but

streetwise like you. It's people like us that represent Britain today and we will defeat all the racist Brexiteers. And talking of racism" (voice softer and she looks down), "it pains me that the Labour Party is now a safe space for them too. I've had Jewish members call me and say that despite all the inspiring campaigning work I do, they no longer feel safe in our Labour Party. Members have complained about increasingly hostile exchanges on social media. Jewish members shouldn't feel afraid to defend house demolitions in the Occupied Territories. One member thought she saw a cross burning on her front lawn. Luckily it was just some carol singers. Nonetheless I told her to report it to the Labour Party." Other members of the Jewish Labour Organised (J-LO) shout "Shame!"

The top is already loose on the green pill bottle.

THURSDAY

Lunch with cousin Rachel. Sisters in all but name but we've taken different paths. The Z-word as we call it has been banned from our conversations long ago by mutual consent. And yet – there it is peeping over her shoulder. Rachel has just come back from Israel visiting in-laws in Tel-Aviv. "Thank God," she says, "Not Jerusalem." Rachel and Ian are now vegans. "Honestly there are such wonderful vegan restaurants on every street corner." She talks about Ian's sister. "Jess does wonderful work with that health food charity. You know they do a lot of work with children in the Occupied Territories to educate them about food choices."

I tell her about another cousin in the US who has worked with an NGO in Gaza. "Well he's young and well-meaning but he'll learn that the situation there is very complicated, and he shouldn't believe everything he's told. Anyway, we agreed not to discuss Israel. What's that pill you're taking...?"

FRIDAY

Urgent motion drafted by Jay-Z calling on members to defend Frank Stone who has been suspended for defending Will Peterson and Dan Duggan. "Honestly. Who gives a fuck?" he said.

Newsnight. Kirsty Wark interviews Margaret Hodge. "At night I now keep an AK47 under my pillow." Kirsty nods.

SATURDAY

Demo about the Arms Trade. I can't find my union branch so fall alongside the J-20 (Jews supporting the 20 members who have been suspended from the Labour Party).

There is tall woman being photographed in front of me. Her long graceful body is draped with an expensive shawl and her luxurious grey hair is piled up in a soft bun. She stops to pose with her banner and we overtake. I turn to see her catwalk pose chin held high and a slight smile. Her banner says, "Israel causes Antisemitism".

SUNDAY.

Lunch with parents. Pill bottle empty.

RUTH LUKOM
navigates the rapids

TRUTH HALF-TRUTH

JEREMY GREEN ponders the conundrum of David Icke. Just when you thought it was safe to dismiss him, some right-on person – Alice Walker, for example – cites him with approval.

It's easy to laugh at conspiracy theorists. They often seem like harmless nutters. It's good fun to swap stories about people who believe that the moon landings were faked, the Vatican is hiding information that proves Christianity is false, the US government is concealing the technologies it has obtained from crashed alien UFOs, or that big business is keeping the wraps on perpetual motion machines, water engines and everlasting light bulbs.

Conspiracy theories tend to share a number of themes. These include the involvement of the rich and powerful, and a cover-up of important truths that would undermine wealth and power. Apparently disparate phenomena are actually connected. The crimes of the powerful are not just evil and self-interested, but lurid and repellent; they don't just have sex orgies, they have orgies involving satanic rituals and kidnapped children. And despite the fact that the rich and powerful have successfully covered up whatever it is they have done (sometimes for hundreds of years), they've inadvertently left clues

stuff, and support for "free speech" for Holocaust denial, Icke cites the notorious anti-semitic forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, as a source, though he claims that the references in the book to Jews are actually coded clues to the real conspirators, an alien race of shapeshifting lizards who have interbred with humans. Well, it makes a change from coded references to Jews.

So mockery and amused tolerance seems an appropriate response. Why dignify this mish-mash of unbelievable untruths and shameless plagiarism from pulp science fiction by treating it seriously? Some don't. "Rationalist" debunkers characterise Icke as more nutty than antisemitic, taking at face value his coy and half-hearted denials of antisemitism, including references to "Rothschild Zionism" and assertions that it's only "some" Jews that are involved in the conspiracy.

Nevertheless, it's a more significant phenomenon than many on the left recognise. Icke rakes in millions from his books, and draws large audiences at his rally-like talks. It's easy to assume that no one with half a brain could be taken in by any of this; the rise of Trump should make us aware that this is not so. It's always been possible to live in a parallel "cultural universe", refusing to admit as valid mainstream assertions and beliefs. Frankly, that's what many of us on the left have, of necessity, done for years, though thankfully not with the same content. The internet has made this easier, as have changes in the structure of the mass media to allow for more explicitly partisan channels like Fox News. It's easier than ever to construct an intellectual world in which you only see and hear evidence that corroborates your core beliefs. The rest of us stay sealed off from these worlds.

Or perhaps we aren't. In December 2018 Alice Walker, the distinguished black author and activist, cited Icke's book, *And the Truth Shall Set You Free*, as "on her nightstand" in an interview with the New York Times, and subsequently defended the recommendation and praised Icke as "brave enough to ask the questions others fear to ask, and to speak his own understanding of the truth wherever it might lead."

It's not hard to find other examples of people praising Icke for his "brave" views on Israel and Palestine; a few minutes with a search engine will turn up lots of them. Sometimes such praise is embedded in other stuff that's critical of American imperialism, the banks and the super-rich. Surprisingly, although Icke belongs on the lunatic fringe of the far right, it's not all that uncommon to find left-wing friends sharing some of his blander, more mainstream pronouncements. (I note in passing that Icke appears to despise Tommy Robinson as an agent of Israel and "Zionist Terrorism".)

Perhaps this shouldn't be too surprising. There is no clear boundary between conspiracy theories and... well, theories about conspiracies. On the left we understand that the media often lies and distorts to serve political ends, and that the rich and powerful cover up their crimes. We know that state agencies really do engage



that have allowed a small band of fearless and dedicated investigators to discover the truth and to publicise it, if only anyone would listen...

No one illustrates this better than David Icke, the former footballer and sports commentator turned New Age guru turned conspiracy theorist. Icke reveals the existence of a massive, long-running conspiracy that has lasted for thousands of years. This involves most politicians that you've ever heard of, the British and several other royal families, plus conspiracy favourites the United Nations, the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, the Illuminati, the Freemasons, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Rothschild family, the World Bank, and so on. Unsurprisingly he is obsessed with Georg Soros, who he cites as a "kingpin" of the Deep State, the New World Order, and part of the "motley crew" of Zionists and others responsible for fake news and worldwide protests. When Icke presents he uses a giant portrait of Soros, unconvincingly photoshopped to look like he has reptile eyes.

As well as mixing in some "alternative medicine"

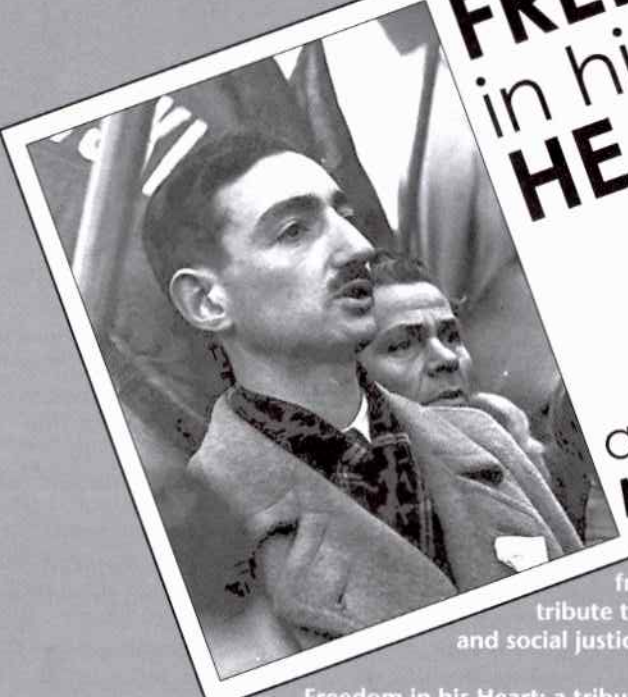
AND ABSOLUTE RUBBISH

in clandestine activities. Lots of things that sound rather like conspiracy theories have turned out to be true, including some of the weirdest and most fantastic: try searching for "Rawalpindi Experiments", or Project MK Ultra. I don't know of any compelling evidence that either the CIA or Mossad carried out the 9-11 attacks, but there really have been false flag operations carried out by the US, the British and Israel (and other states). For the most part the rich and powerful don't manage their domination of political institutions through secret societies and targeted assassinations, but sometimes they do – spend a little time researching the history of the "Propaganda Due" (P2) organisation in Italy and elsewhere.

Engagement with opposition to the actions of Israel seems to lead inexorably to this murky domain. The Israeli state really has often engaged in clandestine operations, both at home and abroad. Israel, like other states, including the Saudis, maintains lobbyists in Washington, Westminster, Brussels and a host of other capitals. There are also networks of non-state organisations that act in support of Israel and/or political parties and movements within Israel – especially the settlers and the extreme right. Many of the participants in these networks are Jews (though in the US Evangelical Christians are increasingly

important within pro-Israel lobby organisations). So it's not too hard for critics of Israel and Zionism to use language and images that either derive from, or overlap with, classical antisemitic conspiracy theories. And when they come across someone else who appears to share their antipathy to Israel's machinations, and who is persecuted or attacked for their views... well, why not click that "share" button?

So where does this leave us? What do we do about our friends and comrades who think that Icke's "exposés" of Zionism and "the elite" actually sound quite sensible? Well, you can start by telling them about Icke's views on other things: the reptile overlords, or "alternative medicine", or free speech for Holocaust deniers. But – as Alice Walker's refusal to disavow Icke suggests – don't get your hopes up. People come into the left in all sorts of ways, and from different directions. Lots of young people have never heard of The Protocols, and may not understand why someone who appears to be against the banks, the 'elite' and the US government may nevertheless be an enemy rather than a friend. In the end there's no substitute for a proper, class-based analysis of wealth and power; in the short term it's necessary, if nonetheless exhausting, to keep pointing out the real allegiances of these false friends.



FREEDOM in his HEART

a tribute to
MAREK EDELMAN

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&p

EMERGING FROM THE INQUISITION

Many Conversos – Spanish Jews who had been forced by the Inquisition to convert to Christianity – were living within and between two communities. **JULIA BARD** reflects on what happened to them when they came to England in the 17th and 18th centuries

After 1290, when Edward I expelled the Jews, officially there was no Jewish presence in England until the middle of the 17th century. Then pressure built up from several directions to readmit them. Protestant millenarians believed that encouraging Jews to live in England would hasten the return of the Messiah. At the same time, Jews who were suffering discrimination and worse under the Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula petitioned for the door to be reopened to them. This dovetailed with England's imperial ambitions. The Jews who came directly from Spain and Portugal were Conversos, New Christians or "Crypto-Jews" – Jews who had converted to Christianity to escape the Inquisition but who remained under suspicion and were scrutinised for signs of being Jewish. The New Christians had lived for generations simultaneously within and outside Spanish and Portuguese society. They spoke the language; as merchants they traded in the mainstream; they were part of the Catholic world – members of its institutions, worshippers in its churches – but at the same time many of them maintained, to varying degrees, Jewish rituals, customs and, perhaps most significantly, their kinship and communal ties.

Being both insiders and outsiders is a fundamental characteristic of Jewish (and minority) life everywhere, but those Spanish and Portuguese Jews who retained anything of their Jewish identity and community had experienced generations of a very extreme version of living in the interstices between two societies. There is a substantial literature on what this meant in practice for Jews living in the countries of the Inquisition, but there are interesting questions to ask about what decisions they made about their identities, allegiances and practices once the pressure was taken off – after they moved away from Spain to France, Holland, the Americas, the Caribbean and to England.

Eventually, despite deeply divided opinion, Oliver Cromwell readmitted the Jews to England in 1656, though this was never legally formalised. The Anglican Church reigned supreme, but the 1689 Toleration Act legitimised public worship for Protestant Dissenters. Non-Anglicans continued to be excluded from full participation in political and commercial life but that Act was the thin end of the wedge in conceding civil rights to religious minorities. As Todd Endelman argues in *The Jews of Georgian England 1714 - 1830*, this supported the argument "that the State had no legitimate interest in the religious beliefs of obedient citizens".

There was still a deep well of hostility and discrimination against Jews, but in England, unlike continental Europe, Jews did not face specifically anti-Jewish restrictions over and above those imposed on other groups who did not belong to the Anglican Church.

Many of the Sephardim (Jews of Spanish origin) who arrived in the years after the Resettlement were merchants who identified and behaved as

Catholics. In England, though, they found it was less of a disadvantage to be Jewish than Catholic, so they started to emerge once again as Jews, and to establish religious and other communal institutions. Many of them worked as financiers in the City of London and, as urban commerce, industrialisation and the bourgeoisie started to gain ground over rural-based aristocratic paternalism, Jews were able to rise through the social and economic ranks.

The tectonic class shifts in that period which allowed formerly marginal groups to grow and flourish are well known. What is less easy to understand is how a group that had hidden their



Bevis Marks Sephardi synagogue, London's oldest synagogue in continuous use. It opened in 1701.

Jewishness for hundreds of years under the threat of torture, death and the confiscation of everything they owned could retrieve anything but a fragmentary sense of themselves, individually or communally, as Jews. Endelman explores this in some detail in *Broadening Jewish History: Towards a Social History of Ordinary Jews* (Littman Library, 2011) looking at their troubled journey towards or away from the London Jewish community (the majority settled in London), some of them "suspended between Judaism and Christianity or even at times between belief and varieties of disbelief (scepticism, atheism, agnosticism, deism)." Nevertheless, many did participate in establishing a Sephardi congregation and later the Reform synagogue movement.

Perhaps a more important question for us today, is why they should have wanted to be Jews. This adherence to an unpopular, unwanted, vilified

religion and culture is at odds with the dominant narrative both within and beyond Jewish communities, which holds that our way of life is so fragile, and that, given half a chance, Jews will assimilate into the surrounding society and disappear into oblivion. The evidence for this is thin. Clearly, the boundaries of Jewish life are porous: people live simultaneously and at different times on either side of it or, indeed, straddling it. But the experience of the New Christians seems to bear out

the claims of Richard Marienstras in his 1975 essay "The Jews of the Diaspora or the Vocation of a Minority", that when the pressure is taken off a minority culture, language and way of life, they re-emerge into the sunlight. Whether they grow true to type or take off in a new direction is another matter. The character of Sephardi Jewish practices in London in 1656 or 1864 or, indeed, in 2019 was surely not the same as it had been in pre-1490s Spain and Portugal. But it was just as surely Jewish.

INCOMPREHENSION AND ANGER

Dear Mum,
2018. Fifty years since you died, 56 since you wrote me the letter of comfort after I learned about the Holocaust. You said Dad tried to tell me about the war; I didn't want to hear. Then I read *Exodus*, by Leon Uris, and, ironically, a controversial book promoting the State of Israel led me to this terrible knowledge which devastated me for years and finally, this November, brought me to Auschwitz Birkenau, carrying a copy of your letter.

I have long meant to visit, and dreaded it, but when Irene, (remember her father was one of the young soldiers sent to liberate Bergen-Belsen), suggested we go with like-minded people, Jewish Voice for Labour, organised by Unite Against Fascism, it seemed the right way to do it. It was.

The trip was thoughtfully organised, including evening talks. David Rosenberg, a historian whose Cable Street walk I went on with Miriam (you'd have loved her, a funny, passionate peace activist, knitter and friend) began with "Polish Jewish life and resistance in the 1930s". His grandparents emigrated from Poland and Ukraine, like yours. His wife wore a tree of life pendant to commemorate the massacre of 11 Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue this year. Yes, this year.

David revealed surprising facts about Jewish participation in civic life, before the Holocaust: though they were only 10% of the population, 20 Jewish councillors were elected in Warsaw, mainly from Socialist anti-Zionist parties, and 25% of trade unionists were

Jewish. They worked in the tobacco and alcohol industries, but were excluded after nationalisation. I don't remember dad drinking much other than the wine at Pesach. I continued the tradition briefly for my small children, not understanding how dad downed three glasses and still read the service, until I realised the glasses were smaller!

We visited Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter of Krakow. The old Jewish Cemetery, desecrated by the Nazis, is restored, fragments of headstones built into the perimeter wall. For years I read about their misuse, unlike the peaceful setting where we gathered for your 50th *Jahrzeit*, placing stones. And here they were, the stones and prayers left by 200 people who attend the Remuh synagogue and, nearby, organisations where young Jews celebrate their culture. Against the odds. Apparently these communities are growing in 15 Polish cities. Two days later, in Warsaw, the Polish Government marched to celebrate Independence Day with the Far Right accompanying.

We lunched in a square where stall holders sold old postcards, fake Nazi memorabilia, stars of David and wooden figurines of Jewish violinists. Somehow, I didn't feel they've "got it" yet, unlike when I visited Berlin in 2006. At the site of the Jewish Ghetto, across the Vistula with the suspended sculptures along the bridge, we saw signs of the Nazi "sense of humour", the tomb-shaped forms topping the Ghetto walls.

We saw the hospital where Nazis shot patients; we gathered in Ghetto Heroes' square from where Jews were transported, having brought just 23 kilos of belongings. Each of the 70 memorial chairs represents 1,000 Jews, ripped suddenly from their homes and lives. We saw the Pharmacy under the Eagle, from where a non-Jew smuggled supplies into the Ghetto, and we found a statue of Jan Karski, who tried to tell the world's powerful what was happening to Polish Jews, without response. I sat and held his hand.

On Saturday we visited Auschwitz. The gateway, with "Arbeit Macht Frei", looked smaller than I imagined.

An incomprehensible brick-built "town", banal; none of the keening I had done since I was 12 and learned about this insanity. We saw the execution wall where Poles were shot. In the former guards' barracks are maps



Holding hands with Jan Karski

In a letter to her mother, **HILARY DE SANTOS** describes her visit to Auschwitz and Krakow alongside friends from Jewish Voice for Labour on a trip organised by Unite Against Fascism

showing the places from which Jews, Gypsies and political prisoners were transported to the camp. Even from Oslo they seized 35 Jews. (That ship was later used by the British to invite people from the Caribbean to rebuild the country: the *Windrush*!)

Then the belongings, and hair, of the victims. An ode to orderliness, prosthetic limbs, empty gas canisters, shoes piled high, some with fashionable heels, and children's. Utensils, best things gathered hastily on arrest for use at their new destination.

Suitcases, named for identification, shaving and hair brushes, shoe polish tins, emphasising usefulness.



Bridge sculpture en route to the site of the Ghetto

An entire gallery of human hair. Plaited, matted, discoloured.

The square for roll calls of prisoners, a sentry box to keep the overseer dry.

Birkenau was familiar, even more terrible. Train tracks stretch into the distance, platforms for selections. Lorna described the moment her grandmother was immediately taken from her mother, a young girl, to be murdered.

Barbed wire, barracks with "bunk beds", the "sanitary" block with rows of holes, gas chambers and crematoria, the sleeping block for women and children, for Mengele's twin experiments. On one wall, a painting of three children like a German folk tale, one pulling a toy horse on wheels behind her. Why?

No tears, just incomprehension and anger.

Our gathering that evening, in a circle, was sombre and necessary. Many spoke movingly.

You won't know about Oskar Schindler, Nazi Party member, who saved the lives of Jews he brought to work in his Krakow factory. The story, told by a Holocaust survivor, Poldek Pfefferberg, to Australian Thomas Keneally, was published in 1982: *Schindler's Ark*. The factory is now a museum.

Firstly, photographs of the



Pots and pans looted from the victims at Auschwitz

workers Schindler saved, then propaganda posters from the streets, marionettes of Hitler and henchmen, and of Jews with their hands raised. For whose entertainment? Facsimiles of children's letters, a replica of Schindler's desk, metal pots and pans made there. Finally, rotating columns revealed the wishes of survivors that they could have done or said something to save someone. It was overwhelming.

The Holocaust is still up for grabs, by the Far Right, by the Israeli Government for justification, by a Jewish saxophonist dubbing it another Jewish "religion".

Like your occupation as Fire Warden in the Blitz, Mum, the vigilance of groups like this remains essential.

What should you sing at folk festivals?

I was at a folk festival in April and these events are notoriously conservative in culture, though I sang the Partisan Song from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It seemed incongruous, when we had been singing the blues and Country American Folk, to interject a serious note, no particular event being imminent. However I explained why and sat down again afterwards. Some

in the room seemed embarrassed, others eager to carry on with something more familiar, after all I was the only Yiddish speaking person present, as far as I know. They clearly wanted to avoid political sides.

Nothing was said, but later a man came up to me to chat about Croydon Unison and local government issues. No one had sung about unions.

Another talked about

how in his town, Darlington, they were strongly Brexit but nevertheless Labour voting. We hadn't sung about Labour or Brexit either.

A woman approached me who said she had a Jewish mother and Pakistani father and wondered if I could recognise her Jewish looks!

Funny how opening the topic can cause embarrassment but at the same time enable

the political issues to be discussed which otherwise had been shelved... Was I a troublemaker? Perhaps, but I've done it all my life and I ain't gonna stop now! I like to think some folkies might have gained an insight into that part of history which is only commemorated by Jews. This will be a tactic I repeat in future. I'd like to know if other people have had similar experiences.

Ruth Appleton

LETTER TO JEWISH SOCIALIST

Please write to us at js@jewishsocialist.org.uk or BM3725, London WC1N 3XX

DISCOVERING WARSAW

In April 12 people participated in a Jewish Socialists' Group study tour of Warsaw. It was an intensive, emotional and educational five days, packed with talks, walks, visits, discussion, food, drink, excitement, singing, sorrow and hope.

The visit was timed to coincide with the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the group was warmly welcomed at the annual alternative commemoration, joining hundreds of people, Jewish and non-Jewish, young and old, carrying banners, placards and flags through the rebuilt streets of the former Ghetto.

This milk churn was used as a hiding place for part of a secret archive collected to document life in the Warsaw Ghetto, then hidden in cellars in the hope that it would be discovered under the rubble after the war. It was an act of faith in the future.

On the following pages, some of the participants describe their experience of the trip.

WHY WE WENT TO POLAND

Over recent years, David Rosenberg and I have visited Poland several times and have met activists, artists, academics and campaigners; we have renewed old friendships and made new ones, and learnt about the long history and relationship between Jews and non-Jews in that much fought-over country. This history is being pieced together by a new generation of historians, political analysts and community activists.

Before World War II, Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in Europe. The Nazis aimed not just to eliminate the Jews physically, but to wipe out their cultures, languages and ways of living in and amongst other peoples. But now, as Jewish communities are coalescing again across Poland, we wanted to encourage others to learn with us about the country's history and meet our

counterparts there. The five-day tour was an opportunity to meet local people who are fighting the re-emergence of the far right, bolstered by racist and fascist movements across the world, who are researching the past and working to build a better future.

We visited the Jewish Historical Institute to learn about the Oneg Shabbat group who hid an archive of life in the Warsaw Ghetto, hoping it would be discovered after the war. Our guide through the former Ghetto was architect, Hania Szmalemburg, who has designed powerful monuments to the Uprising and to the victims of the Nazis. Expert speakers inspired us with their knowledge: Magdalena Kosłowska, author of a book on *Tsukunft*, the Bund's youth movement; Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat on memoirs of Marek Edelman, a commander of the Ghetto Uprising; Piotr Ciszewski described his research on the

Polish antifascists who fought Franco in Spain; Marek Jezowski, leader of Warsaw's progressive Jewish community; Julia Zimmerman from Razem (Together), a young left-wing political party.

We shared songs with the Revolutionary Choir; and our visit to Polin, the museum of Jewish life was just a taster of the exhibition of 1,000 years of history. Vast and beautiful, Okopowa cemetery testifies to the Jewish world that was lost. Treblinka, the death camp to which most of Warsaw's Jews were taken, was razed by the Nazis but a shattering, stunning art installation was created there to represent every place from which the victims

came to this deadly destination.

The programme culminated in the vibrant, creative and welcoming alternative commemoration of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – an event which left us thinking, feeling and hoping that, with the will and determination of the current generation of campaigners and activists, Poland can and will be a place where minorities, including Jews, can again forge a creative future in and with the wider society.

Julia Bard



SOLIDARITY FOREVER

There were many highlights on our trip to Warsaw but, for me, the thing that made a huge impression was the wonderful, mostly young, mostly non-Jewish, Polish socialists that we met.

We met them on walks, at choir rehearsals, on marches, and we met quite a few when they came to talk to us at our hotel. They included a historian who specialises in Jewish studies and told us about *Tsukunft*, the Bund's youth movement in Poland in the 1920s and '30s; the chair of the movement of progressive (religious) Jews gave us details of the Jewish renewal in Poland. We met someone who has researched the Jewish International Brigade company that was named after Naftali Botwin, a Jewish communist who was executed in 1925; we had a discussion with the author of a recently published book of newly discovered memoirs of Bundist Marek Edelman, one of the commanders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; and we met one of the young leaders of *Razem* (Together) a fairly new left wing party that is gaining popularity.

Everyone we spoke to and everything we did was leading towards the culmination of our trip – the Alternative Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration on 19th April. The night before the march, we joined the Warsaw Revolutionary Choir's rehearsal in a rickety room above a café in a working class district of the city. The choir sings songs of resistance and that evening we sang with them. It was a joyful occasion, belting out songs in Yiddish, Polish, Italian and English, and ending up with Pete Seeger's "Solidarity Forever" in English and Polish: *Solidarnosc nasz bronie* – solidarity is our weapon.



On our last day we marched together with hundreds of Polish citizens who had shunned the official Polish/Israeli Warsaw Ghetto commemoration to join the alternative march. One of the leaders was Zuzanna Hertzberg, a young woman who had inspired us at one of the hotel talks earlier in the week, and who came with us on our visit to Treblinka.

It's all too easy to fall into a trap of stereotyping entire nations and I've been guilty of that. I don't want to repeat the prejudice I grew up with about all non-Jewish Poles, but it's safe to say that the people we met, who came to talk to us, who taught us, who marched with us and sang with us, blew my prejudices out of the water. I came away from Warsaw feeling full of hope that, despite the rise of the right in Europe, there can be a different and better future for all.

Sue Hughes

If you read Polish, Russian or German, you can find out about Razem on their website at <http://partiarazem.pl/>. English-speakers can search for Razem International on Facebook or Twitter.

OVERLAPPING IMAGES

The Jewish Socialists' Group trip to Warsaw to mark the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising left me with a kind of mental slide show, each frame gently replacing another.

The first image is the verge of a modern Polish motorway, and in the foreground, unnoticed by the juggernaut drivers tearing past behind it, is a disused railway station sign: Treblinka.

Next on the loop, is a Passover service in suburban Warsaw, where the English-speaking rabbi takes us through the 10 plagues and four glasses of wine with a sprinkling of jokes: "The Passover is about pain," he quips. "That's why we call it Seder-Masochism."

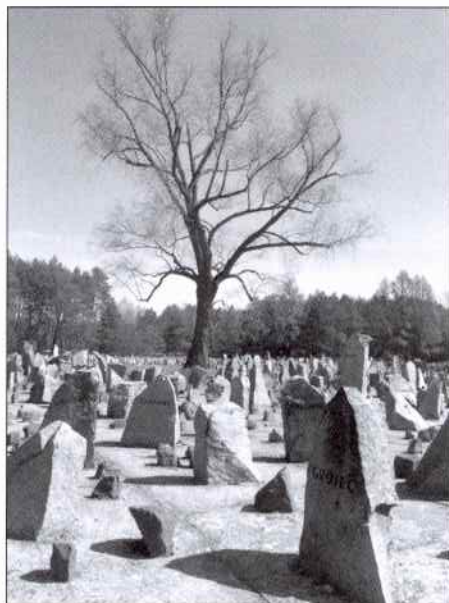
Then, there is the besuited State of Israel delegation at the outdoor commemoration of the 1943 uprising. Their blue and white flags resemble celebration bunting, tools of appropriation that seem closer to intrusion than tribute.

In a third frame, the spirit of nationalism again, alive and well in Poland's (otherwise excellent) Jewish Historical Institute. Its curators insist on referring to their former enemy as Germans, never as Nazis. Talk about missing the point.

The most shocking thing about this slide show is the way it triggers the power of my imagination. How easily the Nazis got

away with it! Put up a few walls and insist people live behind them. Meanwhile, discover a silent clearing in the nearby countryside, lay some railway track and, bingo, nearly a million people get murdered in just over a year.

If the Nazis weren't brilliant social-psychologists, they were nothing. It's not enough to measure them purely in terms of the carnage they wreaked. Depravity on that scale couldn't be practised without a



sharp mind and boundless quantities of emotional intelligence. They had social wit and a supreme ability to predict the behaviour of those they were preparing to murder. Some fear here (the threat of starvation), some rewards there (a pot of jam on the way to the train). Their understanding of our tribal instinct for safety in numbers made it easy – yes easy – to persuade Jews to enter the Ghetto.

Fascists understand it and so must we. You cannot commit crimes against humanity without tricking at least part of humanity into compliance first. The Jewish residents of Warsaw were tricked because they believed they had something worth holding on to, even a pot of jam.

A fifth slide slips into view. It's not shot in Poland; it's me, taken 15 years ago, standing beside the separation wall the Israeli government has built around the city of Jerusalem. The suggestion from Warsaw is clear. Walls can keep others out but they can be easily used to keep you in. Israel is in danger of making a fatal mistake – one that Warsaw teaches us the Nazis would never have made. Never pick a fight with people who have nothing to lose.

A few months after the visit, the five frame loop ends.

Then it restarts.

Ivor Dembina

THEN AND NOW

For a person with three Polish grandparents (all of whom left in good time), how is it possible that I've never gone to Poland? My maternal grandfather came from a Krakow family of Polish patriots – not orthodox Jews but not Bundists. My earliest memories of my grandfather were his stories of childhood, both in the city and the countryside. I have photos taken by a friend and my daughter of the street where he was born. The house still stands. Both of my father's parents came from a *shtetl* called Ropczyce, which they left around 1913. They never spoke about it.

In 1948 my father was at a Communist Party conference in Warsaw. He proposed to visit Ropczyce but was prevented by the Party high-ups, who said it was too dangerous – a number of Jews had been lynched on returning to their home towns. He publicly objected to the fact that more was not being done to re-educate the Poles and protect Jewish citizens. He never returned to Poland.

So, Poland has never been on my bucket list, and I have never been tempted by the annual trip to Krakow organised by Unite Against Fascism. But Warsaw is a bit different because it has no part in the family history. So with misgivings I accepted the invitation to join a small group of comrades from the Jewish Socialists' Group.

I found a city full of reminders of the past – memorials, statues, markers to show where

the Ghetto had stood. Our guides and lecturers were firmly "on our side" in their passion for remembrance. But I did feel that there are two Warsaws – the one our friends wanted to (re)create, and the one symbolised by the recreated Old City, a marvel of kitsch and nostalgia.

Treblinka, carefully created by the Nazis well away from the city, feels in a way forgotten. We were the only visitors. The ground is soaked in blood and violence but I saw few references to it in Warsaw.

The best thing for me was Polin, the Jewish museum which tells the 1,000-year history of Polish Jews. It celebrates this ancient civilisation, rather than its five-year destruction by the Nazis, who are always referred to as Germans – why? We walk among different eras of tolerance and hostility, orthodoxy and socialism. We learn that the history of Polish Jews is integral to the history of Poland; they are inseparable.

The two demonstrations, the official and the alternative commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, really do symbolise the ways that Warsaw sees itself and is seen by others. On the one side, old and young freedom fighters, singing in Yiddish and wearing daffodils. On the other



side, the establishment, supported by delegates from Israel and various right-wing European states. Which will prevail? At noon, at the sound of a siren, all of Warsaw falls silent in tribute, in memory. Will this be enough to prevent further racism in Poland?

The organisers did a wonderful job of presenting Warsaw, past and present, political and civil, left and right. Jewish and non-Jewish? – I don't think so. I remain pessimistic that Poland really wants to abandon its old image. While it is true that Poles did not betray more Jews than any other Nazi-occupied country – that honour belongs to the Dutch – the country does not feel welcoming to me.

Thank you Jewish Socialists' Group for giving me this opportunity – I couldn't have done it otherwise. And thanks to the group of participants for all their support.

Judith Cravitz

"WHAT WE'VE BEEN UNABLE TO

Lynne Walsh and Dominic McVey, two non-Jewish participants, describe the impact of the trip on them

We have an addition to our mantelpiece amongst the memorabilia acquired on our travels. This one is a broken blossom from Treblinka, picked up from the ground beneath a tree.

We weren't, perhaps, the most obvious participants on this trip to Warsaw, and the Ghetto, and that death camp. When we experienced a few reactions to our plan from other people, we might have thought twice. Some (who clearly don't know us well) wondered: "Really? A holiday – to Treblinka?" reducing our decision to either the bizarre or to cultural appropriation.

We'd made the decision with alacrity, partly because we know this is important, challenging stuff. We had spent a wedding anniversary at Sachsenhausen concentration camp in the company of a survivor and we will never forget him, or his story of pedalling his new bicycle home hours after Kristallnacht, intent, with his 10-year-old's priorities, on keeping the tyres safe from broken glass.

But the main reason our decision was easy is that we are members of the Jewish Socialists' Group. We march together, we carry the beautiful banner, we observe the extraordinary and uplifting secular Seder. And in this, we are reminded, always, that we are more alike than we are unlike.

The truth is, of course, that we do not have a shared history. We know that we'd have had relatives who perished or escaped from the Great Hunger. Our families came from Waterford, Cork and Wicklow, and survived when more than a million Irish people did not. We see this bitter slice of history as genocide, rather than "famine". But our knowledge of the Holocaust has been acquired, rather than handed down over decades. We have no familial connections so far as we know.

I kept a journal, as usual, and it's packed with historical information. I'd known some fragments, but now that knowledge is enriched with an emotional charge. I'd read about Rachel Auerbach, one of the Oneg

IN ONE VOICE

It was 19th April, spring and daffodils were being handed out on the streets of Warsaw to commemorate the 1943 Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. The spirit of Marek Edelman, who died 10 years ago and who was the second in command of the Uprising seemed to be present with us. He was the person who established the tradition of the daffodils, to mark the fact that every year, on this date, he received a bunch of daffodils from an anonymous sender. Enthusiastic volunteers associated with Polin, the Warsaw museum of Jewish history, distribute both real and paper flowers in the streets, and at the same

We were lucky enough to join the choir of the Jacek Kuron high school, where Yiddish is taught as a school subject, to sing in Yiddish. We sang songs laden with meaning, from Mordkhe Gebirtig's *Es Brent* (Our Little Town is Burning), to the *Shvue*, the hymn of the Bund, and the Partisan's hymn, *Zog nisht keyn mol az du geyst dem leytstn veg* (Never Say This is the Final Road), which was written in the Vilna Ghetto by the young poet Hirsh Glik on hearing the news of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. We wore our yellow daffodil badges along with most of the other participants, who were largely non-Jewish Poles. Some carried flags of the Bund, and Bundist slogans (There, where we live, that is our land) in Polish and Yiddish. It was very moving to see everyone together speaking and singing in one voice.

The energy of togetherness that we felt in this celebration made us stop to think about what we had seen in Treblinka the previous day. Leaving a small museum on the site, we walked into a forest and after a short distance we arrived at a clearing with some vestiges of the crematorium that had been used for the Nazi programme of mass extermination. There was a sense of a crime having been hidden; the persecutors didn't want the world to know of the atrocities inflicted on the victims. Various pillars of stones represent those who had died, such as the radical educator, Janusz Korczak, and the places they had come from. A big sculpture in the middle of the clearing, around five metres tall, represents a chimney with human bodies piled up on the top.

In some ways, what we found most stirring were three trees in the middle of the memorial stones with their dark trunks and branches with leaves on them. If they were able to bear witness what would they say? They are alive and continue to produce green leaves, in

the same way that Jews and other people continue their own existence and have their struggles remembered year after year. Somehow in the streets of Warsaw on Friday 19th April, Poles and non-Poles, Jews and non-Jews were coming together in full awareness of the horrors of the past and with a will to fight for unity and for a brighter future.

Mike Heiser and Raquel Paiva



time invite people to take part in the commemoration.

We were very glad to participate in this event which started with speeches and was followed by a march from the Ghetto Uprising memorial, outside the museum, past the bunker at Miła 18 where many who took part in the Uprising committed suicide, and on to the Umschlagplatz, where most of the Jewish population of Warsaw were put on trains to the extermination camp of Treblinka.

SHOUT OUT TO THE WORLD"

Shabbat archivists who documented everyday life in the Warsaw Ghetto, and who also ran a soup kitchen. But nothing compares to seeing the Oneg Shabbat exhibition at Warsaw's Jewish Historical Institute. Her comment on the charity of soup kitchens, that this was "dying by instalments", had me slap-bang in the present day, with the cruelty of benefit cuts and food banks.

The quote from her assistant, teenager Dawid Graber, on burying the archive, "What we've been unable to shout out to the world, we have buried in the ground," was a recurring theme for the week.

Our comrade Piotr Ciszewski, expert on the Polish Dabrowski Brigade and their part in the Spanish Civil War, told us about the unit's Yiddish-speaking Botwin company. Later, he took a few of us to honour brigaders' graves, unfurling a Spanish Republican flag as we walked through the cemetery, placing red flowers on memorials. Alongside us was Judith Cravitz, who has a familial connection, as the daughter and niece of International Brigaders.

There were more flowers, this time daffodils, at the Alternative Commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. We moved from one memorial to another, leaving a few blooms, singing and sweltering in the hot sun. At the Umschlagplatz monument, there were people in uniform, part of the official commemoration, marching forward to lay wreaths, saluting. I know they, too, were there to pay respect, but I found it unnerving. Sometimes all uniforms look too alike.

I'd asked Piotr what he knew of the reactions of the ordinary folk of Warsaw, as their city neighbours were herded to this place to board trains. Many were injured to

terrible sights, he thought; they had seen individuals shot dead in the street, seen children starving and dying, bodies slumped in the gutters. And of course they were afraid for their own families.

It's hard to apply any rational thought to the enormity of the horror. I couldn't visualise 300,000 people driven out of the city. I imagined that if I'd been a non-Jewish citizen, I'd have noticed a few neighbours missing, some colleagues no longer at work; perhaps as university students we would have wondered why lecturers had disappeared. And I'd have seen the crocodiles of families, with their suitcases, elderly relatives, babies and toddlers. What the hell might I have said or done?

There were several times during the week when I felt the overwhelming sadness of it all, but more than that: I think it was guilt.

Dominic's reflections

I was really uplifted by the Jewish Historical Institute and the story of the archive, none of which I had heard or read about before. It was a great intellectual act of defiance creating this cultural ark.

We had been to Sachsenhausen and that was a difficult visit – as it should be.

Treblinka was different. It was a deeply moving experience made more so by the simplicity of the memorial, and our group being the only one at the site.

As our fellow participant, Ivor, said after the visit, it says a lot about the role and the power of art when remembering horror.

It felt very



important to have Hania Szmalenberg join the group and show us the memorials that she had designed and fought to maintain. She is part of Warsaw's rebellious history. I remember being with Lynne on the muddy hill at Miła 18 fifteen years ago. That was the site of the bunker where the last members of the Jewish Fighting Organization killed themselves after holding out against the Nazi army for three weeks. At that time it took us some time to find it; there was nothing there except a few candles. We thought then that surely they should be commemorating this place. Hania's tremendous efforts to place monuments there and elsewhere should be celebrated. Meeting her there was an honour.

Both of us have talked since about Treblinka demonstrating the banality of evil. The fake railway ticket office, like a film set, luring victims into thinking this was a station taking them, in transit, on to another place.

We had known about the progressive educationist, Janusz Korczak, who ran an orphanage and went with the children to Treblinka when he had the chance to escape. Seeing his grave marker was significant. We found a pebble and placed it there, in the Jewish tradition. And we've added some of his words to the frame where we keep the broken blossom from Treblinka. "One sun shines for all of us, one hail destroys our crops, and one soil buries the bones of our ancestors."

We know that a broken tree symbolises death, but this quote also makes us think of something we've heard so often, when we go to Spain each year, to honour the International Brigaders: "They thought they buried bodies here. We know they buried seeds."



HOPE FOR A DIFFERENT FUTURE



Warsaw 19th April, 2019, 12 noon. Crowds gather on either side of the 11-metre high Ghetto Fighters' monument made of granite that, ironically, was sourced by the Nazis. They intended to build a monument to mark their victory in Warsaw. But they never did. Warsaw was a city of resistance. They would have had to build it on rubble in any case. Their only way of suppressing the people of Warsaw, ultimately, was by destroying large sections of it. They ghettoised the Jews, who had made up a third of the city's pre-war population, and deported most of them to the death camp at Treblinka. They put down a remarkable, three-week long guerrilla campaign by hundreds of barely-trained fighters aged from 13-40 years of age. They terrorised Warsaw's non-Jews, defeating the uprising they led 16 months later. Small numbers of Jews who survived the burning of the Ghetto in 1943 were hidden but emerged to fight in the '44 city uprising.

Sirens blast out for one minute, during which we are united in silence, but the ceremonies on either side of the memorial are remarkably different.

On one side, armed soldiers, uniformed choirs, and the national flags of Poland and Israel, two countries whose current governments

LUCKY TO KNOW THE SONGS

The Jewish past is everywhere in Warsaw; this is not surprising when we learn that Jewish people have been in Poland since the 9th century.

This past lives on in the taste of the horseradish, the beetroot soup that my great grandmother brought with her to the USA, in the many plaques and memorials, the rubble over which the streets are paved, the cemeteries... Knowing what happened here, it's difficult to know how to connect to this past and place as a Jewish person. These are very personal questions but there is definitely politics involved in any answer.

My only other visit to Poland was when I was 17. I and three friends spent a couple of days in Krakow and went to Auschwitz. It was one stop on a summer inter-railing trip after A-levels; the concentration camp was squashed in between visits to art galleries in Berlin and hash cafés in Amsterdam. Arriving at the gates, it felt like just another quick stop European attraction without much context. I didn't feel any emotion there and I felt bad about it!

What matters to me now is not so much how I feel when I hear about the Holocaust, but what I learn from it. Going to Warsaw with the Jewish

Socialists' Group, and having such an intensive study trip, really helped me understand the Holocaust in a much more complex way, and consolidated what those lessons were for me. They are far too numerous to fit into this short piece but they are lessons around bravery and dignity in the face of fascism, solidarity, how to honour and remember something, fighting colonialism in whatever form it appears, who gets to define antisemitism, and what happens when the victims become the oppressors.

But here I want to focus on this lesson: that I am lucky to know the Passover songs.

As well as a Jewish past there is also a Jewish future in Warsaw. The Nazis invaded the Warsaw Ghetto on the first night of Passover so, after the alternative commemoration to the Uprising, on the last night of our visit, we went to a Seder. The room was packed with people involved in the Liberal

Jewish revival in Poland. More people in Poland are discovering they have Jewish roots or just wanting to learn about and engage with Jewish culture, we were told. The rabbi, who was based in Berlin but travelled all over Europe, said that he spent

and the chair of the group told us, some Jews returned to Poland and were met with antisemitism. It was very difficult for Jewish people to practice religiously under the Stalinist Soviet government. Most of them had to practise in private,



his time "teaching people how to be Jewish".

There was a slightly formal atmosphere in the room, with not many people knowing the songs. Apart from the fact that most Jewish people in Poland were killed during the war, after it ended, as Marek our guide

if at all, so they are having to relearn how to be Jewish.

I never considered myself at all knowledgeable about Judaism, but being in that room, on that anniversary, and knowing those songs, made me feel very lucky, and also quite Jewish

Lily Barson

ON WARSAW'S STREETS

are themselves part of a tide of ultra-nationalism that threatens to bring back the dark days of the 1930s.

On our side of the memorial, the hope for a different future manifests itself. A bright pink banner has the slogan "We will outlive them!" in several languages including Yiddish – the mother tongue of Warsaw's Jews, which Hitler's forces tried to bury along with the Jews who spoke it. But on this day, nearly 75 years after Hitler died, Yiddish words are sung again on Warsaw's streets.

Our flags and banners are internationalist and anti-nationalist. Red flags with the symbols of the Jewish Socialist Bund, who fought for better lives for oppressed workers from their inception in 1897, and who, together with other left-wing currents, were the backbone of resistance in Nazi-occupied Poland. Alongside the Bund flags is one with the International Brigade colours, celebrating those who left Poland to fight Franco's fascists in Spain. One side of the banner is in Yiddish – underlining the role played by internationalist Jews in the Naftali Botwin company of the Dabrowski Battalion.

We are there as a Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) contingent to express international solidarity and to strengthen our own links to the Bundist past and present. We have spent a "study and solidarity" week in Warsaw, choosing this particular week so that on the Friday we could be part of this alternative ceremony.

After a short initial speech from Zuzanna Hertzberg – one of the key organisers – a choir from a Warsaw school that emphasises its multicultural curriculum, sings resistance songs in Yiddish. Few, if any, of the students are Jewish but their diction is perfect and their identification with the meaning of what they sing shines through. Some songs are familiar, others new to us. We had spent the previous evening in a workshop with Warszawianka, a local revolutionary choir.

Britain's Jewish establishment disdain Yiddish in favour of Hebrew, representing Israel's national culture as "Jewish culture" in the Diaspora too. They help to repress the fighting history of the Bund in favour of "heroic" Zionist narratives. But we return to Britain with new Yiddish songs, learned in Poland from the revolutionary choir and the school choir.

In contrast to the strict and militaristic order being maintained by the more static official commemoration, ours is free-flowing. When we move, it is like a gently moving wave, which flows outwards then together again along our route to several stopping points. People, young and old, are wearing ordinary clothes. Friends greet each other warmly. Our own improvised JSG placards, made an hour before the ceremony, attract lots of positive attention.

We stop on the corner of the square that holds the Fighters' Monument for more songs before we move over to the sculpture of a shattered world which commemorates the courageous Bundist, Szmul Zygielbojm. He committed suicide in London as a political act, having read of the final destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto and the allies' failure at the Bermuda Conference to propose drastic rescue action. This monument is particularly poignant for us, as it was the Jewish Socialists' Group, working together with Bundist survivors who established a plaque for Zygielbojm in London in the 1990s. Here in Warsaw the cracks in the shattered world are soon crammed with daffodils, the flower in bloom resembling the yellow star which Nazis made Jews wear in Germany and some other lands under Hitler's regime. The Bundist, Marek Edelman, the last surviving member of the



command group that led the Ghetto Uprising, brought daffodils to such ceremonies until he died in 2009.

There are poems and readings in Polish. A young choir performs *Es brent* (Our Little Town is Burning): a call to arms, written by the Krakowian songwriter, carpenter and socialist, Mordkhe Gebirtig, in the wake of pogroms committed by Poland's National Radical Camp in the 1930s. Poland's ruling Law and Justice party is today working to rehabilitate the reputation of that camp. And here, by Zygielbojm's monument, the authorities have placed the flags of Poland and Israel. Zygielbojm was as fierce a critic and opponent of Jewish nationalism as he was of Polish nationalism. He would be turning in his grave if he could see them.

From there we move towards the stark monument on a small hill at Miła 18, where most of the exhausted and hungry survivors from nearly three weeks of battles with the most powerful of armies, were trapped in a bunker surrounded by the Nazis. They did not let the Nazis have the pleasure of killing them: they killed themselves, but a group led by Marek Edelman dissented and sought to escape through the sewers. As we walked towards Miła 18, we were found among the crowd by Hania Szmalek, who earlier in the week had walked us through the memorials and showed us how she had re-landscaped the original memorial and designed an additional one in English, Polish and Yiddish closer to the road.

Here, the choir sing *Zog nisht keynmol as du geyst dem leytstn veg* (Never Say You Are Going Down the Final Road), and powerful

poems and readings are performed. The crowd, around 500 strong, winds round into Stawski Street and ends its walk where thousands upon thousands of Ghetto Jews of 1942 were forced to assemble at the deportation point, the Umslagplatz, whose beautiful memorial was also designed by Hania Szmalek. More songs and moving words fill the air, including a recording of Marek Edelman reading Zygielbojm's suicide note, before the crowd gradually disperse.

It had been the most incredibly powerful act of remembrance, empathy and solidarity. To see the symbols of the Bund on flags and T-shirts and hear the words of Bundists sung and spoken by a new generation of activists, 70 years after they finally disbanded their organisation in Poland under pressure from its new rulers, was truly moving and uplifting. As one of our placards read: *Zol lebn der Bund!* Long live the Bund!

David Rosenberg



MOVING IMAGES

ART FOR ALL: BRITISH SOCIALLY COMMITTED ART FROM THE 1930S TO THE COLD WAR

by Christine
Lindey

Artery, £25

Christine Lindey is a lecturer who writes about art for the *Morning Star*. Whilst one cannot assume too much from someone being a *Star* writer (its poetry editor used to be the late Jewish anarchist John Rety) it's clear enough from the book that the author's sympathies lie with the communist tradition in Britain. So it is no surprise to see prominent mention of the Artists International Association and the old Communist Party of Great Britain.

I hope you will not turn away, thinking this book solely comprises stylised drawings of horny handed sons of toil marching into a socialist future. On the contrary, the images of working people, women and men, are movingly portrayed.

Here, for example, is Eva Frankfurter's *Afro-Caribbean Waitresses* of 1955 and here's James Fitton's *London Landscape* of 1948. Frankfurter herself was an immigrant, a German Jewish refugee, whose paintings often reflected the multicultural London to which she was so attracted. This picture beautifully expresses the exhaustion and, I think, sisterhood of overworked "nippies". Fitton's street scene feels as if it is just round the corner, a working-class area full of street life (and no sign of hipsters...).

And yet many of the images are stylised. Cliff Rowe's *Woman Cleaning a Locomotive in St Pancras Cleaning Yard* (1942) has the woman facing away from the viewer: "the painting's composition is dominated by geometric circles and horizontals formed by the steam engines' bodies, buffers and barrels and by the railway arches". The Government needed women in the work force, the manual work force. My mother worked in munitions for a period, enjoying the hustle and bustle of factory life, not least as she felt she was doing something for the cause of anti-fascism.

A number of the featured artists in Lindey's book were immigrant, left-wing Jews (as was Lindey's father). Josef Herman is perhaps the best known of these artists, who came to Glasgow but later became famous for his paintings of miners in Ystradgynlais in Wales. *Miner in the Canteen* (c1954) There's also the Hungarian Jewish Peter Peri (born Ladislav Weisz). Herman and Peri were among those who exhibited at The Festival of Britain. Others from an earlier generation are mentioned, like Pearl Binder the "daughter of an unsuccessful jobbing tailor" who moved from Manchester to Whitechapel. She, too, was a pro-Soviet communist, something common then among British and emigré Jews.

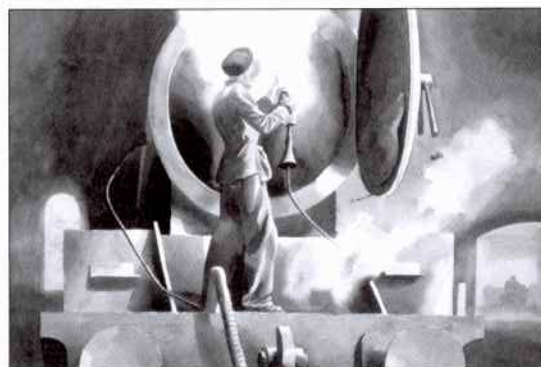
Lindey's book, unusually for a book on art, follows the money, exploring how artists made a living, who offered patronage, commissions and sponsorship. These ranged from commercial art galleries, local authorities, the usual freelance teaching, but also trade unions, and there are numerous examples of union banners and murals. Cliff Rowe's murals at the old Electrical Trade Union Training College are impressive.

The CPGB and its fellow travellers took art seriously, with the production of journals and a report on the

artist's profession. Perhaps the high water mark was the 1953 Artists for Peace exhibition, with 397 exhibits and sponsors, including John Berger, Augustus John, Jacob Epstein and Stanley Spencer.

After 1956 and the fracture of the CPGB, things tailed off. Arnold Wesker's Centre 42 briefly flourished in the 1960s (and did his puppy really pee on the paperwork of the T&GWU's Frank Cousins, which destroyed any hope of national trade union support for his project?). The New Left's Partisan Coffee Bar art gallery lasted a few years, featuring Peri and Herman among others, but time and politics moved on.

Art for All is beautifully produced by John Green's Artery Publications, a survivor from the CPGB days. Older readers might remember the journal *Artery*, which gave the press its name. Ross Bradshaw



Above: Eva Frankfurter, *Afro-Caribbean Waitresses* c1955
Right top: James Fitton, *London Landscape* c1948 © James Fitton family estate.
Middle: Cliff Rowe, *Woman cleaning a locomotive in St Pancras Cleaning Yard* 1940s © People's history Museum Manchester
Bottom: Josef Herman, *Miner in Canteen* c1954 © David Herman

WORDS IN ACTION

BOOK EXCERPT

The late Alexander Baron had many lives: Hackney schoolboy, secret Communist in the Labour League of Youth, wartime infantryman, best-selling novelist, screenwriter... His best-known novels were *From the City*, *From the Plough*, considered to be the British novel of WWII by those who fought, and *The Lowlife*, the chronicle of Harryboy Boas, a working-class Jew who prefers taking irregular shifts as an underprinter and investing (badly, usually) down the dog track to taking the north-west passage to respectability.

Five Leaves has just published *So We Live: the novels of Alexander Baron*, edited by Susie Thomas, Andrew Whitehead and Ken Worpole, which comprises essays on his London novels, on his Jewish writing, his war novels and his life as a Communist. The Imperial War Museum will reissue *From the City*... later this year; in the meantime, Five Leaves has reissued the novels *Rosie Hogarth* (which draws on Baron's political life), *King Dido* (a Bethnal Green gangster) and *With Hope, Farewell* (Baron's most Jewish novel, set in pre- and post-war London).

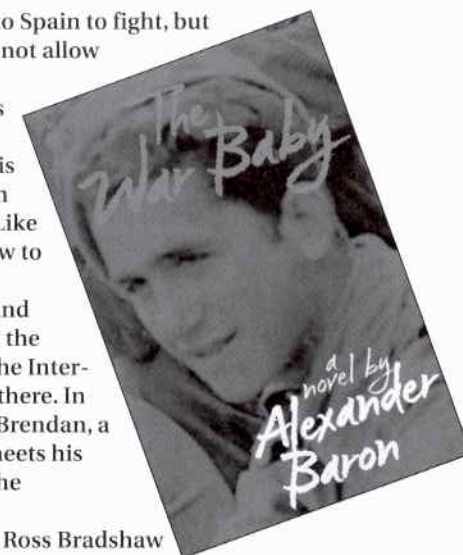
Five Leaves has also published, for the first time, Baron's *The War Baby*, which is set in Spain during the Spanish Civil War.

Baron himself wanted to go to Spain to fight, but the Communist Party would not allow him to.

This novel reflects Baron's admiration for those who fought in the Civil War, but his growing disillusionment with the Communist Party itself. Like his war writing, he knows how to represent the squalor of the battlefield and the heroism and humanity of those who filled the trenches and, in the case of the International Brigade, often died there. In this exclusive extract, Frank Brendan, a young British Communist, meets his fellow British volunteers in the International Brigade.

Ross Bradshaw

The War Baby is published by Five Leaves at £9.99



The rest area was in a combe among the foothills. Its flanks were heavily overgrown with trees and bushes that screened the battalion's dugouts and shelters. When three 'planes dived along the combe whistles shrilled and the men dotted over the hillsides vanished into cover. Frank was bathing in a stream. He watched the 'planes come at him. It would have been futile to move, and dangerous. They streaked over and he heard bombs explode high up at the head of the combe.

It could have been worse. Carpet raids from a high altitude could strike like shell barrages. The new dive bombers were worst. They dropped like screaming black monsters on to their targets. All 'planes were enemy. Frank had only seen one brief appearance of Republican aircraft since he had come to the front.

He came out of the stream. Baked dry at once by the sun, he dressed. He had been given a new shirt and trousers. Amid a group of men nearby an accordion wheezed, played badly. A soldier came through the trees showing a hand that was like a red magnolia on the end of his right arm. He was shouting, "I'm hit! Thank God, I'm hit."

The accordion stopped for a few moments, then started again. Frank relaxed on the grass with The Oxford Book of French Verse. It was the only book he had brought, apart from a tiny volume bound in soft leather, which his Party mentor had given him: the new, 1936, Soviet Constitution. Frank liked to read of all the freedoms that were guaranteed by law to the Soviet people. At the moment he was reading Verlaine. Degenerate, maybe, but it was culture, and the sound of it in his head was lovely.

The accordion player was a Spanish boy, a company runner, one of the reinforcements, a waif of sixteen. Every time 'planes came over he bolted into a hole. The British soldiers were resigned to the probability that he would be no better in action, but they treated him like an adopted orphan.

Of different stuff were the battalion's Spanish company, volunteers from the JSU [United Socialist Youth] with a splendid commander who had been with the battalion from the beginning. The three other rifle companies, the machine-gunners and the mortarmen, were British. Even taking reinforcements into

account, the battalion was only half the number that had crossed the Ebro. Frank's company had started out over a hundred strong. It now had thirty-six men.

A voice from the nearby group came to Frank, Welsh cadences and accent, a man named Morgan. "— pheasants, I ask you, boys! And a waiter bringin' round the wine! It's like the Ritz Hotel."

A Yorkshire voice, from a long, skinny, older man who was Morgan's mate. "Bloody officers!"

Morgan, "A bloody Officer's Mess! Like the bloody 'Ouse 'Old Cavalry! Fat of the land. And cold chickpeas for us. How is that right?"

The Yorkshireman, "It's a bloody disgrace."

A Londoner. This was Knibble, who came from Clerkenwell. A character from Dickens. Very tall, stooping, with a small hump. Eyes magnified by thick glasses with steel rims. Member of the Labour Party.

"Your eyes are bigger than your belly, Taff. Hooky does wonders for us."

"Oh, yes," Morgan said, as Frank came over to them and squatted to listen. "Four-course dinners he gives us. Beans, beans, beans and beans."

The Yorkshireman, "Them chickpeas go through you like scouring pads."

"Hi, aye," Morgan said. "Heads down. Here comes the comic star."

Haxe, the commissar, was short with a small sharp-nosed face. He was a Party member, a former assembly-line man from the car works at Oxford. He held out a round tin of boiled sweets in wrappers. "Here, have some —. Take a few."

The tin went round. Morgan said, "What about some soap?"

"I'm trying, Taff."

"You were trying last week."

"I reckon I'll be trying next week. Anyway, you wouldn't know what to do with soap if you had it."

Morgan said, "Get away, you uneducated communist git."

Continued on next page

WRITING FROM EXPERIENCE

ISAAC AND I: A LIFE IN POETRY

Chris Searle
Five Leaves,
£11.99

...where there are people there is poetry, a truth that has been told me a million times all through my life in the most surprising of situations, in the most unpromising of contexts. Long live the poets in all of us, the words and human messages we harbour and express, and thank you Isaac for telling me this countless, countless times.

Chris Searle writing from a Sheffield classroom, recalling his life from childhood in suburban east London (he was born in 1944) through to the vivid experiences of being a radical young English teacher in the East End in the 1970s. This is a wonderful memoir rooted in offering space and encouragement for working-class children to write poetry.

Michael Rosen in his introduction says: "This is not just a book about Chris Searle. It's about a vision of poetry in education, poetry in a fight for a better world and poetry in life."

The memoir "begins, continues and ends in poetry", holding a beautiful dialogue throughout with the young Jewish east London poet, Isaac Rosenberg, a 28-year-old private, killed at the Arras-St Quentin front in 1918, who is Searle's inspiration (and mine too).

I felt a connection to this book. I am deeply struck by Isaac Rosenberg's, poetry and I remember, too, coming across Chris Searle's beautiful collections of schoolchildren's poetry, *Stepney Words* (1 and 2) in the 1980s. They were an inspiration while I was working as a literacy tutor at Centerprise, a radical bookshop, publisher and educational centre in Hackney.

For publishing the first of these collections, *Stepney Words* Number 1 in 1971, Chris Searle, then

a probationary teacher at Sir John Cass C of E School in Stepney, was summarily sacked. The process of creating these wonderful books, and the children's refusal to accept his sacking (supported by their families, his trade union, the community and many others), forms the heart of this memoir.

Reading this autobiography has been pleasure and an inspiration in these present difficult times.

Chris Searle decided he wanted to become a comprehensive school teacher while studying English at Leeds in the mid-1960s. In his final year he met Isaac's poetry: "I hadn't read anything like it, with the same impact, since reading King Lear ... at school."

There was stress, then, on the "difficulty and obscurity" of poetry, but Searle, drawing on reading Donne and Blake, felt strongly "that all men and women should be readers ... and have the power and authority to be writers too". This attitude underpins his approach to life and teaching.

Searle describes formative experiences while teaching and travelling in Canada, the United States and the Caribbean. In particular, a year teaching in Tobago, participating in challenging the distortions of a racist British colonial curriculum. He found it liberating to teach Caribbean texts: in a time of resistance, anti-colonial struggles: "literature suddenly became true..."

"I began to understand the true power relations of the world." His great book, *The Forsaken Lover*, comes from this experience.

Chris Searle returned to London in December 1969, "Going back to the land and city of Isaac and I". He was powerfully influenced by his Caribbean experiences and the writings of George Jackson, CLR James and Franz Fanon. He was developing

the consciousness, skills and empathy that would underpin his teaching.

He drew from Fanon "his truths of language, how it alienates when it is an oppressive imposed force, but how also, when forged within the endless seascape of the imagination, it can begin to set us free."

On returning, Searle wanted to find Isaac's streets, and, after an interlude in Devon studying for an MA, he began as a probationary teacher in Stepney in 1970s. He landed in a school with a reactionary culture and "vicious streaming". Teaching a "rock bottom stream", he began encouraging the writing of poetry in all his classes, "taking children out into the local streets around the school with their pens and notebooks".

He was encouraged by "two eleven-year-old poets" writing from a Stepney churchyard. "Forging their craft from their ordinary words and vitally original figurative language, poems came teeming out..."

As well as writing directly from their experience, he encouraged children to write from other perspectives, developing "imaginative empathy". He drew in a Liverpoolian photographer, Ron McCormack, living locally, who brought in photos to classes to stimulate their writing, "to empathise, make whole stories from single images". "Why not an anthology combining both? But to do it with beauty and respect." *Stepney Words* was being born.

Searle's proposal to publish an anthology was rebuffed by the Headteacher and governors. The "governors did not want the children to write about the real world", but he was encouraged by others including a then local priest, Trevor Huddleston. They went ahead and published *Stepney Words Number 1*, printed locally by Issy Weinberg, "with beauty and skill". A few days after publication, in May 1971, Chris was summarily dismissed.

The day after his dismissal the students organised a school strike, and the developing protests gained considerable national attention. As school students once again come out on strikes demanding action on biodiversity and climate change, it is apposite to be reminded of this earlier inspiring example of school students taking determined, passionate and effective action. Chris won eventually; the dismissal was overturned, and he returned to the school in September 1972.

During the period of dismissal, they further published *Stepney Words Number 2* (1972). He describes creating the cover image, saying: "Maxine painted on a bare white wall *This fire was put out by water Our fire is in our hearts* ... a small boy stretched up with a paintbrush and painted a black line through her words ... Ron photographed it". This became the striking cover image of *Stepney Words 2*.

The immediate joy of these books is the way the children's words, poems and illustrations work together in the bold design and layout of the work.

I was thinking, what does Searle draw from Rosenberg? One aspect maybe is how Isaac illuminates his poetic process. Here he is, writing from the trenches in 1916:

You know how earnestly one must wait on ideas (you cannot coax real ones to you) and let as it were a skin grow naturally round and through them. If you are not free, you can only when the ideas come hot, seize them with the skin in tatters raw, crude,



in some parts beautiful, in others monstrous

Grasping ideas, even fragments of ideas, expressing these in words and poetry – Isaac, too, worked hard for clarity in his writing. He wanted to be understood. I think something of that understanding informs Searle's work with young writers from Stepney, Brixton and Poplar.

This autobiography, throughout, holds a powerful critique of all segregated, selective education in the UK and a powerful advocacy "that the true comprehensive school system was an entirely different proposition, and that through it you could genuinely help children find their true potential with an end to streaming, division and exclusion in an embrace of mixed-ability teaching."

Searle loves cricket and jazz, is involved in struggles around education, language, race and class, but the core of the work here is in encouraging people in "ordinary circumstances" to express themselves in poetry.

The book closes with a detailed and moving interview with Isaac Rosenberg's friend and fellow poet, Joseph Leftwich, in his mid-80s. Joseph says of Isaac, "The ideas would go in, as everything did, and everything would come out as poetry."

Just read him. He was in the tradition of great visionary poets, like Blake. He loved the simplicity of Blake and it was allied to his admiration of Blake the draughtsman and artist. Like Blake he tried to rise to inaccessible heights in his language, but he worked to be understood and he worked to be appreciated. All his articulacy came out in his poetry.

I echo Leftwich's words: just read Isaac Rosenberg's poetry, find *Stepney Words 1 and 2* and other collections too, and enjoy this wonderful memoir.

Simon Lynn

Continued from page 21

Haxey went. Morgan said, "Bastard!"

Twentyman was middle-aged, with grey hair. He had a married daughter. A printer, a radical working man of no party. He said, "He's only doing his job."

"Get away!" Yorky said.

Frank took a folded pamphlet from his pocket. "Anyone want a read?"

Knibble said, "I'll have it."

Frank said, "We don't seem to get much literature."

"I miss it," Twentyman said. "I like a good read."

Yorky said, "Never mind a good read. What about some soap? The bugger promised us soap." A rough Scots voice. Burke. "Them and their promises! The feller who signed me on in Edinbrae promised me wine, women and loot. I've seen little of the first and fuck-all of the other two."

Frank said, "We ought at least to get the Daily Worker."

Morgan, "Get it, boy, get it. I'm fed up with wiping my arse on grass —. Come on, Yorky, get them cards out."

Frank left the group and overtook Haxey. He said, "That Morgan's a loudmouth."

"He's all right."

"All the same, I think we could do with a bit of political education."

Clean, hair cropped, free of lice, Frank had time to think beyond survival. He did not want to push himself but he had a

responsibility.

"Sure." Haxey stopped to give sweets and exchange chat.

When they strolled on, "I mean," Frank said, "— if I can help."

"Why not? Sure. Thanks."

"I was sent to do political work."

"Oh, yes?" They paused at another group. Afterwards, Haxey said, "I know you were a full-time comrade, but you'll have to bide your time."

These fellers will only take it from someone they know well. Now, Dan Erickson, he's the comrade that'll take over if I cop it, he's a tough chap, he was a trawlerman, but he's brainy, too. He's respected. And there's this little Jewish lad, London School of Economics and all that, but he's done well. They'll have to make commissar before you do."

"I wasn't thinking of that. But we ought to tackle these backward elements. You heard Morgan. And Burke was on about women and loot. It's a disgrace."

"Burke was a hero up the hill. I've put him in for a citation. Morgan is the last of five miners who came out from Mardy. He sticks it out but he's nervy."

"Yes, sure. But we ought to get some literature going round."

"When I can get it." He stopped and turned, in a sudden, impatient way, to face Frank. He looked and sounded strained. "Look here. These fellers are OK. They're so willing, it breaks my heart sometimes. Now, don't push it, comrade. Please!"

"Sure." Frank lingered when Haxey had gone, and decided to walk down to headquarters.

A hidden child

THE CUT OUT GIRL: A STORY OF WAR AND FAMILY, LOST AND FOUND

by Bart van Es
Penguin, £16.99

"Without families you don't get stories," is the opening statement by (Hesseline, also known as Lien) de Jong, the "heroine" of this moving and enthralling book. While classified as non-fiction, this could be read as a mystery thriller – I couldn't put it down. The mystery was why Lien, who was once part of the van Es family, regarded as a sister by Bart van Es's father – had been out of touch with them for many years.

The story is essentially that of Holland during the Nazi occupation. There is great

bravery and generosity – first Lientje's parents, giving up their beloved daughter, and then the Dutch families who faced great danger from the Nazi occupation for taking in Lientje and other Jewish children.

But tidy Holland also must face a darker truth, namely that it was more co-operative in rounding up its Jews for the Nazis than any other Western European country. Her time in hiding was

made much more terrifying by the energetic efforts of the local Dutch authorities, zealous accomplices in the mission of sending every Jew, man, woman and child, East to their extermination.

For a year and a half, she lived quietly, missing the parents she never saw again but loving her adopted family. When the van Es home was raided by local Dutch authorities, Lien was moved from one hiding place to the next, under the noses of the Nazis. Eventually, she reached the stern van Laar family who treated her very badly.

Some 4,000 Jewish children survived the war in hiding in Holland. Lien was one of just 358 who stayed with a non-Jewish family after 1945; she asked to return to the van Eses rather than being given to a Jewish family. She had become a brooding teenager but appeared to grow out of her unhappiness, training first to become a social worker, and then marrying and having children. Yet her "perfect" life did not stop her from later trying to commit suicide.

Bart van Es – an Oxford English professor who has lived in Britain since the age of three – had always known that his

grandparents had sheltered Jewish children. But it was only after the death of his uncle in 2014 that he began to ask questions and made contact with Lien, now in her 80s and living in Amsterdam. Van Es weaves together history and Lien's recollections to tell the story of her traumatic childhood. Unsurprisingly, what she experienced left her "badly damaged" and questioning her very existence: "I ought not to be here." The van Eses did not understand the true depth of Lien's trauma as one of the "hidden children" and this led to tragic misunderstandings later when Bart's grandmother ended all communication with her. Unlike his grandmother, van Es saw that the trauma Lien endured had made her feel cut off from herself and her Jewish heritage, like a "cut out" figure in someone else's culture and life.

This book is not so much a Holocaust memoir as a rigorous investigation of how historical traumas work themselves out in a family down through the generations, always lurking just below the surface, and expressing themselves in unexpected ways.

Judith Lesser Cravitz

On love and war

THE REPORTS ON SARAH AND SALEEM.

Director:
Muayad Alayan
2018.

Arabic, Hebrew,
English subtitles

This is what happens in the affair between a married Palestinian man and a married Israeli woman in Jerusalem when they are spotted in the wrong place at the wrong time. She is married to an Israeli colonel; he smuggles goods into Occupied Territories. Soon their behaviour catches the attention of the authorities on both sides. Based on a real case, and inspired by the director's observation of such affairs, it's the thriller with everything.

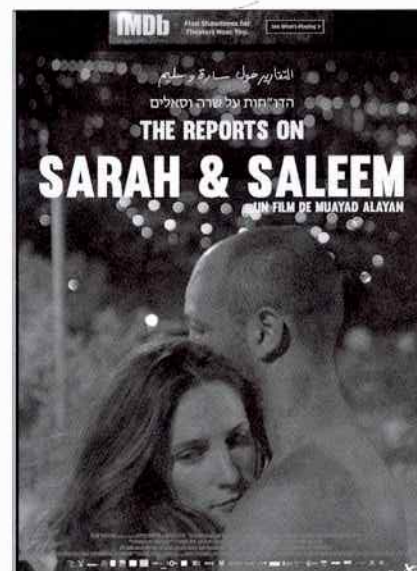
Marriage, religion and

state security in divided Jerusalem all come under scrutiny and all are seen in breakdown.

No happy ending – how could there be? – but Sarah and Beisan, Saleem's pregnant wife, emerge as the stars and heroes of the story. The men, inevitably, symbolise the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its machismo.

I saw the film as part of the Arabic film festival at the Barbican but it is available online. See it!

Judith Lesser Cravitz



A TALMUDIC QUALITY

Jeremy Hardy 1961 - 2019

It's difficult to be a successful comedian and a genuine socialist, but Jeremy Hardy was both. Stand-up comedians work alone, our trade is ourselves and we operate in a raw, unforgiving, and hurtful capitalist market place – the funny get paid, the unfunny don't.

When I first met Jeremy Hardy in the mid-1980s, I didn't warm to him. I wondered if, like many others at the time, he wore left-wing credentials to chime in with fashionable anti-Tory outlook. Not only was I wrong but I now wonder if Jeremy had similar misgivings about me. I never got to ask him before last February, when, very sadly, he died at the age of 57.

In the 40 years I knew Jeremy, I don't think we ever had a serious political conversation. But somehow, I always felt an affinity towards him. It had nothing to do with our shared interest in Marxism but rather, and I don't care how bourgeois this sounds, something about the quality of the man.

When I first saw him at a small gig in north London in the early days of the comedy circuit, he already had good jokes, abundant composure and a talent for fearless and devastating improvisation. I don't have his wit with words to write the tribute he deserves and to describe the quality and sheer power of his funniness.

Yet even at that first gig I caught a glimmer of the personal steel and political courage that drove him. I was running the small event in question, and at that time it was axiomatic that all door receipts would be distributed in equal shares between everybody, including the acts and the promoter. It seemed fair that the more people who came to watch the gig, the more money everyone would get. But Jeremy said "No". He argued that it was the job of the entrepreneur (in this case me) to bear the financial risk and all the workers (the acts) should be guaranteed payment for their labour. He won the argument hands down, and from that point the principle of prearranged, guaranteed payment for professional comedians at my club became the norm.

We had been introduced by a fellow Jewish comedian friend of mine, Dave Cohen, and I was struck by how comfortable Jeremy seemed in the company of Jewish people. He'd slip in Yiddish expressions without ever a hint of giving offence, and his own humour had that Talmudic quality of seeing the power of opposites in funny ways.

Politically, Jeremy "got it" from the start. Yes, Jewish people are a distinct group with a torrid history, but like other oppressed minorities their future lies in solidarity with similar groups, not in separation from them. And that is why he was always a valued non-Jewish friend of the Jewish Socialists' Group.

Further afield, Jeremy's relative absence from



our television screens was our gift. Unburdened by the fatuousness of celebrity, Jeremy, whether he liked it or not, saved his best for us. His live stand-up awards, however "prestigious", still mean little to me because all that mattered was, when he was on stage, we all knew we were in the presence of a stand-up comedian of the highest calibre.

He found his biggest

audience on radio, especially Radio 4, where his incessant attacks on pomposity, hypocrisy and the abuse of power were so thought-provoking and funny that they left me wondering out loud, "Why can't the BBC always be like that?" He often felt like the true voice of the nation – no wonder there was such a lasting demand for him to address it.

His main impact on my own life was on film. Based on his visit to Palestine in 2002 he was the principle figure and narrator in Leila Sansour's iconic documentary *Jeremy Hardy versus the Israel Army*. For the first time, those who cared to look could get a glimpse of the true nature of the Israeli occupation. Jeremy perfectly adapted his lighthearted approach to commentary and laid bare for us the racism, land theft and war criminality of the Zionist state. No one who has seen the film can forget the footage of the young female peace protestor reeling on the floor from the impact of an Israeli army bullet. For a Jewish person, there was no looking away. There were no excuses, no 'historical explanations' and no lies about "the desire for peace" to be had.

After the film, Jeremy offered to put me in touch with a small group of other Jews who wanted to go to the West Bank to see things for themselves. Indeed, I travelled to Palestine on three occasions. The visits – especially seeing the settlements and checkpoints – have left me with a shame so deep that it has stained my Jewish soul in a way that generations of reparation may never eradicate.

Afterwards, I adopted Jeremy Hardy's tactic of trying to find humour in the whole thing, and I wrote a solo comedy show entitled *This is Not A Subject For Comedy*. Despite acquiring a bit of critical success, you won't, unsurprisingly, see it at Jewish venues in the UK. But the censorship I receive from our self-appointed guardians of Jewish culture is the highest compliment I have ever been paid.

Jeremy Hardy taught me how political struggle works. He used his personal talent, willingness and courage to publicly take action. It doesn't matter whether it was about Palestine, his involvement in campaigns to free the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4, or his personal fight for better wages at my little comedy club. The lessons of his own life are there for us all. Fight injustice where you see it. Take courage and join with others. Find the joy in what life you have left and, above all, never give up.

IVOR DEMBINA
honours the
courage,
principles and
enormous talent
of a fellow
comedian

"I'M ONLY GIVING YOU BACK WHAT WAS ALREADY YOURS"

Chaim Neslen 1938 - 2018

ARTHUR NESLEN remembers his father's commitment to Yiddish culture and social justice

My father, Chaim Neslen, who has died aged 79, was a leading Yiddish writer, teacher and musician. He ran the Friends of Yiddish literary circle in Toynbee Hall, in Whitechapel, east London, for more than a decade, and cut a dash on the capital's Yiddish music scene, regularly performing from a wide repertoire of folk songs on his guitar.

"I'm only giving you back what was already yours," he would tell concertgoers. Later in life, he managed the Vi and John Rubens Yiddish club in Redbridge.

Chaim also taught Yiddish at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies and, together with his friend Barry Davis, co-wrote the first *Teach Yourself Yiddish* self-access book. Experts in a rarely heard language, Chaim and Barry provided advice to filmmakers, and background Yiddish voices for films including *Schindler's List* (1994).

Chaim's father, Norman, a tailor and union activist with Bundist beliefs, had escaped from Poland to Toronto in the 1930s. His mother, Bertha (née Dzaldowski), a shop worker, arrived in Canada via Denmark.

Chaim was born and brought up in Toronto and studied at the University of Toronto. In the 1960s, though, he migrated to London and dedicated his life to keeping alive memories of the *farshvundene velt* (vanished world) of Yiddish language, culture and values that had shaped and sustained him.

Norman, who lost his own father and two sisters in the Holocaust, had been active in smuggling survivors out of Europe in the 1940s. While still a child, Chaim had helped other traumatised children from the camps to adapt to new surroundings. It imbued him with a sense of responsibility, selflessness and caring for others, particularly the vulnerable.

In the late '70s, he opened the first shop in London selling aids to disabled people. He went on to develop innovative products and services for visually impaired people at the Royal National Institute for the Blind, retiring around 10 years ago.

Chaim was raised in the values of the Bund, which fired his involvement in the Jewish Socialists' Group, and in campaigns against Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands.

The group's concept of *doikayt* ("hereness") was central to Chaim's beliefs, and to those of his wife, Diana (née Jacob), whom he married in 1966. Its



rejection of communal currents such as Zionism also inspired younger activists in groups such as Jewdas, at whose seminars he sometimes taught. They in turn paid tribute to him at a Passover Seder attended by Jeremy Corbyn.

From his teenage years to the last, Chaim despaired at the gravitational pull that Israel exerted on Jewish

thought. An ardent scholar in his own right, he never shied from taking the ethical Jewish anti-Zionist perspective into the Jewish community. In 2009, two weeks after the first Gaza "war" ended, he wrote a devastating rebuttal to an op ed by Rabbi Benjamin Hecht in Canada's *Jewish Tribune* which asked of Jewish peaceniks: "How could Jews protest... and as Jews?"

How could they not! Chaim retorted. He wrote to Hecht: "If your eyes were not blinkered by the cankers over them, you too would see the evils of bombing civilian populations in the name of Jews; of shooting children in the name of Jews; of denigrating the culture of others in the name of Jews; of pejoratising the identity of another group in the name of Jews; of lying, and corrupting the memories of all of the *Kidushim* including all of those from the Holocaust, again, in the name of Jews; and finally of course, insulting the Jewish culture and religion by impugning the moral authority of a True Rabbi. Yours is the moral bankruptcy of a Shabatai Tzvi. The flash created by a bomb, or a rifle, is not the 'Light' we were intended to show the 'Nations'."

For Chaim, the ersatz nationalist enterprise espoused by Zionism amounted to "a soulless betrayal of Judaic identity, almost by fundamental Jewish definition, a sham, a red (shmaltz) herring, and a true danger to the survival of Judaism everywhere." He believed that Jews who protested were the true representatives of Judaism.

"How can a Jew protest... and, as a Jew?" he concluded. "What a question. Desperation! Here's another: Am I really challenging your right to call yourself a Rabbi of Judaism, Mr Hecht? You can bet on it! Shame on you!"

This response was never published, until now.

Chaim is survived by Diana, his children, Esther and me, and four grandchildren, Asher, Sophie, Charlotte and Dorothy.

A MAN OF PEACE WHOSE LIFE WAS CONFIGURED BY WAR

Walter Wolfgang 1923 - 2019

Walter's life was one that spanned all the triumphs and disasters of war and peace. Born in Germany to a middle class family who were not political, the rise of the Nazis became an obvious threat. His parents sent him to England as a young man for his safety. They lost their business and livelihood and were sent to a concentration camp but managed to gain release, and so came to join Walter. His father died in Britain in 1945 but his mother lived to a great age and Walter was devoted to her.

He became more political when his family were interned by the British as German nationals at the outbreak of the war. As an internee he met communists and socialists from Germany and they discussed the absurdity of the situation where Jewish opponents of Nazism were interned when the one thing they wanted to do was fight to stop the Nazi takeover of Europe.

When he was eventually released and able to pursue his education, Walter volunteered for the RAF but was rejected on medical grounds.

After the war, Walter became more and more involved in the Labour Party; he supported the main thrust of the Government's strategy but was part of the left currents after the Party lost the 1951 election. He was secretary of Victory for Socialism and author of pamphlets and speaker at numerous events in the 1950s and 1960s as the Party pondered a move to abandon Clause IV and the principles behind it. Walter was one of many who ensured adherence to the socialist base of the Party.

He stood as Labour Candidate in Croydon in 1959 but was not elected and was, sadly, subsequently blocked as a candidate thereafter.

A victim of the rise of fascism and antisemitism, whose life was configured by war, Walter was a man of peace. His opposition to the foreign policy of the Labour Party in the post-war period and, in particular, the development of nuclear weapons, led him to being a founder of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and he was on the first Aldermaston march.

Nobody was more passionate for peace and a world of justice than Walter, and it was a privilege and an honour to know him as a close friend for more than 40 years. He taught me so much about life and overcoming adversity.

He was a deeply religious man – and every rabbi he ever met will attest to his faith and to his critical faculties if he did not feel they were acting as he would wish.

As a victim of the most vile racism in Nazi Germany his trenchant opposition to racism in any form was as strong as his passion for world peace. He always reached out to Christians and Muslims in a touching way.

A strong opponent of the wars in the Gulf in 1991, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003, Walter was

one of the founders of the Stop the War Coalition and spoke at many rallies with passion. He was also always present at the less glamorous organising events that are the crucial part of any campaign.

He always considered the Labour Party the vehicle for socialism and social justice. He helped me in every election campaign I have fought in Islington. In 2005 he was doubly determined as, in the wake of Iraq, he could see the dangers of our supporters becoming disillusioned. Walter was in our campaign office almost every day, phone canvassing, raising funds and encouraging people.

He shot to national fame a few months later when, at Labour Party Conference, he verbally and loudly said Jack Straw's defence of the Iraq war was



"rubbish". He was ejected and had his pass removed in a bizarre and ridiculous show of force. The outcry that followed meant he was reinstated, returned as a hero next day, and received an apology from Tony Blair.

Walter's revenge? He was elected to the Party's National Executive Committee a year later!

I have so many memories of Walter, the quiet accountant, the decent man, the friend and confidant who was always supportive, and a strategic thinker.

My wife Laura and I were his last visitors, and during wakeful moments he asked me how things were going. He was, despite being hours away from death, mentally alert.

His last words were, "We will win!"

Thank you, Walter, the passionate socialist, the deeply religious man, the thinker and an inspiration.

We will win!

JEREMY CORBYN pays tribute to his friend and fellow fighter for social justice